

JUSTIFICATION

SINNERS RIGHTEOUS IN CHRIST



DOCTRINES OF GRACE JOHN GILL

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John Gill

‘As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord’ (*Romans 5: 18-21*)

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Preface

Dear readers who seek the Lord, you who cannot be satisfied without the assurance of peace in your conscience, you who must have the Lord Jesus as your Friend, you who know you are unrighteous by nature and practice, we wish to give our reasons for publishing this work.

God's anger burns fiercely against sin. He has said that the soul that sins shall die and shall be cast out of his presence for ever into that place of eternal darkness and misery. We cannot cease from sin. We are born and shapen in it and we all shall die as sinners. What oppressive hopelessness and despair can fill our hearts. Is there no escape? Can we be delivered from this awful state and the distress that shadows us continually? Are we to die unrighteous and so receive the sentence from God our Judge to depart from him for ever? We cannot make ourselves righteous; we cannot rid ourselves of the burden of

our sins; and so we cannot save ourselves from black despair.

We get our sin-bent nature from our father Adam. We share the guilt of his dreadful act of proud, ungodly, rebellious disobedience. We come under his condemnation that the moment he first sinned he would die and we, his children, with him. Being born his children, with his nature, we now add iniquity to iniquity as he did. We are verily guilty before our Creator. We are guilty in Adam's sin and through our own acts of sin. God has said that he will by no means clear the guilty.

But God did not execute the final sentence of eternal death on our father. He had more intentions towards Adam and his children than solely judgment for transgression. He purposed to show mercy and he communicated this intention and the means of its accomplishment through his faithful word in the Bible. We are told how God can execute his righteous judgment against sin and yet deliver the ungodly from hell. We are told how he, the holy unchanging God, can reckon an ungodly man to be perfectly righteous - that is, how he can justify the ungodly and receive them spotlessly sinless, yea, clothed in perfect righteousness, in his sight.

No wonder the angel said to the shepherds 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy'. This Bible truth that God justifies the ungodly, is glad tidings of great joy to the sinner who languishes in distress, conscious of his ungodliness, and who thirsts to be accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the manifestation to us of the eternal invisible God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All God's children, from the least to the greatest, are taught this great salvation. They are brought to thirst for it; they shall delight in it; they shall meditate upon it throughout eternity.

Just consider, this subject is so extensive and so relevant to each believer and to God's honour that the redeemed shall never tire throughout eternity of exploring its glories as centring in the Lamb of God. In this life, believers are given grace, wisdom unto salvation, according to the measure that God the Holy Spirit sovereignly purposes. In the world to come, all shall be given a fulness of understanding, a fulness of capacity to praise their Saviour.

The Lord has given to some men an anointing, an establishment in the truths of salvation, to act as under-shepherds to his little flock. In foretaste of the glorious occupation of the saints in glory, they are drawn to devote their lives to preaching Christ crucified, risen and glorified, as the One in whom men are justified and shall glory. They explore the breadth, length, depth and height of this salvation. They defend it against the incessant pressures of the devil whose heresies incline men to seek to justify themselves rather than submit to God's way of righteousness. John Gill (1697–1771), the Particular Baptist pastor who wrote this work, was such a defender of the faith.

John Gill's writings are very comprehensive in nature and include frequent references to the original languages and to the writings of other scholarly ministers of the gospel. Many students of God's truth, inclined to extensive reading, are familiar with Gill's Commentary of the whole Bible, his Body of Divinity, his Tracts and Sermons and other works. But many children of God, for various reasons, are not extensive readers. They can find the length and complexity of such writings as Gill's to be so daunting that they do not venture to read them. But John

Gill was a champion for the truths by which such persons are saved. He brought forth the glories, the riches of their saving justification by God. This is heavenly treasure. This is the foundation of their hopes for time and eternity. Only upon these truths can be grounded their assurance of eternal life. The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead the least of God's saints into the personal possession of this hope set before them in the gospel.

