

Of Other Eternal and Immanent Acts in God, Particularly Adoption and Justification.

by John Gill

This sermon explores the concepts of adoption and justification as eternal and immanent acts of God's free grace.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4

Topics: "Justification By Faith", "Divine Adoption"

Description

John Gill expounds on the eternal acts of God, particularly focusing on adoption and justification. He emphasizes that both acts are rooted in God's eternal will, with adoption being God's choice to make certain individuals His children, and justification being God's declaration of righteousness towards the elect. Gill clarifies that these acts are not contingent upon human actions or faith but are established in God's sovereign grace from eternity. He argues that justification is an internal act of God that precedes faith and is based on Christ's righteousness, which was secured for the elect before the foundation of the world. The sermon highlights the profound nature of God's grace in adopting and justifying unworthy sinners.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 2--Chapter 5

OF OTHER ETERNAL AND IMMANENT ACTS IN GOD,
PARTICULARLY ADOPTION AND JUSTIFICATION.

I shall not here treat of these as doctrines, in the full extent of them; or as blessings of grace actually bestowed upon, and enjoyed by believers, with all the privileges and advantages arising from thence; or as transient acts passing on them, and terminating in their consciences at believing; but as internal and immanent acts, taken up in the mind of God from eternity, and which abide in his will; in which they have their complete "esse", or being, as eternal election has, being of the same kind and nature, and are ranked with it as of the same date, and as branches of it (Eph. 1:4-6).

In the other view of them they will be considered hereafter in course, in a proper place. I shall begin with, 1. Adoption; as predestination to it stands next to election, (Eph. 1:5) which is no other than his will to adopt the chosen ones, which is his adoption of them; for as the will of God to elect any is his election of them, so his will to adopt the same is his adoption of them; and the complete essence of it lies in his will, and is as such an eternal immanent act of it; in like manner as election is, and may be considered as a branch of it, at least of the same nature with it; and which agrees with the sense of the word "adopto", from whence adoption comes, which is compounded of "ad" to, and "opto" to choose; so that adoption is God's choice or election of some to be his children; and by this option, or choice, of his they become so.

The Greek word for adoption throughout the New Testament is *uioyesia*, which signifies "putting among the children"; the phrase used by God (Jer. 3:19). "How shall I put them among the children?" or a putting one for and in the room of a son, that is a stranger and not a son by birth; a constituting and accounting such an one as a son, according to choice, will, and pleasure: and divine adoption is an act of the sovereign grace and good will of God, (Eph. 1:5) to which he is not induced by any motive out of himself; not by any excellency in the creature; nor for want of a son; one or other of which is the case in human adoptions; as of Moses, a goodly child, by Pharaoh's daughter; and of Esther, a beautiful person, and a relation by Mordecai; but divine adoption is of persons exceeding unworthy and undeserving, nothing engaging in them; not only strangers, but children of wrath even as others, and like the wretched infant in (Ezek. 16:1-63).

It is an act of distinguishing grace; it is of men, and not angels; who are servants and not sons, at least not by adoption; and of some men and not of all, though all are alike in their nature state; and it is a most amazing act of unmerited love and free grace (1 John 3:1). Now this is an eternal act of grace: 1a. First, It did not begin in time, but commenced from eternity; it is an act of God's will, and has its complete essence in it; and the will of God is eternal, no new will, nor any new act of will, arises in God in time; or otherwise he would not be the unchangeable God he is. 1a1.

It is an act that does not first take place at believing; indeed the saints are "all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus", openly and manifestatively, (Gal. 3:26) but then it is not faith that makes them children, but what makes them appear to be so; adoption is the act of God, and not of faith; it is God that says, "How shall I put them among the children?" and again, "I will be their Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters", (Jer. 3:19; 2 Cor. 6:18) it is the work and business of faith to receive the blessing of adoption, which it could not do, unless it had been previously provided in the mind and by the will of God, and in the covenant of his grace; for the reception of which Christ has made way by his redemption, one end of which is "that we might receive the adoption of sons", (Gal. 4:5) that is, by faith; for God has appointed faith to be the general receiver of Christ, and of all the blessings of grace through him, and this among the rest; and to as many as receive Christ, he gives exousian, a power, authority, dignity, and privilege to become the sons of God openly; that is, to claim this as their privilege and dignity; which claim is made by faith; but not the thing itself claimed; "even to them that believe on his name", and who are described as regenerate persons; which is an evidence of their sonship, though not the thing itself; "who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man; but of God" (John 1:12, 13).

