

Justification

by G.W. North

Justification is only possible through the redemption in Christ Jesus, which is the purchase of humanity by God and the basis for the experience of God's spirit/soul state.

Scripture: John 1:29, Romans 3:24, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:1, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:13-14, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 John 2:2

Topics: "Redemption", "Justification"

Description

G.W. North expounds on the doctrine of justification as revealed by Paul, emphasizing that justification is a gift of grace through the redemption found in Christ Jesus. He illustrates how the Old Testament practices, particularly the Day of Atonement and the Ark of the Covenant, foreshadowed Christ's ultimate sacrifice, which justifies believers before God. North argues that redemption must precede justification, as God redeems sinners while they are still in sin, and that this act of grace is rooted in God's faithfulness to His promises. He highlights that Jesus, as both the propitiation and the propitiatory, fulfills the requirements of justice while offering forgiveness. Ultimately, North asserts that understanding this relationship between redemption and justification is crucial for grasping the fullness of the Gospel.

Transcript

Paul, who received from God the revelation of our election in Christ and delivered it to us, makes much of this knowledge, unfolding its many splendours in the various letters he wrote to the churches. To the Romans he writes of the glory of God that he by grace should justify sinners absolutely freely. This is a marvellous revelation, quite beyond the minds of men to accept and totally impossible except he add, 'through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus'. It is unethical to think and believe that a man can be forgiven and more than forgiven apart from some atonement made on his part or on his behalf. Unless there is a factor unknown to man, yet operative on his behalf, which justifies him before God, it would be utterly wrong and amoral to absolve him. So it is that Paul states the basis of justification, thereby assuring man, justifying God and vindicating the gospel. He does this by making inspired use of the means familiar to himself and all Jews, and made fully known to all men in the scriptures of truth, namely the tabernacle/temple type and ritual of ancient Israel. He speaks of 'Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth - a propitiation - through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God'.

As is so often the case, Paul is referring to the great day of atonement, Israel's yearly feast. On that day God freely forgave His people all the sins He had forborne to visit upon them during the past year, sins of which they were totally ignorant and for which therefore they could not make atonement. If God had punished them for those it would have been utterly unjust, for why should a man be punished for sins of which he knows nothing? So God devised and ordained a means whereby He could forgive all, and in doing so be completely just, as well as the only justifier of Israel. He therefore had the Ark of the Covenant made to His specifications, that His Law for righteousness may be placed in it, and His Mercy Seat be set on it for a lid. Upon this throne of mercy He commanded the blood of atonement to be sprinkled annually. This Ark of the Covenant represented Christ Jesus standing before God in absolute holiness. In the New Testament another name used for this Mercy Seat is 'the propitiatory', or 'place of propitiation'; it describes the place where the atoning blood was sprinkled. It was the exact spot where God fully absolved His people from all their sins.

Now Jesus Christ, says Paul, is set forth by God in order to declare His righteousness; this is symbolised in the Ark of the Covenant by the ten commandments. Because Jesus was so perfectly righteous He could be set forth as the One whose sacrifice could completely justify God in justifying men. His whole self and life was predestined to be propitiatory, so in the end at Calvary, when crowned with His own blood, shed on behalf of men, He achieved His purpose. He was both the propitiation and the propitiatory - He was the propitiation which propitiates and the place where the propitiation was made. Himself offered Himself upon Himself, because He was Himself.

That which He did was perfectly satisfying to God, and because of it He can righteously justify everyone who believes in Jesus; that is grace. Now the Day of Atonement was celebrated annually in goats' blood because through the blood of the lamb they were already a redeemed people. True to this, Paul says all is 'through redemption that is in Christ Jesus'. He is telling us that whether it be Israel or anyone else, there would have been no such thing as justification had it not been for the redemption. Justification is only possible because of redemption.

In relation to Israel this is most clearly seen and is not less true for men today. Analytically speaking God never justified His people in Egypt, He redeemed them from it. As regards order of time redemption was accomplished by God first; justification was introduced later. The Lord does not justify people in their worldliness and sin, but from the world and sin. God redeems people while they are still in sin in the world system of satan's kingdom. This is what Paul stresses most clearly to the Romans, 'God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'.

