

A Due Consideration of God Necessary

by John Owen

A due consideration of God as the judge of all is necessary for a right understanding of the doctrine of justification and for approaching God with humility and reverence.

Scripture: Job 40:3-5, Job 42:4-6, Psalm 130:3-4, Psalm 143:2, Isaiah 33:14, Isaiah 43:25, Daniel 9:7, Micah 6:6-7, Romans 3:20, Romans 8:33

Topics: "God's Holiness", "Justification"

Description

John Owen emphasizes the necessity of a proper understanding of God as the ultimate judge in relation to the doctrine of justification. He argues that recognizing God's greatness, holiness, and authority is crucial for understanding how one can be justified before Him. Owen illustrates that both sinners and saints, when confronted with God's majesty, are led to self-abasement and reliance on divine mercy rather than their own works. He warns against the dangers of self-conceit and the false security that comes from relying on personal righteousness. Ultimately, Owen calls for a humble approach to justification, rooted in the acknowledgment of God's grace and the sacrifice of Christ.

Transcript

Secondly, A due consideration of God, the Judge of all, necessary unto the right stating and apprehension of the doctrine of justification, Rom. viii. 33; Isa. xliii. 25; xlv. 25; Ps. cxliii. 2; Rom. iii. 20 What thoughts will be ingenerated hereby in the minds of men, Isa. xxxiii. 14; Micah vi. 6, 7; Isa. vi. 5 The plea of Job against his friends, and before God, not the same, Job xl. 35, xliii. 46 Directions for visiting the sick given of old Testimonies of Jerome and Ambrose Sense of men in their prayers, Dan. ix. 7, 18; Ps. cxliii. 2, cxxx. 3, 4 Paraphrase of Austin on that place Prayer of Pelagius Public liturgies

Secondly, A due consideration of him with whom in this matter we have to do, and that immediately, is necessary unto a right stating of our thoughts about it. The Scripture expresses it emphatically, that it is God that justifieth, Rom. viii. 33; and he assumes it unto himself as his prerogative to do what belongs thereunto. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins, Isa. xliii. 25. And it is hard, in my apprehension, to suggest unto him any other reason or consideration of the pardon of our sins, seeing he has taken it on him to do it for his own sake; that is, for the Lords sake, Dan. ix. 17, in whom all the seed of Israel are justified, Isa. xlv. 25. In his sight, before his tribunal, it is that men are justified or condemned. Ps. cxliii. 2, Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. And the whole work of justification, with all that belongs

thereunto, is represented after the manner of a juridical proceeding before Gods tribunal; as we shall see afterwards. Therefore, says the apostle, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, Rom. iii. 20. However any man be justified in the sight of men or angels by his own obedience, or deeds of the law, yet in his sight none can be so.

Necessary it is unto any man who is to come unto a trial, in the sentence whereof he is greatly concerned, duly to consider the judge before whom he is to appear, and by whom his cause is finally to be determined. And if we manage our disputes about justification without continual regard unto him by whom we must be cast or acquitted, we shall not rightly apprehend what our plea ought to be. Wherefore the greatness, the majesty, the holiness, and sovereign authority of God, are always to be present with us in a due sense of them, when we inquire how we may be justified before him.

Yet is it hard to discern how the minds of some men are influenced by the consideration of these things, in their fierce contests for the interest of their own works in their justification: *Precibus aut pretio ut in aliquâ parte hæreant*. But the Scripture does represent unto us what thoughts of him and of themselves, not only sinners, but saints also, have had, and cannot but have, upon near discoveries and effectual conceptions of God and his greatness. Thoughts hereof ensuing on a sense of the guilt of sin, filled our first parents with fear and shame, and put them on that foolish attempt of hiding themselves from him.

Nor is the wisdom of their posterity one jot better under their convictions, without a discovery of the promise. That alone makes sinners wise which tenders them relief. At present, the generality of men are secure, and do not much question but that they shall come off well enough, one way or other, in the trial they are to undergo. And as such persons are altogether indifferent what doctrine concerning justification is taught and received; so for the most part, for themselves, they incline unto that declaration of it which best suits their own reason, as influenced with self-conceit and corrupt affections.

The sum whereof is, that what they cannot do themselves, what is wanting that they may be saved, be it more or less, shall one way or other be made up by Christ; either the use or the abuse of which persuasion is the greatest fountain of sin in the world, next unto the depravation of our nature. And whatever be, or may be, pretended unto the contrary, persons not convinced of sin, not humbled for it, are in all their ratiocinations about spiritual things, under the conduct of principles so vitiated and corrupted.

