

The Doctrine of Justification, by the Righteousness of Christ, Stated and Maintained.

by John Gill

Justification is a forensic act that declares a person righteous according to law, through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Scripture: Acts 13:39, Romans 4:6, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:33

Topics: "Justification", "Righteousness of Christ"

Description

John Gill expounds on the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ, emphasizing that justification is distinct from pardon and is an act of God's grace where believers are declared righteous through Christ's imputed righteousness. He clarifies that justification is not based on human works or faith as a condition, but solely on Christ's obedience and sacrifice. Gill discusses the roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the justification process, asserting that it is a complete act that occurs before faith and is rooted in God's eternal decree. He concludes that believers are justified from all things through Christ, who fulfills the law's demands and provides a perfect righteousness that cannot be lost.

Transcript

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ACTS 13:39

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

This, and the preceding verse, appear, at first view, to contain those two great doctrines of the gospel, pardon of sin, and justification from it, the former of which I have largely insisted on, from the foregoing words, and shall now consider the latter, which I propose to do in the following method. I. I shall explain the act of justification, and shew what it is, and what it is not. II. Enquire into the author of it, or who it is that justifies. III. Shew the matter of it, or what that is, for the sake of which any are justified.

IV. Say something concerning the form of it, which is by imputation of righteousness. V. Consider the date of justification. VI. Point out the objects thereof, or who they are that are justified. VII. Mention the several effects, which follow upon it, or are closely connected with it. VIII. And lastly, Give some account of the several Properties of it. I. I shall explain the act of justification, and shew both what it is not, and what it is. And, 1. Strictly, and properly speaking, it is not the pardon of sin.

These two acts of divine grace are in strict connection with each other, and are not to be separated; that is to say, where the one is, the other also is; yet, I think, they may be distinguished. Divines generally make justification to consist in the remission of sins, and in the imputation of Christ's righteousness; which some make different parts; others say, they are not two integrating parts of justification, or acts numerically and really distinct, but only one act respecting two different terms, à quo & ad quem; just as by one, and the same act, darkness is expelled from the air, and light is introduced into it; so by one, and the same act of justification, the sinner is absolved from guilt, and pronounced righteous.

Hence they conclude, that those divines express the whole nature of justification, who say, that it consists in the remission of sins, and who say, that it consists in the imputation of righteousness; because, say they, when God forgives us our sins, he pronounces us righteous, by the imputation of Christ's righteousness; and when he pronounces us righteous, by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, he forgives us our sins. I readily allow that there is a very great agreement between justification and pardon, in their efficient, impulsive, and procuring causes, in their objects, or subjects, in their commencement, and manner of completion: the same God that pardons the sins of his people, justifies them, or accounts them righteous; the same grace, which moved him to the one, moved him to the other; as the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins, so by it are we justified; all who are justified are pardoned; and all who are pardoned, are justified, and that, at one and the same time; both these acts are finished at once, simul & semel, and are not carried on in a gradual and progressive way, as sanctification.

But all this does not prove them to be one and the same, for though they agree in these things, in others they differ; for justification is a pronouncing a person righteous according to law, as though he had never sinned; not so pardon: it is one thing for a man to be tried by law, cast, and condemned, and then receive the king's pardon; and another thing to be tried by the law, and, by it, to be found and declared righteous, as though he had not sinned against it. Moreover, though pardon takes away sin, and therefore is expressed by God's casting of it behind his back, and into the depths of the sea, and by a removal of it from his people, as far as the east is from the west; (Isa. 38:17; Micah 7:20; Ps. 103:13) yet it does not give a righteousness, as justification does; pardon of sin, indeed, takes away our filthy garments, but it is justification that clothes us with change of raiment.

Besides, more is required, and was given for our justification, than for our pardon; the blood of Christ was sufficient to procure pardon; but, besides, his suffering of death, the holiness of his nature, and the perfect obedience of his life, must be imputed for justification. Again, though pardon frees from punishment, yet, strictly and properly speaking, it does not give a title to eternal life; that justification properly gives, and is one good reason why the apostle calls it Justification of life. (Rom. 5:18) If a king pardons a criminal, he

does not thereby give him a title to his crown and kingdom; if he will, when he has pardoned him, take him to court, make him his son and heir, it must be by another distinct act of royal favour.

Once more, justification passed on Christ, as our head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, but so did not pardon. We may truly say, that Christ was justified, because the scriptures say so, (1 Tim. 3:16) but we cannot say that he was pardoned; should we, it would sound very harsh in our ears, as well as be, I think, a very unwarrantable expression; therefore pardon and justification may be considered as two distinct things. In fine, if these two are one and the same, the apostle must be guilty of a tautology in our text, where he speaks distinctly of justification, having fully expressed forgiveness of sin in the preceding verse. 2.

Justification is not a teaching, or an instructing of men in the way and method how they are or may be justified. When Christ as God's righteous servant, is said to justify many by his knowledge; (Isa. 53:11) the meaning is, not that he, by his knowledge, or doctrine, should only teach men how they might be justified, or what is God's way and method of justifying sinners; for this is no more than what the ministers of the gospel do, who are said to turn many to righteousness, or, as it is in the original text, to justify many; (Dan. 12:3) which they do, by preaching the gospel, wherein the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith; and which, being blessed and owned by the Spirit of God, is the ministration of righteousness to many: but the meaning is, that he should give to many a spiritual knowledge of himself, which, in other words, is faith; by which they should have a comfortable apprehension of their justification by his righteousness. 3.