The lamb was slain and its blood sprinkled on the houses of sinners while still in Egypt under Pharaoh's power in 'the house of bondage'. By first birth spiritually we all are the devil's children in experience, though God's children in reality. We all are firstborn to satan in his house of bondage, yet by God's choice and in His elective purposes we belonged to Him before the foundation of the world. We are His firstborn in that by His will we were chosen by Him in Christ before we were ever born in this world. For these reasons God made the final plague in Egypt the judgement of the first-born; it was all about firstborn sons - God's and satan's. The devil's firstborn, being so to speak a plague to God, were cut off at one stroke. Doing this God dealt with the thing that both grieved His heart and plagued the earth, incorporating the operation into redemption.

Redemption has to do with spirit, soul and body. It is outright purchase of the human being, God claiming the right to have man wholly in order to do with him as He pleases. Everything depends on this.

Redemption is directly connected with the covenant, the oath God swore to Abraham. He redeemed Israel because He had made promise to their fathers. Whether or not they were in sin made no difference, God had committed Himself to His friend Abraham; if for no other reason, He would have done it for his sake alone. It was as much a matter of honour as a revelation of love and a display of power: 'Hath He not said and shall he not do it?'

Herein lies the pre-eminence of redemption over every other thing God wrought through the death of His Son. The person He was and the life He lived was redemptive, He was in Himself the Redeemer. When He shed His blood it was to purchase us and in this sense we were redeemed, but redemption can only be experienced as we are baptised into Him. Redemption is in Him as well as through or by Him. In order to teach men this, God ordered His people to be brought to Him at Sinai. There He gave them His law for righteousness.

He had shown Himself to be righteous in that He had redeemed them, though they had done nothing to merit it. God's righteousness towards them lay in His faithfulness to keep His word to Abraham. They could not enter into Christ as we can, yet figuratively they did so. It was for this reason that God gave them His Law and His instructions about the Tabernacle which was to be His home. The Tabernacle was a figure of Christ Jesus. Its structure and furnishings spoke wholly of Him, and although only a few select priests were allowed to enter into it, through them Israel vicariously entered into and found their redemption in Him. Even though it was impossible for them in their day to be the Church of Jesus Christ, when dealing with them God could not depart from basic principles of eternal truth. They were therefore regarded by Him as His Church; indeed Stephen called them 'the church in the wilderness'.

God is insistent about the facts and order of truth. The Tabernacle before the land is a revelation of invariable eternal principle. Entrance into Christ was typified to them primarily in terms of the priesthood and tabernacle worship, and only later as entering the Promised Land. Entrance into the Promised Land was delayed for some forty years and therefore is quite secondary to entrance into the House of God. In the Tabernacle all spoke of Christ. Basically the Promised Land itself represents man's soul in its natural state when fully possessed by Christ - flowing with milk and honey - 'a land of corn and wine and oil, favoured with God's peculiar smile'. This is nothing other than a metaphorical way of describing the normal soul-state of Jesus the man.

Unlike the children of Israel, and better than they, we enter into Him for redemption, not into a tabernacle or a land. Structures and territories have no meaning now, everything to do with our salvation is spiritual. We are saved into Him through His own blood in order to experience His spirit/soul state for our God-given inheritance - 'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will'.

The invariable laws governing all God's gracious dealings with His redeemed were well known to Paul. The word 'obtained' in Ephesians chapter one means 'to obtain by lot', and is a direct reference to the occasion when Joshua cast lots before the Lord to determine the tribal and family inheritance of the children of Israel in the Promised Land. By the lot each man's inheritance was predetermined; he had to go to the portion of Canaan given to him by God, and he must possess it and live and work there - nowhere else. It was all part of the predestinating process; it was done according to purpose as God's will counselled him.

Redemption itself is all part of God's great predestinating will. God planned and purposed and created Canaan to be an inheritance for Israel; before the nation existed He promised the land to Abraham. Likewise, before we had any existence, save in God's will and Jesus' heart, He planned and purposed Christ's glorified eternal inward states to be our inheritance. The act of redemption through bloodshed at Calvary was just one phase of the operation of God according to the overall plan of salvation. It was the most costly thing He ever did, involving far more than the actual bloodshed so vitally necessary for the purchase. But the Lamb slain in heart from the foundation of the world shed no blood then; in that sacrifice His death was not physical. He was slain prehistorically that the mind of God may be justifiably made up and the decision to save unborn men be taken, and even the world itself be founded.