But though this describes such who are the sons of God openly, and who believe; yet, 1a2. Adoption does not first commence at regeneration; adoption and regeneration are two distinct blessings, and the one is previous to the other; though they are commonly confounded together by divines. Regeneration is not the foundation of adoption, but adoption the foundation of regeneration; or, the reason why men are adopted, is not because they are regenerated, but they are regenerated because they are adopted.

By adoption they are put into the relation of children, and by regeneration they have a nature given them suitable to that relation; and are made partakers of the divine nature, that they may be made known to be heirs apparent to, and to have a meekness for the possession, enjoyment, and use of it, the inheritance in heaven they are adopted to; for, 1a3. The act of adoption is previous to any work of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of his people; "Because ye are sons, sons already, sons by adopting grace; God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts", both to convince, convert, regenerate, and effectually call by his grace, and sanctify, and also to comfort, and to enable to cry Abba Father, witnessing to their spirits, that they are the children of God; and hence he is called, "the Spirit of Adoption"; and it is his influences, teachings, and leadings, which are the evidences of adoption; "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God"; not that those influences, operations, and leadings, make them, but make them evident to be such, (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14-16). 1a4.

Divine adoption, or sonship, took place before any work of Christ was wrought in time, for any of the sons of men; it was before his incarnation and birth; forasmuch then, or because "the children are partakers of flesh and blood", the children of God, who are so by adopting grace; therefore "he also", Christ, "himself took part of the same"; for though the nature he assumed was what was in common to all mankind, yet he assumed it with a peculiar view to the children of God, the spiritual seed of Abraham; whose nature he is said to take, and for whose sake he was the child born, and the Son given, (Isa. 9:6; Heb. 2:14, 16) and in consequence they must be the children of God before Christ suffered and died; and, indeed, he suffered and died for them under this character, considered as the children of God by adopting grace; for he died not only for the elect of God among the "Jews, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad"; that is, those who were already the children of God by adopting grace, who were scattered throughout the whole Gentile world.

This relates to the gathering of all the elect in one, in Christ, in the dispensation of the fulness of times; when Christ suffered as their Surety, Head, and Representative; and when they were all considered as the children of God, whether in heaven or on earth, and whether among Jews or Gentiles, (Eph. 1:10; John 11:51, 52) and in order to bring these many sons to glory, it became him to be made perfect through sufferings, and that through his redemption of them thereby, they might receive, actually in their own persons, the adoption before provided for them, as before observed; see (Heb. 2:10; Gal. 4:5). 1b.

Secondly, Adoption is an act of God's free grace from all eternity. 1b1. The elect of God are frequently spoken of as a distinct number of men, given to Christ, and as previous to their coming to him by faith, which is the certain fruit and consequence of that gift; see (John 17:2, 6, 9, 24, 6:37) yea, they were given to Christ before the world was; for if grace was given to them in him before the world began, they themselves must be given to him, and be in him before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9).

Now these were given to Christ in the relation of children, and therefore must be children so early; "Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me" (Heb. 2:13). 1b2. The elect of God were espoused to Christ in eternity; as has been shown in the preceding chapter; which serves to illustrate and prove the relation of sonship to God so early; for as in natural and civil marriage, if a man marries a king's daughter, he becomes his son in law; as David to Saul: or if a woman marries a king's son, she becomes the king's daughter: so the elect of God, his church and people, being espoused to the Son of God, they become the sons and daughters of the Lord God almighty, the King of kings; and hence the church is called the King's daughter, (Ps. 45:13) and these persons being betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, in eternity, as they were the spouse of Christ, they must be, and must be considered as being the sons of God so early. 1b3.

The elect of God were taken by him into the covenant of his grace, as children; the sum and substance of which runs thus, "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty" (2 Cor. 6:18). Now this covenant was from everlasting; as the setting up of Christ the Mediator of it so soon; and the promises and blessings, made and provided before the world began, do abundantly testify. Besides, in this covenant, these same persons so early were given to Christ, as his seed and offspring, his children, and he commenced the everlasting Father of them (see Isa. 9:6 53:10). 1b4.

Predestination to the adoption of children, is mentioned along with election, as of the same date with it, and as an illustration of it, and as an addition to it, or rather, a branch of it; as men by election are not only chosen to holiness, but to adoption, and the inheritance annexed to it (Eph. 1:4, 5). Adoption is a sentence of grace conceived in the divine mind, and settled by the divine will, and pronounced in divine predestination, which is an eternal act of God; and so says Dr.