Justification is not an infusion of righteousness into persons; to justify, is not to make men holy and righteous, who were unholy and unrighteous, by producing any physical or real change in them; for this is to confound justification and sanctification together, which are very manifestly distinct; the one being a work of grace in us; the other an act of grace towards us; the one is imperfect, the other perfect; the one is progressive, and carried on by degrees; the other is complete, and finished at once.

Besides, justification is never used in scripture in a physical, but in a forensic sense; (see Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:23; Rom. 5:16, 18 and 8:33, 34) and stands opposed, not to a state of impurity, or unholiness, but to a state of condemnation. 4. Justification is an act of God's free grace, whereby he clears his people from sin, discharges them from condemnation, and reckons and accounts them righteous for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which he has accepted of, and imputes unto them.

Some very excellent divines have distinguished justification into active and passive. Active justification is God's act, it is God that justifies; passive justification is the same act, terminating on the conscience of the believer; active justification is strictly and properly justification, passive justification is improperly so; active justification precedes faith, passive justification is by faith. Again, justification may be considered either in foro Dei, and so it is an eternal, immanent act in God: or in foro conscientiae, and so it is declarative to and upon the conscience of the believer; or in foro mundi, and so it will be notified to men and angels at the general judgment.

Again, let it be farther observed, that the scriptures sometimes speak of the justification of God's people, either of their persons, or faith, or cause, before men, and then it is ascribed to their works; and, at other times, of their persons before God, which is said to be without works; it is now, not of the former, but of the latter our text speaks, and which I am considering; and shall now proceed, II. To enquire into the author, or efficient cause of justification, who is the great God of heaven and earth: It is God that justifies; (Rom.

8:34) which may well be wondered at, when it is considered that he is the supreme Judge of all, who will do right; that his law is the rule by which he acts in this affair; that this law is broken by the sin of man; that sin, which is a breach of the law, is especially committed against him, and is hateful to him; that he is a God that will not admit of an imperfect righteousness, in the room of a perfect one; and that he has power to condemn, and reason sufficient to do it; when, I say, these things are considered, it is amazing that this God should justify.

For the farther illustration of this head, I shall endeavour to shew the concern that all the three Persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, have in the justification of the elect. 1. God the Father is the contriver of the scheme and method of our justification; he was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses; (2 Cor. 5:19) he drew the model and platform of it, which is *Nodus Deo vindice dignus*. It would have remained a puzzling question to men and angels, how should man be just with God? had not his grace employed his wisdom to find out a ransom, whereby he has delivered his people from going down to the pit of corruption; which ransom is no other than his own Son, whom he sent, in the fulness of time, to execute the scheme he had so wisely formed in his eternal mind which he did by finishing transgression, making an end of sin, making reconciliation for iniquity, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness; which righteousness, being wrought out by Christ, God was well pleased with, because hereby his law was magnified and made honourable; and, having graciously accepted of it, he imputes it freely to all his people, and reckons their righteous on the account of it. 2.

God the Son, as God, is the co-efficient cause of it, with his Father. As he has equal power with him to forgive sin, he also has to acquit, discharge, and justify from it. As Mediator, he is the Head and Representative; in whom all the seed of Israel are justified; as such, he has wrought out a righteousness, answerable to the demands of the law, by which they are justified; and is the Author and Finisher of that faith, which looks unto, lays hold on, and apprehends that righteousness for justification. 3.

God the Holy Ghost convinces men of the weakness, imperfection, and insufficiency of their own righteousness to justify them before God; he brings near, and sets before them, the righteousness of Christ, and works faith in them to lay hold on it, and receive it; he intimates to their consciences the justifying sentence of God, on the account of Christ's righteousness, and bears a testimony to and with their spirits, that they are justified persons; and hence the saints are said to be justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God; (1 Cor. 6:11) but this testimony of the Spirit is not so properly justification in itself, as an actual perception of it, before granted, by a kind of a reflex act of faith, as Dr.

Ames expresses it. Now this is the part which Father, Son, and Spirit, severally bear in justification: the Father has contrived it, the Son has procured it, and the Spirit applies it. I go on, III. To consider the matter of justification, or what that is for the sake of which God's elect are justified. And, 1. Man's obedience to the law of works, is not the matter of his justification, or that for the sake of which he is justified, for this is imperfect, and therefore not justifying; and was man's obedience his justifying righteousness, his justification would be by works, and not by grace; which is contrary to the whole stream and current of scripture.

Besides, if righteousness is by the law, then Christ is dead in vain, and his righteousness is needless and useless; which must highly reflect both on the grace and wisdom of God. 2. Nor is man's obedience to the gospel, as to a new and milder law, his justifying righteousness before God. The scheme of some, if I understand it right, is this; that Jesus Christ has procured a relaxation of the old law, and has introduced a new law, a remedial law, a law of milder terms; which new law is the gospel, and its terms, faith,

unto righteousness, and intends no more here than what the apostle elsewhere says, that with the heart man believes unto righteousness; (Rom. 10:10) that is, with his heart, or heartily, he believes in Christ for righteousness; which righteousness, and not faith, is imputed to him for justification; for faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of his faith, and my faith, and thy faith in scripture; (Hab. 2:5; James 2:18) but the righteousness by which we are justified is the righteousness of another, and therefore not faith.