See Matt. xviii. 3, 4. But when God is pleased by any means to manifest his glory unto sinners, all their preferences and contrivances do issue in dreadful horror and distress. An account of their temper is given us, Isa. xxxiii. 14, The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Nor is it thus only with some peculiar sort of sinners. The same will be the thoughts of all guilty persons at some time or other.

For those who, through sensuality, security, or superstition, do hide themselves from the vexation of them in this world, will not fail to meet with them when their terror shall be increased, and become remediless. Our God is a consuming fire; and men will one day find how vain it is to set their briars and thorns against him in battle array. And we may see what extravagant contrivances convinced sinners will put themselves upon, under any real view of the majesty and holiness of God, Mic. vi. 6, 7, Wherewith, says one of them, shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousand of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of

my soul? Neither shall I ever think them meet to be contended withal about the doctrine of justification who take no notice of these things, but rather despise them.

This is the proper effect of the conviction of sin, strengthened and sharpened with the consideration of the terror of the Lord, who is to judge concerning it. And this is that which, in the Papacy, meeting with an ignorance of the righteousness of God, has produced innumerable superstitious inventions for the appeasing of the consciences of men who by any means fall under the disquietments of 15such convictions. For they quickly see that nothing of the obedience which God requires of them, as it is performed by them, will justify them before this high and holy God. Wherefore they seek for shelter in contrivances about things that he has not commanded, to try if they can put a cheat upon their consciences, and find relief in diversions.

Nor is it thus only with profligate sinners upon their convictions; but the best of men, when they have had near and efficacious representations of the greatness, holiness, and glory of God, have been cast into the deepest self-abasement, and most serious renunciation of all trust or confidence in themselves. So the prophet Isaiah, upon his vision of the glory of the Holy One, cried out, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, chap. vi. 5; nor was he relieved but by an evidence of the free pardon of sin, verse 7. So holy Job, in all his contests with his friends, who charged him with hypocrisy, and his being a sinner guilty in a peculiar manner above other men, with assured confidence and perseverance therein, justified his sincerity, his faith and trust in God, against their whole charge, and every parcel of it. And this he does with such a full satisfaction of his own integrity, as that not only he insists at large on his vindication, but frequently appeals unto God himself as unto the truth of his plea; for he directly pursues that counsel, with great assurance, which the apostle James so long after gives unto all believers. Nor is the doctrine of that apostle more eminently exemplified in any one instance throughout the whole Scripture than in him; for he shows his faith by his works, and pleads his justification thereby. As Job justified himself, and was justified by his works, so we allow it the duty of every believer to be. His plea for justification by works, in the sense wherein it is so, was the most noble that ever was in the world, nor was ever any controversy managed upon a greater occasion.

At length this Job is called into the immediate presence of God, to plead his own cause; not now, as stated between him and his friends, whether he were a hypocrite or no, or whether his faith or trust in God was sincere; but as it was stated between God and him, wherein he seemed to have made some undue assumptions on his own behalf. The question was now reduced unto this, on what grounds he might or could be justified in the sight of God? To prepare his mind unto a right judgment in this case, God manifests his glory unto him, and instructs him in the greatness of his majesty and power. And this he does by a multiplication of instances, because under our temptations we are very slow in admitting right conceptions of God. Here the holy man quickly acknowledged that the state of the case was utterly altered. All his former pleas of 16faith, hope, and trust in God, of sincerity in obedience, which with so much earnestness he before insisted on, are now quite laid aside. He saw well enough that they were not pleadable at the tribunal before which he now appeared, so that God should enter into judgment with him thereon, with respect unto his justification. Wherefore, in the deepest self-abasement and abhorrence, he betakes himself unto sovereign grace and mercy. For then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no farther, Job xl. 35. And again, Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak; I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself; and repent in dust and ashes, chap. xlii. 46. Let any

men place themselves in the condition wherein now Job was, in the immediate presence of God; let them attend unto what he really speaks unto them in his word, namely, what they will answer unto the charge that he has against them, and what will be their best plea before his tribunal, that they may be justified. I do not believe that any man living has more encouraging grounds to plead for an interest in his own faith and obedience, in his justification before God, than Job had; although I suppose he had not so much skill to manage a plea to that purpose, with scholastic notions and distinctions, as the Jesuits have; but however we may be harnessed with subtle arguments and solutions, I fear it will not be safe for us to adventure farther upon God than he durst to do.

