

Our Apostasy From God

by John Owen

A clear apprehension of our apostasy from God, the depravation of our nature, and the power and guilt of sin is necessary for a right understanding of the doctrine of justification.

Scripture: Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:23, Romans 10:3, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Original Sin", "Justification By Faith"

Description

John Owen emphasizes the importance of understanding our apostasy from God, the depravation of our nature, the power and guilt of sin, and the holiness of the law in grasping the doctrine of justification. He highlights how denying or downplaying these truths leads to misbelief about God's grace, as seen in Pelagianism. Owen warns against boasting in personal perfection and emphasizes the need for a clear recognition of our sinfulness to truly appreciate the righteousness of Christ. He stresses that a deep sense of sin and a humble acknowledgment of our need for God's grace are essential for genuine faith and justification.

Transcript

Thirdly, A due sense of our apostasy from God, the depravation of our nature thereby, with the power and guilt of sin, the holiness of the law, necessary unto a right understanding of the doctrine of justification -- Method of the apostle to this purpose, Rom. i., ii., iii. -- Grounds of the ancient and present Pelagianism, in the denial of these things -- Instances thereof -- Boasting of perfection from the same ground -- Knowledge of sin and grace mutually promote each other

Thirdly. A clear apprehension and due sense of the greatness of our apostasy from God, of the depravation of our natures thereby, of the power and guilt of sin, of the holiness and severity of the law, are necessary unto a right apprehension of the doctrine of justification. Therefore, unto the declaration of it does the apostle premise a large discourse, thoroughly to convince the minds of all that seek to be justified with a sense of these things, Rom. i., ii., iii. The rules which he has given us, the method which he prescribes, and the ends which he designs, are those which we shall choose to follow. And he lays it down in general, "That the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;" and that "the just shall live by faith," chap. i. 17. But he declares not in particular the causes, nature, and way of our justification, until he has fully evinced that all men are shut up under the state of sin, and manifested how deplorable their condition is thereby; and in the ignorance of these things, in the denying or palliating of them, he lays the

foundation of all misbelief about the grace of God. Pelagianism, in its first root, and all its present branches, is resolved whereinto. For, not apprehending the dread of our original apostasy from God, nor the consequence of it in the universal depravation of our nature, they disown any necessity either of the satisfaction of Christ or the efficacy of divine grace for our recovery or restoration. So upon the matter the principal ends of the mission both of the Son of God and of the Holy Spirit are renounced; which issues in the denial of the deity of the one and the personality of the other. The fall which we had being not great, and the disease contracted thereby being easily curable, and there being little or no evil in those things which are now unavoidable unto our nature, it is no great matter to be freed or justified from all by a mere act of favour on our own endeavours; nor is the efficacious grace of God any way needful unto our sanctification and obedience; as these men suppose.

When these or the like conceits are admitted, and the minds of men by them kept off from a due apprehension of the state and guilt of sin, and their consciences from being affected with the terror of the Lord, and curse of the law thereon, justification is a notion to be dealt withal pleasantly or subtlety, as men see occasion. And hence arise the differences about it at present, -- I mean those which are really such, and not merely the different ways whereby learned men express their thoughts and apprehensions concerning it.

By some the imputation of the actual apostasy and transgression of Adam, the head of our nature, whereby his sin became the sin of the world, is utterly denied. Hereby both the grounds the apostle proceeds on in evincing the necessity of our justification, or our being made righteous by the obedience of another, and all the arguments brought in the confirmation of the doctrine of it, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, are evaded and overthrown. Socinus, de Servator. par. iv. cap. 6, confesses that place to give great countenance unto the doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; and therefore he sets himself to oppose, with sundry artifices, the imputation of the sin of Adam unto his natural posterity. For he perceived well enough that, upon the admission thereof, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto his spiritual seed would unavoidably follow, according unto the tenor of the apostle's discourse.

Some deny the depravation and corruption of our nature, which ensued on our apostasy from God, and the loss of his image; or, if they do not absolutely deny it, yet they so extenuate it as to render it a matter of no great concern unto us. Some disease and distemper of the soul they will acknowledge, arising from the disorder of our affections, whereby we are apt to receive in such vicious habits and customs as are in practice in the world; and, as the guilt hereof is not much, so the danger of it is not great. And as for any spiritual filth or stain of our nature that is in it, it is clean washed away from all by baptism. That deformity of soul which came upon us in the loss of the image of God, wherein the beauty and harmony of all our faculties, in all their acting in order unto their utmost end, did consist; that enmity unto God, even in the mind, which ensued thereon; that darkness which our understandings were clouded, yea, blinded withal, -- the spiritual death which passed on the whole soul, and total alienation from the life of God; that impotency unto good, that inclination unto evil, that deceitfulness of sin, that power and efficacy of corrupt lusts, which the Scriptures and experience so fully charge on the state of lost nature, are rejected as empty notions or fables. No wonder if such persons look upon imputed righteousness as the shadow of a dream, who esteem those things which evidence its necessity to be but fond imaginations. And small hope is there to bring such men to value the righteousness of Christ, as imputed to them, who are so unacquainted with their own unrighteousness inherent in them. Until men know themselves better, they will care very little to know Christ at all.