Moreover, faith, as an act of ours, is a duty; for whatsoever we do, in a religious way, we do but what is our duty to do; and, if it is a duty, it belongs to the law; for, as all the declarations and promises of grace belong to the gospel, so all duties belong to the law; and if faith belongs to the law, as a duty, it is a work of it, and therefore by it we cannot be justified; for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Besides, faith is imperfect, it has many deficiencies; and, was it perfect, it is but a part of the law, though one of the weightier parts of it; and God, whose judgment is according to truth, will never reckon or account a partial conformity to the law a complete righteousness.

Add to this, that faith and righteousness are manifestly distinguished; (Rom. 1:17 and 3:22) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; it is unto all, and upon all them that believe. Something else, and not faith, is represented as our justifying righteousness: faith is not the blood, nor obedience of Christ, and yet by these we are said to be justified, or made righteous. (Rom. 5:9, 19) We are, indeed, by faith said to be justified by faith, (Rom. 5:1) but not by faith, as an act of ours, for then we should be justified by works; nor by faith as a grace of the Spirit, for this would be to confound sanctification and justification; but we are justified by faith objectively, as it looks to, receives, apprehends, and embraces Christ's righteousness for justification.

And let it be observed, that though we are said to be justified by faith, yet faith is never said to justify us. And here give me leave to correct a vulgar, though but a verbal mistake, in calling faith, justifying faith. I am well satisfied sound divines have used this phrase without any ill meaning; and no less a person than the great Dr. Goodwin, whose works I much value and esteem, has entitled one of his treatises, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*: But why it should be called justifying faith, any more than adopting or pardoning faith, I see not; since it has just the same concern in adoption and pardon, as it has in justification.

Are we said to be justified by faith, or, by faith, to receive the righteousness of Christ for justification? We are also said, by faith, to receive the remission of sins, and to be the children of God, by faith, in Christ Jesus. (Acts 26:18; Gal. 3:26) Besides, what do we, or can we say more of the righteousness of Christ; than that it is a justifying one? In one word, it is God, and not faith, that justifies. But, 5. The matter of our justification, or that for the sake of which we are justified, is the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; by which I mean not his essential righteousness as God: nor his righteousness and fidelity to him, that appointed him, in the discharge of his mediatorial office; nor do I take in any of his actions performed by him in heaven, as Jesus Christ the righteous; only those which he wrought in his state of humiliation here on earth: and not all these neither, for his extraordinary works and miracles must be excluded; for "they, as a great man well observes, rather transcend the predicaments of the Ten Commandments, than are parts of the righteousness of the law: they were proofs of his divinity, and the signs and badges, rather than the duties of his office.

He, indeed, by them, shewed himself to be the only Mediator, but he did not act the Mediator in them; and he did them that men might believe in his righteousness, but they were no ingredients in that righteousness on which they were to believe." But by the righteousness of Christ, I mean that which

consists of what is commonly called his active and passive obedience; by the former, is meant the conformity of his life to the precepts of the law, and is, strictly speaking, that obedience of his, by which we are made righteous; and by the latter, is meant his sufferings and death, which in scripture, are expressed by his blood.

This distinction, though taken from the schools, is not very accurate. Passive obedience is a contradiction in terms; nor can Christ's sufferings and death be properly called obedience. Obedience belongs to the predicament, or class of action, and sufferings and death to that of passion. Besides, Christ's sufferings and death flow from his obedience; they are the effects of it, they are in consequence of his subjection and submission to his Father's will. What looks most likely to prove Christ's sufferings and death to be an obedience, is the text in Philippians 2:8, where Christ is said to be obedient unto death.

But this will fall short of doing it; for as a judicious divine observes, it may as well be inferred, because Peter and Paul confessed Christ unto death, therefore their confession and death were one and the same. The true sense of the words is, that Christ was obedient to his Father, from the cradle to the cross, during the whole course of his life, even to the very moment of his death. It will be allowed, that Christ was, in some sense, active in his sufferings, he being God, as well as man.

Hence he is said to lay down his life of himself; (John 10:18; Isa. 53:12; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14) to pour out his soul unto death; to give himself an offering and sacrifice; yea, through the eternal Spirit, to offer up himself to God; and it will be as readily granted that Christ's sufferings and death, which are commonly called passive obedience, are requisite unto, and are imputed to us for our justification. Hence we are said to have healing by his stripes, (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:9, 10) to be justified by his blood, and to be reconciled to God by his death: but then this is not to be understood as exclusive of the imputation of his active obedience, nor of the holiness of his human nature.

There are some divines that exclude Christ's active obedience from being any part of the righteousness by which we are justified: they allow, that it is a condition requisite in him, as Mediator, which qualifies him for his office, and that without it his death would not have been effectual and meritorious. But they deny that this obedience strictly and properly speaking, is the matter of our justification, or that it is imputed to us, or reckoned to us, as ours: they suppose that Christ was obliged to this obedience as a creature for himself, and that it was unnecessary to us, because his sufferings and death were sufficient for our justification.