There was of old a direction for the visitation of the sick, composed, as they say, by Anselm,⁶ and published by Casparus Ulenbergius,⁷ which expresses a better sense of these things than some seem to be convinced of: *Credisne te non posse salvari nisi per mortem Christi? Respondet infirmus, Etiam. Tum dicit illi, Age ergo dum superest in te anima, in hâc solâ morte fiduciam tuam constitue; in nullâ aliâ re fiduciam habe, huic morti te totum committe, hâc solâ te totum contege totum immisce te in hac morte, in hac morte totum te involve.*

Et si Dominus te voluerit judicare, dic, Domine, mortem Domini nostri Jesu Christi objicio inter me et tuum judicium, aliter tecum non contendo. Et si tibi dixerit quia peccator es, dic, Mortem Domini nostri Jesu Christi pono inter me et peccata mea. Si dixerit tibi quod meruisti damnationem; dic, Domine, mortem Domini nostri Jesu Christi obtendo inter te et mala merita mea, ipsiusque merita offero pro merito quod ego debuissem habere nec habeo. Si dixerit quod tibi est iratus, dic, Domine, mortem Domini Jesu Christi oppono inter me et iram tuam; that is, Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved but by the death of Christ?

The sick man answers, Yes; then let it be said unto him, Go to, then, and whilst thy soul abideth in thee, put all thy confidence in this death alone, place thy trust in no other thing; commit thyself wholly to this death, cover thyself wholly with this alone, cast thyself wholly on this death, wrap thyself wholly in this death. And if God would judge thee, say, Lord, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and thy judgment; and otherwise I will not contend or enter into judgment with thee.

And if he shall say unto thee that thou art a sinner, say, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and my sins. If he shall say unto thee that thou hast deserved damnation, say, Lord, I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between thee and all my sins; and I offer his merits for my own, which I should have, and have not. If he say that he is angry with thee, say, Lord, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and thy anger. Those who gave these directions seem to have been sensible of what it is to appear before the tribunal of God, and how unsafe it will be for us there to insist on any thing in ourselves.

Hence are the words of the same Anselm in his Meditations: *Conscientia mea meruit damnationem, et penitentia mea non sufficit ad satisfactionem; set certum est quod misericordia tua superat omnem offensionem;* My conscience has deserved damnation, and my repentance is not sufficient for satisfaction; but most certain it is that thy mercy aboundeth above all offence. And this seems to me a better direction than those more lately given by some of the Roman church; such as the prayer suggested unto a sick man by Johan.

Polandus, lib. Methodus in adjuvandis morientibus: Domine Jesu, conjunge, obsecro, obsequium meum cum omnibus quæ tu egisti, et passus es ex tam perfecta charitate et obedientia. Et cum divitiis

satisfactionum et meritorum dilectionis, patri æterno, illud offerre digneris. Or that of a greater author, Antidot. Animæ, fol. 17, Tu hinc o rosea martyrum turba offer pro me, nunc et in hora mortis meæ, merita, fidelitatum, constantiæ, et pretiosi sanguinis, cum sanguine agni immaculati, pro omnium salute effusi.

Jerome, long before Anselm, spake to the same purpose: Cum dies iudicii aut dormitionis advenerit, omnes manus dissolventur; quibus dicitur in alio loco, confortamini manus dissolutæ; dissolventur autem manus, quia nullum opus dignum Dei justitia reperiatur, et non justificabitur in conspectu ejus omnis vivens, unde propheta dicit in psalmo, Si iniquitates attendas Domine, quis sustinebit, lib. 6 in Isa. xiii. 6, 7; When the day of judgment or of death shall come, all hands will be dissolved (that is, faint or fall down); unto which it is said in another place, Be strengthened, ye hands that hang down.

But all hands shall be melted down (that is, all mens strength and confidence shall fail them), because no works shall be found which can answer the righteousness of God; for no flesh shall be justified in his sight. Whence the prophet says in the psalm, If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, who should stand? And Ambrose, to the same purpose: Nemo ergo sibi arroget, nemo de meritis gloriatur, nemo de potestate se jactet, omnes speremus per Dominum Jesum misericordiam invenire, quoniam omnes ante tribunal ejus stabimus.