Ames[1], "Adoption is a gracious sentence of God--which sentence is pronounced in the same variety of degrees as justification; for it was first pronounced in divine predestination, (Eph. 1:5) afterwards in Christ, (Gal. 4:5) then in believers themselves" (Gal. 4:6). And all these pronunciations, and so all that Christ did in redemption respecting this, or the Spirit of God does in revealing, applying, and witnessing it, yea, all that will be done in eternity to come; for though now the saints "are the sons of God, it doth not yet appear", clearly and fully, "what they shall be", even as sons, or what dignity and glory they shall be raised unto, in consequence of this relation; I say, all these in time, and to eternity, serve only to open and expand the original act of God's will, in appointing and constituting them his sons in an eternity past. 2.

Justification is an act of God's grace, flowing from his sovereign good will and pleasure; the elect of God are said to be "justified by his grace"; and as if that expression was not strong enough to set forth the freeness of it, the word "freely" is added elsewhere; "Being justified freely by his grace" (Titus 3:7; Rom. 3:24). Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object.

It is not of this I shall now treat, but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it; it is, as Dr. Ames[2] expresses it, "a sentence conceived in the divine mind, by the decree of justifying." Now, as before observed, as God's will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them; as it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them, is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity. 2a.

First, It does not begin to take place in time, or at believing, but is antecedent to any act of faith. 2a1. Faith is not the cause, but an effect of justification; it is not the cause of it in any sense; it is not the moving cause, that is the free grace of God; "Being justified freely by his grace", (Rom. 3:24) nor the efficient cause of it; "It is God that justifies", (Rom. 8:33) nor the meritorious cause, as some express it; or the matter of it, that is the obedience and blood of Christ, (Rom. 5:9, 19) or the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his active and passive obedience; nor even the instrumental cause; for, as Mr.

Baxter[3] himself argues, "If faith is the instrument of our justification, it is the instrument either of God or man; not of man, for justification is God's act; he is the sole Justifier, (Rom. 3:26) man doth not justify himself: nor of God, for it is not God that believes": nor is it a "causa sine qua non", as the case of elect

infants shows; it is not in any class of causes whatever; but it is the effect of justification: all men have not faith, and the reason why some do not believe is, because they are none of Christ's sheep; they were not chosen in him, nor justified through him; but justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others believe is, because they are ordained to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation: the reason why any are justified, is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith, is because they are justified; was there no such blessing of grace as justification of life in Christ, for the sons of men, there would be no such thing as faith in Christ bestowed on them; precious faith is obtained through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 1:1) nor, indeed, would there be any room for it, nor any use of it, if a justifying righteousness was not previously provided.

Agreeable to this are the reasonings and assertions of Twisse[4], Maccovius[5], and others. Now if faith is not the cause, but the effect of justification; then as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification. 2a2. Faith is the evidence and manifestation of justification, and therefore justification must be before it; "Faith is the evidence of things not seen", (Heb. 11:1) but it is not the evidence of that which as yet is not; what it is an evidence of, must be, and it must exist before it.

The "righteousness of God", of the God-man and mediator Jesus Christ, "is revealed from faith to faith", in the everlasting gospel, (Rom. 1:17) and therefore must be before it is revealed, and before faith, to which it is revealed: faith is that grace whereby a soul, having seen its guilt, and its want of righteousness, beholds, in the light of the divine Spirit, a complete righteousness in Christ, renounces its own, lays hold off that, puts it on as a garment, rejoices in it, and glories of it; the Spirit of God witnessing to his spirit, that he is a justified person; and so he is evidently and declaratively "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11). 2a3.

Faith adds nothing to the "esse" only to the "bene esse" of justification; it is no part of, nor any ingredient in it; it is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, without the being or consideration of faith, or any foresight of it; a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God; and after he does believe, his justification does not depend on his acts of faith; for though "we believe not, yet he abides faithful"; that is, God is faithful to his covenant engagements with his Son, as their Surety, by whose suretyship righteousness they are justified; but by faith men have a comfortable sense, perception and apprehension of their justification, and enjoy that peace of soul which results from it; it is by that only, under the testimony of the divine Spirit, that they know their interest in it, and can claim it, and so have the comfort of it.