On the other hand, I firmly believe, that not only the active obedience of Christ, with his sufferings and death, but also that the holiness of his human nature is imputed to us for justification. The law requires an holy nature, and perfect obedience, and, in case of disobedience, enjoins punishment. Through sin, our nature is become unholy, our obedience imperfect, and so we are liable to punishment. Christ has assumed an holy human nature, and in it performed perfect obedience to the law, and suffered the penalty of it; all which he did not for himself, but for us; and unto us it is all imputed for our justification.

He is of God, made unto us, that is, by imputation, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30) Wisdom may stand in general for justification, because there is in it such a manifest display of the wisdom of God; and the other three may be considered as so many parts of it. Sanctification may intend the holiness of his human nature; which is that law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which frees from the law of sin and death. Righteousness may signify his active obedience, by which many are made righteous; and Redemption may express his sufferings and death, whereby sin was condemned in the flesh, and so the whole righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us.

I shall now very briefly give some reasons why, I think, Christ's active obedience, in particular, as well as his sufferings and death, is imputed for justification. 1. Because all that must be imputed for our justification, which the law requires, and without which it cannot be satisfied. Now, let it be observed, that the law, before man had sinned, only obliged him to obedience; since his fall, it obliges him both to obedience and punishment; and, unless its precepts are perfectly obeyed, and its whole penalty endured, it cannot be satisfied; and unless it is satisfied, there can be no justification by it.

If Jesus Christ, therefore, engages, as a surety, to make satisfaction to the law, in the room and stead of his people, he must both obey the precept of the law, and suffer the penalty of it; his submitting to the one, without conforming to the other, is not sufficient; one debt is not paid by another; his paying off the debt of punishment did not exempt from obedience, as the paying off the debt of obedience, did not exempt from punishment. Christ did not satisfy the whole law by either of them separately, but by both conjunctly by his sufferings and death he satisfied the threatenings of the law, but not the precepts of it; and, by his active obedience, he satisfied the preceptive part of the law, but not the penal part of it; but, by both, he satisfied the whole law, and magnified it, and made it honourable, and therefore both must be imputed for our justification. 2.

Because we are justified by a righteousness, and that is the righteousness of Christ. Now righteousness, strictly speaking, consists in actual obedience; it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments, Deuteronomy 6:25. Christ's righteousness lay in doing, not in suffering. "All righteousness is either a habit, or an act; but sufferings are neither, and therefore not righteousness: no man is righteous because he is punished; if so, the devils and damned in hell would be righteous, in proportion to their punishment; the more severe their punishment, and the more grievous their torments, the greater their righteousness must be; if there is any righteousness in punishment, it must be in the punisher, not in the punished."

If then we are justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, it must be by his active obedience, and not merely by his sufferings and death; because these, though they free us from death, yet they do not, strictly speaking, make us righteous. 3. Because we are expressly said to be made righteous by the obedience of one, (Rom. 5:19) which is Christ. Now by obedience, in this place, cannot be meant the sufferings and death of Christ; because, strictly speaking, they are not his obedience, but flow from it, as has been observed.

Besides, the antithesis, in the text, determines the sense of the words; for if, by one man's actual disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the rule of opposition, by one man's actual obedience, many are made righteous. 4. Because the reward of life is promised not to suffering, but to doing; the law says, Do this and live; it promises life not to him that suffers the penalty, but to him that obeys the precept. "There never was a law, as an excellent divine observes, even among men, either promising or declaring a reward due to the criminal, because he had undergone the punishment of his crimes."

Christ's sufferings and death being satisfactory to the comminatory, or threatening part of the law, are imputed to us for justification, that so we may be freed and discharged from the curse, and hell, and wrath. But these, as they do not constitute us righteous, do not, properly speaking, entitle us to eternal life; but the active obedience, or righteousness of Christ, being imputed to us, is our justification of life, or what gives us the title to eternal life. 5. Because Christ's active obedience was performed for us, in our room and stead, and therefore must be imputed to us for justification.

If it should be said, that Christ, as a creature, being made of a woman, and made under the law, was obliged to yield obedience to that law for himself; I answer, that he assumed human nature, became a creature, subjected himself to the law, and obliged himself to yield obedience to it, not for himself, but for us; not upon his own, but our account; to or for us a Child is born, a Son is given; (Isa. 9:6) and if Christ only in his sufferings, and not in his obedience, is given to us, we should not have a whole Christ given us, only a suffering Christ, not an obeying one.

Let it be further observed, that Christ's active obedience to the law for us, and in our room and stead, does not exempt us from personal obedience to it, any more than his sufferings and death exempt us from a corporal death, or suffering for his sake. It is true, indeed, we do not suffer and die in the sense he did, to satisfy justice, and atone for sin; so neither do we yield obedience to the law, in order to obtain eternal life by it. By Christ's obedience for us, we are exempted from obedience to the law in this sense, but not from obedience to it, as a rule of walk and conversation, by which we may glorify God, and express our thankfulness to him, for his abundant mercies.

Well then, it is what is commonly called Christ's active and passive obedience, together with the holiness of his nature, from whence all his obedience flows, which is the matter of our justification before God. Many things might be said in commendation of this glorious righteousness of the Mediator. The nature and excellency of it may be collected from the several names, or appellations, by which it is called in scripture. 1. It is called the righteousness of God; (Rom. 1:17 and 3:22) and that not only because it stands opposed to the righteousness of man, but because it was wrought out by one that is God, as well as man; and is greatly approved and graciously accepted of by God, and by him freely imputed to all his people, who are justified from all things by it in his sight. 2.