Against such as these the doctrine of justification may be defended, 22as we are obliged to contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints, and as the mouths of gainsayers are to be stopped; but to endeavour their satisfaction in it, whilst they are under the power of such apprehensions, is a vain attempt. As our Saviour said unto them unto whom he had declared the necessity of regeneration, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?" so may we say, If men will not believe those things, whereof it would be marvellous, but that the reason of it is known, that they have not an undeniable evidence and experience in themselves, how can they believe those heavenly mysteries which respect a supposition of that within themselves which they will not acknowledge?

Hence some are so far from any concernment in a perfect righteousness to be imputed unto them, as that they boast of a perfection in themselves. So did the Pelagians of old glory in a sinless perfection in the sight of God, even when they were convinced of sinful miscarriages in the sight of men; as they are charged by Jerome, lib. ii. Dialog.; and by Austin, lib. 2 contra Julian., cap. 8. Such persons are not "subjecta capacia auditionis evangelicæ." Whilst men have no sense in their own hearts and consciences of the spiritual disorder of their souls, of the secret continual acting of sin with deceit and violence, obstructing all that is good, promoting all that is evil, defiling all that is done by them through the lusting of the flesh against the Spirit, as contrary unto it, though no outward perpetration of sin or actual omission of duty do ensue thereon, who are not engaged in a constant watchful conflict against the first motions of sin, -- unto whom they are not the greatest burden and sorrow in this life, causing them to cry out for deliverance from them, -- who can despise those who make acknowledgments in their confession unto God of their sense of these things, with the guilt wherewith they are accompanied, -- [they] will, with an assured confidence, reject and condemn what is offered about justification through the obedience and righteousness of Christ imputed to us. For no man will be so fond as to be solicitous of a righteousness that is not his own, who has at home in a readiness that which is his own, which will serve his turn. It is, therefore, the ignorance of these things alone that can delude men into an apprehension of their justification before God by their own personal righteousness. For if they were acquainted with them, they would quickly discern such an imperfection in the best of their duties, such a frequency of sinful irregularities in their minds and disorders in their affections, such an unsuitableness in all that they are and do, from the inward frames of their hearts unto all their outward actions, unto the greatness and holiness of God, as would abate their confidence in placing any trust in their own righteousness for their justification.

23By means of these and the like presumptuous conceptions of unenlightened minds, the consciences of men are kept off from being affected with a due sense of sin, and a serious consideration how they may obtain acceptance before God. Neither the consideration of the holiness or terror of the Lord, nor the severity of the law, as it indispensably requires a righteousness in compliance with its commands; nor the promise of the gospel, declaring and tendering a righteousness, the righteousness of God, in answer whereunto; nor the uncertainty of their own minds upon trials and surprisals, as having no stable ground of peace to anchor on; nor the constant secret disquietment of their consciences, if not seared or hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, can prevail with them whose thought are prepossessed with such slight conceptions of the state and art of sin to fly for refuge unto the only hope that is set before them, or really and distinctly to comport with the only way of deliverance and salvation.

Wherefore, if we would either teach or learn the doctrine of justification in a due manner, a clear apprehension of the greatness of our apostasy from God, a due sense of the guilt of sin, a deep

experience of its power, all with respect unto the holiness and law of God, are necessary unto us. We have nothing to do in this matter with men, who, through the fever of pride, have lost the understanding of their own miserable condition. For, "Natura sic apparet vitiata, ut hoc majoris vitii sit non videre," Austin. The whole need not the physician, but the sick. Those who are pricked unto the heart for sin, and cry out, "What shall we do to be saved?" will understand what we have to say. Against others we must defend the truth, as God shall enable. And it may be made good by all sorts of instances, that as men rise in their notions about the extenuation of sin, so they fall in their regard unto the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is no less true also, on the other hand, as unbelief works in men a disesteem of the person and righteousness of Christ, they are cast inevitably to seek for countenance unto their own consciences in the extenuation of sin. So insensibly are the minds of men diverted from Christ, and seduced to place their confidence in themselves. Some confused respect they have unto him, as a relief they know not how nor wherein; but they live in that pretended height of human wisdom, to trust to themselves. So they are instructed to do by the best of the philosophers: "Unum bonum est, quod beatæ vitæ causa et firmamentum est, sibi fidere," Senec. Epist. xxxi. Hence, also, is the internal sanctifying grace of God, among many, equally despised with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. The sum of their faith, and of their arguments in the confirmation of it, is given by the learned Roman orator and philosopher. "Virtutem," says he, "nemo unquam Deo acceptam retulit; nimirum rectè. Propter virtutem enim jure laudamur, et in virtute rectè gloriamur, quod non contingeret, si donum a Deo, non a nobis haberemus," Tull. de Nat. Deor.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-owen/our-apostasy-from-god/>

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