But, 2a4. Justification is the object, and faith the act that is conversant with it. Now every object is prior to the act that is concerned with it; unless when an act gives being to the object, which is not the case here; for faith, as has been seen, is not the cause, nor matter of justification; what the eye is to the body, that is faith to the soul: the eye, by virtue of its visive faculty, beholds sensible objects, but does not produce them; they are before they are seen, and did they not previously exist, the eye could not behold them; the sun is before it is seen; and so in innumerable other instances: faith is to the soul, as the hand is to the body, receives things for its use; but then these things must be before they are received; faith receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, even that righteousness by which it is justified, from the God of its salvation; but then this blessing must exist before faith can receive it (Ps. 24:5).

Christ's righteousness, by which men are justified, is compared to a robe or garment, which faith puts on; but then as a garment must be wrought and completely made, before it is put on, so must the justifying righteousness of Christ be, before it can be put on by faith. 2a5. All the elect of God were justified in Christ, their Head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, and therefore they believe: Christ engaged as a Surety for all his people from eternity, had their sins imputed to him, and for which he made himself responsible; in the fulness of time he made satisfaction for them by his sufferings and death, and at his resurrection was acquitted and discharged: now as he suffered and died, not as a private, but as a public person, so he rose again, and was justified as such, even as the representative of his people; hence when he rose, they rose with him; and when he was justified, they were justified in him; for he was "delivered for their offences, and was raised again for their justification", (Rom. 4:25; 1 Tim. 3:16) and this is the sense and judgment of many sound and learned divines; as, besides our Sandfords[6] and Dr.

Goodwins[7], the learned Amesius[8], Hoornbeck[9], Witsius[10], and others. But, 2b. Secondly, Justification is not only before faith, but it is from eternity, being an immanent act in the divine mind, and so an internal and eternal one; as may be concluded, 2b1. From eternal election: the objects of justification are God's elect; "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifies"; that is, the elect. Now if God's elect, as such, can have nothing laid to their charge; but are by God acquitted, discharged, and justified; and if they bore this character of elect from eternity, or were chosen in Christ before the world began; then they must be acquitted, discharged and justified so early, so as nothing could be laid to their charge: besides, by electing grace men were put into Christ, and were considered as in him before the foundation of the world; and if they were considered as in him, they must be considered as righteous or unrighteous; not surely as unrighteous, unjustified, and in a state of condemnation; for "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ", (Rom. 8:1) and therefore must be considered as righteous, and so justified: "Justified then we were, says Dr.

Goodwin[11] when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and an interest in him." 2b2. Justification may well be considered as a branch of election; it is no other, as one expresses it, than setting apart the elect alone to be partakers of Christ's righteousness; and a setting apart Christ's righteousness for the elect only; it is mentioned along with election, as of the same date with it; "Wherein", that is, in the grace of God, particularly the electing grace of God, spoken of before, "he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

What is this acceptance in Christ, but justification in him? and this is expressed as a past act, in the same language as other eternal things be in the context, he "hath" blessed us, and he "hath" chosen us, and "having" predestinated us, so he hath made us accepted; and, indeed, as Christ as always the beloved of God, and well pleasing to him; so all given to him, and in him, were beloved of God, well pleasing to him, and accepted with him, or justified in him from eternity. 2b3.

Justification is one of those spiritual blessings wherewith the elect are blessed in Christ according to election-grace, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3, 4). That justification is a spiritual blessing none will deny; and if the elect were blessed with all spiritual blessings, then with this; and if thus blessed according to election, or when elected, then before the foundation of the world: and this grace of justification must be no small part of that "grace which was given in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was" (2 Tim. 1:9).

We may say, says Dr. Goodwin[12], of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ, that his goings forth are from everlasting--in Christ we were blessed with all spiritual blessings, (Eph. 1:3) as we are blessed with all other, so with this also, that we were justified then in Christ! 2b4. Christ became a Surety for his people from everlasting; engaged to pay their debts, bear their sins, and make satisfaction for them; and was accepted of as such by God his Father, who thenceforward looked at him for payment and satisfaction, and looked at them as discharged, and so they were in his eternal mind; and it is a rule that will hold good, as Maccovius[13] observes, "that as soon as one becomes a surety for another, the other is immediately freed, if the surety be accepted;" which is the case here and it is but a piece of common prudence, when a man has a bad debt, and has good security for it, to look not to the principal debtor, who will never be able to pay him, but to his good bondsman and surety, who is able; and so Dr.