It is called, the righteousness of one; (Rom. 5:18) that is, of one of the Persons of the Trinity; it is not the righteousness of the Father, nor of the Spirit, but of the Son, who though he is a partaker of two natures, yet is but one Person; it is the righteousness of one, who is a common head to all his seed, as Adam was to his. It may, indeed, be called the righteousness of many, even of all the saints, because it is imputed to them, and they all have an equal right to it; but yet the Author is but one; and therefore we are not justified, partly by our own righteousness, and partly by Christ's; for then we should be justified by the righteousness of two, and not of one only. 3.

It is called, the righteousness of the law; (Rom. 8:4) for though righteousness does not come by our obedience to the law, yet it does by Christ's obedience to it; though, by the deeds of the law, as performed by man, no flesh living can be justified, yet, by the deeds of the law, as performed by Christ, all the elect are justified. Christ's righteousness may be truly called a legal righteousness; it is what the law requires and demands, and is every way commensurate to it; it is a complete conformity to all its precepts; by it the law is magnified and made honourable.

It is true, indeed, it makes no discovery of it, for it is manifested without the law, though witnessed to both by law and prophets; it is the gospel that is the ministration of it; for therein it is revealed from faith to faith. 4. It is called, the righteousness of faith; (Rom. 4:13) not that faith is our righteousness, either in whole, or in part; it is not the matter of our justification, as has been before observed; it has no manner of causal influence on it, nor is it imputed to us for it; but Christ's righteousness is called so, because faith receives it, puts it on, rejoices in it, and boasts of it. 5.

justified by an inherent righteousness, then it must be by an imputed one, because there remains no other. 3. The righteousness by which we are justified is not our own righteousness, but the righteousness of another, even the righteousness of Christ: That I may be found in Christ, says the apostle, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ. (Phil. 3:9) Now, the righteousness of another cannot be made ours, or we be justified by it, any other way than by an imputation of it. 4.

The same way that Adam's sin becomes ours, or we are made sinners by it, the same way Christ's righteousness becomes ours, or we are made righteous by it. Now, Adam's sin becomes ours by imputation, and so does Christ's righteousness, according to the apostle: As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so, by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous. 5. The same way that our sins became Christ's, his righteousness becomes ours. Now our sins became Christ's by imputation only; the Father laid them on him by imputation, and he took them to himself by voluntary susception; they were placed to his account, and he looked upon himself as answerable to justice for them.

Now, in the same way his righteousness becomes ours: For he, who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Corinthians 5:21. But I hasten, V. To enquire into the date of justification, concerning which there have been various sentiments. Some have thought that it will not be completed until the day of judgment; others, that it commences at, or upon believing, and not before; others, that it took place at Christ's resurrection from the dead, when he was justified, and all the elect in him; others, that it bears date from the time that Christ was first promised, as the Mediator, which was quickly after the fall: others carry it up as high as the covenant transactions between the Father and the Son, and the surety-ship engagements of Christ from eternity, which are the present sentiments of my mind.

The method in which I shall endeavour to represent them to others, shall be as follows: First, I shall endeavour to prove that that which is properly justification, is antecedent to any act of believing. Secondly, That the justification, by, or at, or upon believing, is not properly justification. Thirdly, Answer the objections made against this doctrine. First, I shall endeavour to prove, that that which is properly justification, is before faith, or antecedent to any act of believing of ours; which, I apprehend, may be fairly concluded from the following considerations. 1.

Faith is not the cause, but the fruit and effect of justification. The reason why we are justified, is not because we have faith; but the reason why we have faith is because we are justified. Was there no such blessing of grace as justification of life provided for the sons of men, there would be no such thing as faith in Christ bestowed upon them, nor, indeed, would there be any use for it; and though it is provided, yet since not for all men, therefore all men have not faith.

The reason why some do not believe, is, because they are not of Christ's sheep; (John 10:26) they never were chosen in him, nor justified by him, but are justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others do believe, is, because they are ordained to eternal life, (Acts 13:48) have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation and, in asserting this, I say no more than what Dr. Twisse, the famous Prolocutor to the Assembly of Divines, has said before me.

His words are these: "Before faith the righteousness of Christ was ours, being in the intention of God the Father, and Christ the Mediator, wrought out for us; and, because wrought out for us, therefore God, in his own time, gives us grace of every kind, and among others, faith itself, and, at last, the crown of heavenly glory." And, a little after, he says: "Before faith and repentance the righteousness of Christ is applied unto us; since it is on the account of that, that we obtain efficacious grace, to believe in Christ and repent."

Likewise the judicious Pemble writes to the same effect, when, observing a two-fold justification, he says, the one is "In foro divino, in God's sight, and this goes before all our sanctification; for even whilst the elect are unconverted, they are then actually justified, and freed from all sin, by the death of Christ, and God so esteems of them as free, and, having accepted of that satisfaction, is actually reconciled to them. By this justification, we are freed from the guilt of our sins; and because that is done away, God, in due time, proceeds to give us the grace of sanctification, to free from sin's corruption still inherent in our persons."

The other is, "In foro conscientiae, in their own sense, which is but the revelation and certain declaration of God's former secret act of accepting Christ's righteousness to our justification." And Maccovius says, "That because that God justifies us, therefore, he gives us faith, and other spiritual gifts." Now, if justification is the cause, and faith the effect; then, as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its own cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification. 2.