De illo veniam, de illo indulgentiam postulabo. Quænam spes alia peccatoribus? in Ps. cxix. Resh, Let no man arrogate any thing unto himself, let no man glory in his own merits or good deeds, let no man boast of his power: let us all hope to find mercy by our Lord Jesus; for we shall all stand before his judgment-seat. Of him will I beg pardon, of him will I desire indulgence; what other hope is there for sinners?

Wherefore, if men will be turned off from a continual regard unto the greatness, holiness, and majesty of God, by their inventions in the heat of disputation; if they do forget a reverential consideration of what will become them, and what they may betake themselves unto when they stand before his tribunal; they may engage into such apprehensions as they dare not abide by in their own personal trial. For how shall man be just with God? Hence it has been observed, that the schoolmen themselves, in their meditations and devotional writings, wherein they had immediate thoughts of God, with whom they had to do, did speak quite another language as to justification before God than they do in their wrangling, philosophical, fiery disputes about it.

And I had rather learn what some men really judge about their own justification from their prayers than their writings. Nor do I remember that I did ever hear any good man in his prayers use any expressions about justification, pardon of sin, and righteousness before God, wherein any plea from any thing in ourselves was introduced or made use of. The prayer of Daniel has, in this matter, been the substance of their supplications: O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces.

We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; for thine own sake, O my God, Dan. ix. 7, 18, 19. Or that of the psalmist, Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified, Ps. cxliii. 2. Or, If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared, Ps. cxxx. 3, 4. On which words the exposition of Austin is remarkable, speaking of David, and applying it unto himself: Ecce clamat sub molibus iniquitatum suarum.

Circumspexit se, circumspexit vitam suam, vidit illam undique flagitiis coopertam; quacunque respexit, nihil in se boni invenit: et cum tanta et tam multa peccata undique videret, tanquam expavescens, exclamavit, Si iniquitates observaris Domine, quis sustinebit? Vidit enim prope totam vitam humanam

circumlatrari peccatis; accusari omnes conscientias cogitationibus suis; non inveniri cor castum præsumens de justitia; quod quia inveniri non potest, præsumat ergo omnium cor de misericordi Domini Dei sui, et dicat Deo, Si iniquitates observaris Domine, Domine quis sustinebit?

Quæ autem est spes? quoniam apud te propitiatio est. And whereas we may and ought to represent unto God, in our supplications, our faith, or what it is that we believe herein, I much question whether some men can find in their hearts to pray over and plead before him all the arguments and distinctions they make use of to prove the interest of our works and obedience in our justification before him, or enter into judgment with him upon the conclusions which they make from them.

Nor will many be satisfied to make use of that prayer which Pelagius taught the widow, as it was objected to him in the Diospolitan Synod: Tu nosti, Domine, quam sanctæ, quam innocentes, quam puræ ab omni fraude et rapina quas ad te expando manus; quam justa, quam immaculata labia et ab omni mendacio libera, quibus tibi ut mihi miserearis preces fundo; Thou knowest, O Lord, how holy, how innocent, how pure from all deceit and rapine, are the hands which I stretch forth unto thee; how just, how unspotted with evil, how free from lying, are those lips wherewith I pour forth prayers unto thee, that thou wouldst have mercy on me.

And yet, although he taught her so to plead her own purity, innocency, and righteousness before God, he does it not as those whereon she might be absolutely justified, but only as the condition of her obtaining mercy. Nor have I observed that any public liturgies (the mass-book only excepted, wherein there is a frequent recourse unto the merits and intercession of saints) do guide men in their prayers before God to plead any thing for their acceptance with him, or as the means or condition thereof, but grace, mercy, the righteousness and blood of Christ alone.

Wherefore I cannot but judge it best (others may think of it as they please), for those who would teach or learn the doctrine of justification in a due manner, to place their consciences in the presence of God, and their persons before his tribunal, and then, upon a due consideration of his greatness, power, majesty, righteousness, holiness, of the terror of his glory and sovereign authority, to inquire what the Scripture and a sense of their own condition direct them unto as their relief and refuge, and what plea it becomes them to make for themselves. Secret thoughts of God and ourselves, retired meditations, the conduct of the spirit in humble supplications, deathbed preparations for an immediate appearance before God, faith and love in exercise on Christ, speak other things, for the most part, than many contend for.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-owen/a-due-consideration-of-god-necessary/>

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