Goodwin[14] observes, that God, in the everlasting transaction with Christ, "told him, as it were, that he would look for his debt and satisfaction of him, and that he did let the sinners go free; and so they are in this respect, justified from all eternity." 2b5. The everlasting transaction, the same excellent writer thinks, is imported in 2 Corinthians 5:19. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". And the very learned Witsius[15] is of opinion, "that this act of God may be called, the general justification of the elect."

And, indeed, since it was the determination of God, and the scheme and method he proposed to take in Christ for the reconciliation of the elect, not to impute their sins to them, but to his Son, their Surety; then seeing they are not imputed to them, but to him; and if reckoned and accounted to him, then not to them; and if charged to him, then they must be discharged from them, and so justified; and a non-imputation of sin to the elect, is no other than a justification of them; and thus the apostle strongly concludes the imputation of Christ's righteousness; which is the "formalis ratio", or the form of justification, from the non-imputation of sin, and the remission of it (Rom. 4:6-8). 2b6.

It was the will of God from everlasting, not to punish sin in the persons of his elect, but to punish it in the person of Christ; and that it was his will not to punish it in his people, but in his Son, is manifest from his setting him forth in his purposes and decrees, to be the propitiation for sin; and from his sending him forth in the likeness of sinful flesh, to condemn sin in the flesh; and from his being made sin and a curse, that his people might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Now, as has been often observed, no new will can arise in God; God wills nothing in time, but what he willed from eternity; and if it was the eternal will of God not to punish sin in his people, but in his Son, then they were eternally discharged, acquitted from sin, and secured from everlasting wrath and destruction; and if they were eternally discharged from sin, and freed from punishment, they were eternally justified: Dr. Twisse[16] makes the very quiddity and essence of justification and remission of sin, which he takes to be the same, to lie in the will of God not to punish; and asserts, that this will not to punish, as it is an immanent act, was from eternity. 2b7.

It deserves regard and attention, that the saints under the Old Testament, were justified by the same righteousness of Christ, as those under the New, and that before the sacrifice was offered up, the satisfaction given, and the everlasting righteousness brought in; for Christ's blood was shed for the remission of sins that were past, and his death was for the redemption of transgressions under the first Testament (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). Now if God could, and actually did, justify some, three or four thousand years before the righteousness of Christ was actually wrought out, taking his Son's word and bond as their Surety, and in a view of his future righteousness; why could he not, and why may it not be thought he did,

justify all his elect from eternity, upon the word and bond of their Surety, and on the basis of his future righteousness, which he had engaged to work out, and which he full well knew he would most certainly work out? and if there is no difficulty in conceiving of the one, there can be none in conceiving of the other.

There are many objections made to this truth; some are so trifling as to deserve no notice; a few of the more principal ones I shall briefly answer to, and chiefly those made, for the most part, by the learned Turretine[17]. 2b7a. It is objected, that men cannot be justified before they exist; they must be, before they can be justified; since "non entis nulla sunt accidentia", &c. of a nonentity nothing can be said, nor anything ascribed to it. To which I answer, whatever is in this objection, lies as strongly against eternal election, as against eternal justification; for it may as well be said, how can a man be elected before he exists? he must be before he can be chosen, or be the object of choice.

I own, with Maccovius[18], that this is true of non-entities, that have neither an "esse actu", nor an "esse cognitum", that have neither an actual being, nor is it certain, nor known that they shall have any future being: but though God's elect have not an actual being from eternity, yet it is certain, by the prescience and predetermination of God, that they shall have one; for "known unto God are all his works from the beginning", or from eternity (Acts 15:18). And besides this, they have an "esse representativum", a representative being in Christ; which is more than other creatures have, whose future existences are certain; even such a being as makes them capable of being chosen in Christ, and blessed in him before the foundation of the world, and of having grace given them in him before the world was; and why not then of being justified in him? (Eph. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Moreover, as the same writer[19] observes, "Justification is a moral act, which does not require the existence of the subject together with it; but it is enough that it shall exist some time or other." 2b7b. It is further objected, that if God's elect are justified from eternity, then they were not only justified before they themselves existed, but before any sin was committed by them; and it seems absurd that men should be justified from sins before they were committed, or any charge of them brought against them.

To which may be replied, that it is no more absurd to say, that God's elect were justified from their sins before they were committed, than it is to say, that they were imputed to Christ, and he died for them, and made satisfaction for them before committed; which is most certainly true of all those that live, since the coming and death of Christ: such that believe the doctrines of the imputation of sin to Christ, and of his satisfaction for it, ought never to make this objection; and if they do, they, ought to be fully content with the answer.