Justification is the object, and faith is the act, which is conversant with it. Now the object does not depend upon the act, but the act upon the object. Every object is prior to the act, which is conversant with it; unless it be when an act gives being to the object, which cannot be the case here; unless we make faith to be the cause or matter of our justification, which has been already disproved. Faith is the evidence, not the cause of justification; and if it is an evidence, that of which it is an evidence must exist before it.

Faith is indeed the evidence of things not seen; but it is not the evidence of things that are not: what the eye is in the body, that faith is in the soul. The eye, by virtue of its visive faculty beholds sensible objects, but does not produce them; and did they not previously exist, could not behold them. We see the sun shining in its brightness, but did it not exist before, it could not be visible to us; the same observation will hold good in ten thousand other instances. Faith is the hand which receives the blessing of justification from the Lord, and righteousness, by which the soul is justified from the God of its salvation; but then this blessing must exist before faith can receive it.

If any should think fit to distinguish between the act of justification, and the righteousness of Christ, by which we are justified; and object, That not justification, but the righteousness of Christ, is the object of faith; I reply, Either the righteousness of Christ, as justifying, is the object of faith, or it is not: if it is not, then it is useless, and to be laid aside in the business of justification; if, as justifying, it is the object of faith, what is it else but justification?

Christ's righteousness justifying me, is my justification before God, and as such, my faith considers it, and says with the church, Surely, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength. (Isa. 45:24) 3. The elect of God are justified whilst ungodly, and therefore, before they believe; the reason of the consequence is plain, because a believer is not an ungodly person. That God's elect are, by nature ungodly, will not be denied; as such, Christ died for them; While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom. 5:6) And it is as evident, that, as such, God justifies them: But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Rom. 4:5) Not that God justifies the ungodly without a righteousness; but he imputes and reckons to them the righteousness of his

Son; for otherwise he would do that himself which he abhors in others: For he that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, they both are an abomination to the Lord. (Prov. 17:15) Nor does he justify them in their ungodliness, but from it; and indeed, from all things, from which they could not be justified, by the law of Moses; and yet he justifies them being ungodly.

Now, if it can be proved that a believer is or may be called, an ungodly person, then there is no strength in my argument; but, I apprehend, it cannot be proved, from scripture, that a believer is so called; nor can any just reason be given why he should; seeing an ungodly person is one that is without God, that is, without the grace and fear of God; and without Christ, being destitute of a true knowledge of him, faith in him, and love to him; all which is incompatible with the character of a believer.

I conclude then, that if God justifies his elect when they are ungodly, then he justifies them before they believe, which is the thing I have undertaken to prove. 4. All the elect of God were justified in, and with Christ, their Head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, and therefore before they believe. The Lord Jesus Christ having, from eternity engaged as a Surety for his people, all their sins were laid upon him, imputed to him, and placed to his account; for all which he was responsible to divine justice, and accordingly, in the fulness of time gave full satisfaction for them, by his sufferings and death; and having done this, was acquitted and discharged; for, as he was put to death in the flesh, he was justified in the Spirit.

Now as he suffered and died not as a private person, but as a public one, so he rose again, and was justified as such. Hence, when he was justified, all those for whom he made satisfaction, and brought in a righteousness, were justified in him; which seems to be the meaning of that scripture, Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. (Rom. 4:25) This justification of the elect, at the resurrection of Christ, and upon the foot of the oblation and sacrifice, already offered up, is acknowledged by many excellent and judicious divines; some of whom, though they only allow a decretive justification from eternity; yet assert a real and complete one at the resurrection of Christ, on the account of his actual oblation and sacrifice.

Dr. Ames says, that "The sentence of justification was, 1. As it were conceived in the mind of God, by the decree of justifying. 2. Pronounced in Christ our Head, when he arose from the dead." The learned Hoorneeck, summing up the tenets of the people called Antinomians in England, takes notice of their sentiments concerning justification; and observes, that the difference between them and others, "May easily be reconciled, by distinguishing justification into active and passive, the former, says he, is the act of God justifying; the latter the termination and application of it to the consciences of believers.

The one was done at Christ's satisfaction; the other is, when a person actually believes." And a little after he adds; "Justification was designed for us from all eternity, in the decree of predestination; promised immediately after the fall: wrought at the death and resurrection of Christ, for these are to be joined together, Romans 8:34, being, at the one, merited by Christ, and, at the other, declared and ratified by God." Witsius, who engaged as a Moderator in the Antinomian and Neonomian controversies, moved here in England says: "Christ verily was justified, when God raised him from the dead, and gave him an acquittance for the payment made by Christ, and accepted by him: And the same Christ was raised again for our justification, Romans 4:25.

For when he was justified, the elect were justified together in him; for as much as he was their Representative." And, not to forget our great Dr. Goodwin, who observes, that "At the instant when he,

that is, Christ, arose, God then performed a farther act of justification towards him, and us in him; admitting him, as our advocate, into the actual possession of justification of life; acquitting him from all those sins, which he had charged upon him. Therefore we read, that as Christ was made sin in his life and death, so that he was justified also, 1 Timothy 3:16.