God sought nobody's counsel about His action, but moved in absolute love and justice. Redemption was validated then without bloodshed; there was no Calvary. There was much suffering though; that is why on earth Jesus was a man of sorrows - He was acquainted with grief in eternity. When He came to earth He was already our Redeemer - redemption was in Him as of nature, He was made redemption to us of purpose. It was all part of God's predestinating will and action to bring us into Him that we should obtain our inheritance, namely the spiritual status of sons of God, enjoying the soul-state of Jesus the man of God. This is the absolutely irreducible minimal basis of eternal life for the sons of men. For us the lot has been cast, the decision made, the inheritance given, the will fixed, the destination settled; we are now the redeemed in Christ the Beloved.

Paul had a wonderful grasp of eternal truth; time and again he brings out treasures of knowledge connected with being in Christ. In one place he speaks of himself as having been 'carnal, sold under sin'; it is a reference to Adam's transaction with Satan in Eden. At that time the whole human race was sold to the devil; Adam did it for the prize of being allowed to retain Eve. Paul realised that without his knowledge he was included in that transaction, that Adam betrayed his trust and that in Adam he died; he said, 'as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive'. The redeeming act purchased us - the full price for Adam's heinous original sin was the sum total exacted of Jesus in recovering God's loss and restoring that which He took not away; it was love beyond degree and grace beyond deserts.

Adam sold us all out to the devil, robbing God of His created man. He never paid God anything, he robbed Him. So the last Adam came and as man paid God full price for man; having done so He kept him, but not for Himself, He gave him to His Father and God. This then is the defeat of Satan, the negation of Adam's sin, the resolution of the problem - God chose us in Christ before the world began, but only in redemption - 'in Christ shall all be made alive'. The crowning virtue of Jesus' wholly virtuous life was His willingness to die for us. Because of the redemption in Him we are justified freely, but He could not do that for us until we belonged to Him wholly; justification is conditional and entirely dependent upon redemption.

It seems that many in the early Church did not properly understand this conditional salvation. At any rate Paul had repeatedly to make it clear to his converts, firmly grounding his doctrines in the Old Testament scriptures, and invariably using God's dealings with Israel to illustrate his points. Not that everything commenced with Israel; it did not, but so much of redemption truth now known to the Church was first either applied to or plainly typed in them. Therefore when Paul wishes to bring understanding of redemption to the Church he draws upon his vast knowledge of scripture and Israel's history.

For instance, what he tells the Corinthians is typical of his style, 'ye are not your own.. .ye are bought with a price'. Always this is his starting point. That is why, following some brief opening remarks, he presents the cross to them right in the first chapter. The effectiveness of the cross lies in its comprehensiveness, its

completeness and its finality. It applied the innate power of Christ to the total basic needs of man according to the total requirements of God. Because of that, by the cross God bought every member of His Church outright. In chapter five Paul rightly connects this with the Lamb - 'Christ our passover is sacrificed for us', he says, 'let us keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'.

The redemption of Israel was unto a feast of bread without leaven. Taking up this feast and using it as a figure, Paul says we are an unleavened lump; redemption through the blood of Christ is from sin. New Testament redemption involves more than being purchased, it also means being purged. This is implied in the use of the word which means to loose or to liberate. To Israel this aspect of redemption was spelled out to them in the words 'out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'. This meant that God would bring them out from under Pharaoh's yoke completely; redemption effected total deliverance out from under all the tasks and burdens of the Egyptians. To them redemption meant that they would be liberated from slavery and the slave-master, it did not mean, nor was it ever suggested, that it effected liberation from sin. The blood of the lambs on the houses of Egypt could no more take away sins than could the blood of the bulls and goats on the Altars of Canaan, or on the Mercy Seat itself. But testifying of the superior blood of Jesus, John says, 'unto him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us a kingdom of priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen'.