As for the charge of sin against God's elect, that is not first made when brought to the conscience of an awakened sinner; justice brought the charge against all the elect, in the eternal transactions between the Father and the Son; or how came Christ to be bail and Surety for them? or how otherwise could there be a transfer of the charge from them to Christ? and where is the grace of a non-imputation of sin to them, and of an imputation of it to Christ, if it was not imputable to them, and chargeable on them? 2b7c.

It is urged, that strictly and accurately speaking, it cannot be said that justification is eternal, because the decree of justification is one thing, and justification itself another; even as God's will of sanctifying is one thing, and sanctification itself another; wherefore, though the decree of justification is eternal, and precedes faith, that itself is in time, and follows it. To which it may be answered, that as God's decree and will to elect men to everlasting life and salvation, is his election of them; and his will not to impute sin to them, is the non-imputation of it; and his will to impute the righteousness of Christ unto them, is the

imputation of it to them; so his decree, or will to justify them, is the justification of them, as that is an immanent act in God; which has its complete essence in his will, as election has; is entirely within himself, and not transient on an external subject, producing any real, physical, inherent change in it, as sanctification is and does; and therefore the case is not alike: it is one thing for God to will to act an act of grace concerning men, another thing to will to work a work of grace in them; in the former case, the will of God is his act of justification; in the latter it is not his act of sanctification; wherefore, though the will of God to justify, is justification itself, that being a complete act in his eternal mind, without men; yet his will to sanctify, is not sanctification, because that is a work wrought in men, and not only requires the actual existence of them but an exertion of powerful and efficacious grace upon them: was justification, as the papists say, by an infusion of inherent righteousness in men, there would be some strength in the objection; but this is not the case, and therefore there is none in it. 2b7d.

It is observed, that the apostle, reckoning up in order, the benefits which flow from the love of God to the elect, in his famous chain of salvation, sets calling before justification, as something antecedent to it, (Rom. 8:30) from whence it is concluded, that calling is in order of time, before justification. To which I reply, that the order of things in scripture is frequently inverted. The Jews have a saying[20], that there is nothing prior and posterior in the law; that is, that the order of things is not strictly observed; to put that first which is first, and that last which is last; but the order is changed, and therefore nothing strictly can be concluded from thence; even the order of persons in the Trinity is not always kept to, sometimes the Son is placed before the Father, and the Holy Spirit before them both; which, though it may be improved into an argument for their equality, yet not to destroy the order among them; and so with respect to calling, it may be observed, that it is sometimes placed before election, (2 Peter 1:10) but none but an Arminian would argue from thence, that it is really before it in order of time, or that men are not elected until they are called: on the other hand, salvation is placed before calling (2 Tim. 1:9).

"Who hath saved us, and called us", &c. from whence we might, with as great propriety, argue, that salvation, and so justification, precedes calling; as to argue, from the other text in Romans, that calling precedes justification, in order of time. Indeed, nothing is to be concluded with certainty, one way or another, from such modes and forms of expression. Justification, as a transient act, and declarative, follows calling; but as an immanent act in God, it goes before it, of which we are only speaking, as ought always to be remembered. 2b7e.

It is affirmed, that those various passages of scripture, where we are said to be justified through faith, and by fairly, have no other tendency than to show that faith is something prerequisite to justification, which cannot be said if justification was from eternity. To which the answer is, that those scriptures which speak of justification, through and by faith, do not militate against, nor disprove justification before faith; for though justification by and before faith differ, yet they are not opposite and contradictory.

They differ, the one being an immanent act in God; all which sort of acts are eternal, and so before faith; the other being a transient declarative act, terminating on the conscience of the believer; and so is by and through faith, and follows it. But then these do not contradict each other, the one being a declaration and manifestation of the other. What scriptures may be thought to speak of faith, as a prerequisite to justification, cannot be understood as speaking of it as a prerequisite to the being of justification; for faith has no causal influence upon it, it adds nothing to its being, it is no ingredient in it, it is not the cause nor matter of it; at most, they can only be understood as speaking of faith as a prerequisite to the knowledge and comfort of it, and to a claim of interest in it; and this is readily allowed, that no man is evidentially and declaratively justified until he believes; that is, he cannot have the knowledge of it, nor any comfort from it;

nor can he claim his interest in it, without faith; and this being observed, obviates another objection, that if justification is before faith, then faith is needless and useless.