And that he should be thus justified, is not spoken of him, abstractly considered in himself, but as he hath us conjoined in him, and as he connotes us." And a little after he says: "As when he ascended, we ascended with him, (and therefore we are said now to sit together with him in heavenly places, Eph. 2:6) so when he was justified, we are justified also in him. And as it may be said, Adam condemned us all, and corrupted us all when he fell; so did Christ then perfect us all, and God justified us all, when he died and rose again."

Some divines call this a virtual justification: the phrase I confess, is unintelligible to me. The famous Parker calls it an actual justification, both of Christ and us. His words are these: "Christ is said to be justified when he rose again, 1 Timothy 3:16, and we to be then justified in him, Romans 4:25, because the discharge, that is, his Father's raising him up, was an actual justification of him from the sins of others, for which he had satisfied, and of us from our own sins, for which he became a surety."

Those who assert there is no justification before faith, ought duly to consider this argument, so well founded in scripture, and so agreeable to the sentiments of great and good men. But, 5. I shall go a step higher, and endeavour to prove, that all the elect of God are justified from eternity. When, I say, the elect of God are justified from eternity, I do not think, that they had an actual personal existence from eternity, though they had a representative one in Christ; or that an actual payment of their debts, or an actual satisfaction for their sins was then made by Christ, though he engaged to do it; nor do I intend justification from eternity, in such a sense, as to set aside the imputation of Adam's sin to the condemnation of the elect in him; or to render Christ's bringing in an actual righteousness in time unnecessary; or to make faith useless in our justification, in our own consciences, as, I hope, I shall shortly make appear; yet, on the other hand, I mean more by justification from eternity, than merely God's prescience, or foreknowledge of it, to whom all works are known, from the beginning of the world, άπάιωνος, from eternity; (Acts 15:18) more than a mere resolution and purpose to justify his elect in time, he calling things that are not, as though they were; (Rom. 4:17) or, in other words, more than a decretive justification, as some divines call it; who apprehend that God's elect can, in no other sense, be said to be justified from eternity, than they may be said to be sanctified or glorified from eternity, because he had decreed to sanctify and glorify them: I say, I mean more than thus, and assert, with Dr.

Ames, that justification "is a sentence conceived in the mind of God, by the decree of justification;" that this is an act in God, all whose acts in him are eternal; that this is the grand original sentence of justification; of which that pronounced on Christ, as our representative, when he rose from the dead, and that which is pronounced by the Spirit of God in the conscience of believers, as well as that which will be pronounced before men and angels, at the general judgment, are no other than so many repetitions, or renewed declarations; that this includes the whole complete esse of justification; being, as Mr.

Rutherford observes, "An eternal and immanent act in God, and not transient upon an external subject. Of which sort, adds he, are the acts of election and reprobation, which have their whole complete being before the persons elected, reprobated, or justified, either begin to be, live or believe, or do any thing good or evil." In a word, I apprehend, that as God's eternal decree of election of persons to everlasting life, is

the eternal election of them, so God's will, decree, or purpose, to justify his elect, is the eternal justification of them; though his eternal will to sanctify them is not an eternal sanctification of them; because sanctification is a work of God's grace upon us, and within us, and so requires our personal existence.

Justification is an act of God's grace towards us, is wholly without us, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimation, accounting and constituting us righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and so required neither the actual existence of Christ's righteousness, nor of our persons, but only that both should certainly exist in time. For the further confirmation and illustration of this truth, let the following things be observed: (1.) That there is an eternal election of persons to everlasting life, and that the objects of justification are God's elect: Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth. (Rom. 8:33) 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 by God from eternity, so as nothing could be laid to their charge.

Besides, electing grace before the world began, put them in Christ: he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world. (Eph 1:4) And if electing grace then put them in him, they must be considered in Christ as an unrighteous person, or as unjustified, or as in a state of condemnation. And, I think, we may be allowed to argue an eternal justification from eternal election, since eternal justification is a branch of it; and, as such, as one observes, "Is the Father's eternal purpose and agreement with the Son, that the elect should be everlastingly righteous in his sight, in the righteousness of this dear Son of his; in which act he constituted and ordained them so to be."

And his act, as the same excellent person observes, is no other than "setting apart the elect alone to be partakers of Christ's righteousness, and setting apart Christ's righteousness for the elect only." It think we may safely conclude, that if there is an eternal election of persons in Christ, there must be an eternal acceptance and justification of them in him; since as he always was the beloved Son of his Father, in whom he is ever well pleased, so he always has graciously accepted of, and is well pleased with all his elect in him. (2.)

That there was, from all eternity, a covenant of grace and peace made between the Father and the Son, on the account of these elect persons; when all the blessings of grace, and promises of life, provided and secured in that covenant, were put into the hands of Jesus Christ for his people; and though they had then no personal or actual existence, yet they had a representative Being in Christ, in whom they were then blessed with all spiritual blessings. (Eph. 1:3) And, if with all spiritual blessings, then with this of justification; which was no inconsiderable part of that grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. (2 Tim. 1:9) But I cannot express this better than in the words of Dr.

Goodwin, who speaking of the date of justification, says: "The first progress, or step, was at the first covenant-making and striking of the bargain from all eternity: we may say, of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ, that his goings forth are from everlasting. Justified then we were, 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 interest in him: You are in Christ, (saith the apostle) and so we had the promise made of all spiritual blessings in him, and he took all the deeds of all in our name; so in Christ we were blessed with all spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1:3.