The liberation in Jesus' blood is by inward purging rather than by outward release. Paul spoke frankly to servants still 'under the yoke', telling them not to seek release from bondage to a master, but to be free from sin and turn their slavery into joyful service for Jesus. His blood is the powerful antidote to sin. We have faith in His blood that it is the faultless blood of a righteous man - a lamb without blemish and without spot in His outward life in this world. Lambs anciently sacrificed in Egypt or Canaan had to be of this quality in their bodies; whatever their behavioural patterns were did not matter as long as their bodies were of this standard of perfection. On the contrary, when Jesus was crucified, far from being without physical blemish, 'he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our sins was upon him.. .with his stripes we are healed'. God demanded that sacrificial lambs should be physically perfect' as a testimony to the spiritual perfection of the inward manhood and outward life of Jesus. (They did not bear sins in their bodies, or suffer for others, they only died that their blood should justify God in first redeeming Israel and later forgiving the people their sins. That was all God required of them).

In the New Testament the purpose of the four Gospels is to furnish proof of the perfections of Jesus. The spirit within the man of Galilee was clearly God, for the life manifest in His flesh was purest soul; inwardly and outwardly He was without blemish or spot or even a wrinkle. He was the perfect Redeemer. The whole body of the truth of justification by faith, though hinted at in the Gospels, is not properly introduced until after Pentecost. Apart from a reference here and there to expiation and forgiveness, the Gospels largely ignore Christ's propitiatory function in favour of presenting Him as the redeeming Lamb.

This is a remarkable testimony to the fact and truth of inspiration. Each of the Gospels was written long after the revelation of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, yet none of them refer to it in any degree. There is not any suggestion that Jesus ever gave systematic teaching along that line; their testimony is given under the control of the Holy Spirit and is exclusively overruled to give conclusive proof to the unprejudiced mind that Jesus is indeed the Kinsman-Redeemer. That is the most important point of all. Nothing else of truth could be developed unless it was first established that Jesus is the redeeming Lamb.

Anna's prophecy to Israel could be summed up as 'look for redemption, behold this babe, observe His life'. On the mount of transfiguration the theme of conversation between Moses, Elijah and Jesus was the exodus He should accomplish at Jerusalem. The disappointed testimony of the two on the road to Emmaus when speaking of Jesus was 'we trusted it had been he that should have redeemed Israel'. There are a few recorded occasions when He had forgiven people their sins, but this was not the main emphasis of His teachings and ministry among men. The reason for this was that until the redeeming blood was shed He could not speak about justifying anybody. It would have been premature to have done so.

Even on the day of Pentecost when the new era had dawned, Peter did not speak of justification. Instead he pursued the theme of redemption. He did not even mention the word righteousness, but laboured to show that Jesus is Lord and Christ. Those to whom he spoke understood perfectly what he meant. Under the power of the Spirit Peter skilfully linked King David with Jesus, and presented the crucified, dead, buried, raised, ascended, exalted, enthroned Messiah-Kinsman-Redeemer. Not until later, and chiefly through the selection and installation of Paul to the apostolate, was the propitiatory aspect of Christ's death and the theme of justification introduced and developed in the sacred canon. This does not mean that Peter and the rest of the apostles did not know or believe that Christ is the propitiation; on the contrary they all rejoiced in it.

It does mean however that the scriptures are the word of truth and shows that all was written under the strict control, revelation, inspiration, supervision and order of the Spirit. He constrained and restrained the men of the New Covenant, so that they wrote in the same doctrinal vein as the men of the Old Covenant, namely first redemption, then justification. This was no great difficulty for Him, given the right instruments, for the history of salvation recorded in the Book runs a parallel course with world events. It unfolds naturally and honestly; there is no need to twist facts and concoct stories, nothing is strained or contrived. There is no suppression of facts in the Bible; the New Testament flows on and out from the Old Testament as a great river of truth growing deeper and wider the further it flows.

Redemption for Israel - the few - grows into redemption for the world - for many. God's love for Israel is shown to be only a part of His love for the world; indeed it is revealed to be but the foundation of the greater love. He selected Israel chiefly that He might use them for the purpose of bringing His Son into the world for a greater redemption and exodus than Israel ever knew. Redemption of the few (Israelites) by the blood of many lambs has been superseded by the redemption of the many by the blood of one Lamb.

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