It is not so; it is not of use to justify men, which it is never said to do; but it is of use to receive the blessing of justification, and to enjoy the comfort of it. 2b7f. It is asserted, that justification cannot be from eternity, but only in time, when a man actually believes and repents; otherwise it would follow, that he who is justified, and consequently has passed from death to life, and is become a child of God, and an heir of eternal life, abides still in death, and is a child of wrath, because he who is not yet converted, and lies in sin, abides in death, (1 John 3:14) and is of the devil, (1 John 3:8) and in a state of damnation, (Gal. 5:21) but this latter especially cannot be admitted of, with respect to God's elect, even while unconverted.

And now, to remove this seeming difficulty, let it be observed, that the elect of God may be considered under two different "heads", Adam and Christ, and as related to two covenants at one and the same time; as they are the descendants of Adam, they are related to him as a covenant head, and as such, sinned in him, and judgment came upon them all to condemnation and death, and so they are, by nature, children of wrath, even as others. But as considered in Christ, they are loved with an everlasting love, chosen in him before the world was, and always viewed and accounted righteous in him, and so secured from everlasting wrath and damnation; hence it is no contradiction to say, that the elect of God, as in Adam, and according to the covenant of works, are under the sentence of condemnation; and that as in Christ, and according to the covenant of grace, and the secret transactions thereof, they are justified, and saved from condemnation.

This is no more a contradiction, than that they were loved with an everlasting love, and yet are children of wrath, at one and the same time, as they most certainly are; nor than that Jesus Christ was the object of his Father's love and wrath at the same time, he sustaining two different capacities, and standing in two different relations, when he suffered in the room and stead of his people; as the Son of God he was always the object of his love; as the Surety of his people, bearing their sins, and suffering for them, he was the object of his wrath, (Ps. 89:38). 2b7g.

It is urged what the apostle says (1 Cor. 6:11). "Now ye are justified"; as if they were not justified before; but the word now is not in the text; and was it, and admit that to be the sense of it, it does not follow that they were not justified before: for so they might be "in foro dei", in the court of God, and in his account from eternity, and in Christ their Head and Surety, and especially when he rose from the dead, before now; yet not till now be justified in "foro conscientiae", in their own consciences, and by the Spirit of God; which is the justification the apostle is there speaking of.

In a word, the sentence of justification pronounced on Christ, the representative of his people, when he rose from the dead, and that which is pronounced by the Spirit of God in the consciences of believers, and that which will be pronounced before men and angels at the general judgment, are only so many repetitions, or renewed declarations, of that grand original sentence of it, conceived in the mind of God from all eternity; which is the eternal justification pleaded for; and is no other than what many eminent divines of the highest character for learning and judgment, have asserted, as before observed; and it is to such as these Dr.

Owen[21] refers, when he replied to Mr. Baxter, who charged him with holding eternal justification; "I neither am, nor ever was of that judgement; though as it may be explained, I know better, wiser, and more learned men than myself, (and he might have added, than Mr. Baxter,) that have been, and are."

ENDNOTES:

[1] Medulla Theologiae, l. 1. c. 28. s. 2, 3.

[2] Ibid. c. 27. s. 9.

[3] Aphorism, 56.

[4] Vindiciae Gratiae, l. 1. par. 2. s. 25. p. 197.

[5] prwton qeudov, Arminian, c. 10.

[6] De Descensu Christi. l. 3. s. 30. p. 59.

[7] Work, vol. 4. part 1. p. 105, 106.

[8] Medulla ut supra.

[9] Summa Controvers. l. 10. p. 705.

[10] Animadv. Irenic c. 10. s. 2. see the words of these authors at length, and of others before referred to, in my treatise on Justification.

[11] Ut supra.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Theolog. Quaest. loc. 31. qu. 6.

[14] Ut supra.

[15] Ut supra.

[16] Ut supra, p. 104.

[17] Institut. Theolog. tom. 2. loc. 16. qu. 9. s. 3.

[18] Loc. Commun. c. 69. p. 609.

[19] Theolog. Quaest. loc. 31.

[20] T. Bab. Pesachim: fol. 6. 2.

[21] Doctrine of Justification vindicated from the animadversions of R. B. p. 9.

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/of-other-eternal-and-immanent-acts-in-god-particularly-adoption-and-justificatio/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net