As we are blessed with all other, and with this also, that we were justified then in Christ. To this purpose is that place, Romans 8:30, where he speaks of all those blessings which are applied to us after redemption, as calling, justification, glorification, as of things already past and done, even then when he did predestinate us: whom he hath predestinated, them he hath called, them he hath justified, them he hath glorified. He speaks it as in the time past; neither speaks he thus of these blessings, as past simply in regard of that presence, in which all things stand before him from eternity; all things past, present, and to come, being to him as present: nor doth he speak it only in regard of a resolution, or purpose, taken up to call and justify, he calling things that are not as though they were, Romans 4:17.

For thus it may be said, of all his other works towards the creatures in common, that he hath created and preserved them from everlasting: but in a more special relation are these blessings decreed, said to have been bestowed, because, though they existed not in themselves, yet they existed really in a Head that represented them and us, who was by to answer for them, and to undertake for them, which other creatures could not do; and there was an actual donation and receiving of all these for us, (as truly as a feoffee in trust may take lands for one unborn) by virtue of a covenant made with Christ; whereby Christ had all our sins imputed to him, and so taken off from us, Christ having then covenanted to take all our sins upon him, when he took our persons to be his; and God having covenanted not to impute sin unto us, but to look at him for the payment of all, and at us as discharged.

Of this seems that place, 2 Corinthians 5:19, evidently to speak, as importing that everlasting transaction; God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses to them, that is, not imputing them then when he was reconciling us unto himself in Christ. So as then God told Christ, as it were, (for it was a real covenant) 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.

And, indeed, if the promise of life was then given us, (as the apostle Paul speaks, Titus 1:2) then also justification of life, without which we could not come to life. Yet this is but the inchoation, though it be an estating us into the whole tenure of life." (3.) Christ was set up from everlasting, as the Mediator of this covenant: his goings forth, and acting therein, on the behalf of his people, were of old, from everlasting. He then engaged to be a surety for them, and was accepted of by God the Father as such; who thence forward, to use the Doctor's words, just now cited, looked for his debt, and expected satisfaction of him, and let the sinners go free, for whom he engaged.

Looking at him for the payment, he looked at them as discharged; and they were so in his eternal mind, and, in this respect, were justified from eternity. And indeed, it is a rule that will hold good, "That as soon as any one becomes a surety for another, the other is immediately freed, if the surety be accepted;" which is the case here. And it is certainly most prudential, when a man has a bad debt, and has good security for it, to have his eye upon the bondsman or surety for payment, and not upon the principal debtor, who will never be able to pay him. (4.)

That as soon as Christ became a surety, the sins of all those persons, for whom he became a surety, were reckoned and accounted to him; and, if accounted to him, then not to them; if they were laid to his charge, then not to theirs; and, if he was answerable for them, then they were discharged from them. If there was an imputation of them to him, then there must be a non-imputation of them to them; which the apostle plainly intimates, when he says, God was in Christ, that is, from everlasting, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. (2 Cor. 5:9) Witsius, citing this text of scripture, says: "God hath reconciled the whole world of his elect to himself, and hath declared that he will not impute their

trespasses to them, and that because of the consummate satisfaction of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:19, wherefore, says he, I am of opinion, that this act of God may be called the general justification of the elect."

Nor ought it to be thought strange, foreign, or far-fetched, that the justification of God's people is inferred from the imputation of their sins to Christ, and the non-imputation of them to them; since the apostle Paul, in Romans 4:6-8, has so manifestly deduced, and strongly concluded the imputation of righteousness, which is the ratio formulis of justification, from the non-imputation of sin, and remission of it. (5.) That God from eternity willed to punish sin, not in the persons of the elect, but in the person of Christ their surety.

That it is the will of God to punish sin, not in his people, but in his Son, is plain and manifest, from his setting him up (Rom. 3:25) in his purpose, to be a propitiation for their sins; from his sending him forth in the likeness of sinful flesh; to condemn sin in the flesh; and from his being made both sin and a curse for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him. This will was notified to man quickly after the fall, though it did not then begin, for no new will can arise in God; he wills nothing in time, but what he willed from eternity.

If it was God's eternal will 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 makes the very quiddity or essence, of justification and remission of sins, which he takes to be the same, to lie in God's will not to punish. His words are these: "Forgiveness of sin, if you regard the quiddity of it, is no other than a negation of punishment, or a will not to punish: be it therefore, that to forgive sin is no other than to will not to punish; why, this will not to punish, as it is an immanent act in God, was from eternity." (6.)

That the saints under the Old Testament were justified by the same righteousness of Christ, as the saints under the New; and that before the oblation, or sacrifice, was actually offered up, or the everlasting righteousness was actually brought in; before an actual payment of debts was made, or an actual satisfaction for sins given. For Christ's blood, when it was shed, was shed for the remission of sins that were past. (Rom. 3:25, 26; Heb. 9:15) And his death was for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first Testament.

Now if God could, and did, actually justify some, having taken his Son's word as their surety, upon a view of his future righteousness, three or four thousand years before this righteousness was actually wrought out; why could he not, and why may it not be thought that he did, justify all his elect from eternity, viewing the same future righteousness of Christ, which he had engaged to work out for them, and which he knew full well he would work out; since, though they had not then an actual, yet they had a representative Being in Christ their Head? But I proceed, Secondly, To shew

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