This extract from John Gill's *Body of Divinity* is directed towards those children of God who are not great readers and who are not familiar with his writings. We have tried to make this book as easy as possible for such to read. We have not changed Gill's words or the sequence of his paragraphs. But we have omitted many of the quotations which are in Hebrew and Greek. Of those that remain, their translation is either given by Gill in the text or inserted in square brackets by ourselves. The footnote references to other writers have been omitted, as most of their works will be inaccessible to our readers. We have included references in square brackets to more well-known writers such as John Owen and Thomas Goodwin.

Gill's sentences can be very long, with much use of semicolons and colons, but we have retained his punctuation. It was in the style of that day and the reader can come to appreciate its logic, flow and coherence. We have inserted our own headings to different sections of the book to break down the body of text into a more readable form and to emphasise the thread of Gill's thoughts. We have put spaces between his points to articulate them for the modern reader.

Gill's work was entitled 'A body of doctrinal and practical

divinity.’ It is usually referred to as his ‘Body of Divinity’. As the full title implies, he subdivided his work into two sections – doctrinal divinity and practical divinity. He further subdivided these into books.

The first part of our publication is from the doctrinal section, Book 2 titled ‘Of the Acts and Works of God,’ Chapter 5 ‘Of other Eternal and Immanent Acts of God, particularly Adoption and Justification.’ We here only publish the section dealing with justification. An immanent act of God is one that is within himself. His determining from eternity to save sinners whom he had chosen was an eternal act within himself. God’s eternal determinations are his immanent acts. In eternity the Father chose them and justified them in his Son. God eternally accounted them righteous in Christ. Gill opens up to believing sinners the glory of this doctrine, the certainty of their salvation, the comforting consideration that in their heavenly Father’s view they have always been in a justifying union with Christ.

The second part of our publication is also from the doctrinal section, but Book 6 titled ‘Of the Blessings of Grace, and the Doctrines of it,’ Chapter 8 ‘Of Justification.’ Here the author expounds the details of what justification is and how it is established in the consciences of believers. It is justification by faith rather than justification by works. This doctrine is at the heart of the gospel and was the foundational doctrine of the Reformation.

There is a long sermon by Gill, entitled ‘The doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ stated and maintained.’ We decided not to include this in the present publication because it has virtually the same content as his

Body of Divinity. If readers wish, they can obtain his works from Baptist Standard Bearer and Gospel Mission in the USA and from the Christian Bookshop, Ossett, in the UK.

We close with a sample quotation from our publication. Here you see the importance that the author attaches to this doctrine of justification and the sweetness he draws from it:

‘The well-being of God’s people here and hereafter depends upon their justification, and is a consequent of it; *Say ye to the righteous*, one that is justified by the righteousness of Christ, *that it shall be well with him (Isa. 3:10)*, it is well with the justified ones in life; be it with them as it may, all is well with them and for the best; all things work together for their good, adversity and prosperity; what they have of worldly things, though but little (*Ps. 37:16; Prov. 15:16, 17*), are blessings to them: it is well with such an one at death, he has hope in it, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God; peace is the end of the perfect and upright man, who is perfectly righteous through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; and it is well with him at judgment, he has a righteousness that will answer for him in that time to come; and he shall have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ; and it will be well with him to all eternity; he that is righteous will then be righteous still, and ever continue so, and shall go into everlasting life.’

Timothy Abbott
Committee member
Gospel Standard Trust

Part One

from

The Body of Divinity

Book 2: Of the acts and works of God

Chapter 5: Of other Eternal and Immanent Acts of God,
particularly Adoption and Justification

Section II: Justification

Justification from eternity

An internal and immanent act of God

THE SCOPE OF THIS PART OF THE WORK

Justification is an act of God's grace, flowing from his sovereign good will and pleasure; the elect of God are said to be *justified by his grace*; and as if that expression was not strong enough to set forth the freeness of it, the word *freely* is added elsewhere; *Being justified freely by his grace* (*Titus 3:7; Rom. 3:24*). Justification is by many divines distinguished into active and passive. Active justification is the act of God; it is God that justifies. Passive justification is the act of God, terminating on the conscience of a believer, commonly called a transient act, passing upon an external object. It is not of this I shall now treat [*see Part Two of this publication – Justification by Faith*], but of the former; which is an act internal and eternal, taken up in the divine mind from eternity, and is an immanent, abiding one in it; it is, as Dr. Ames expresses

it, “a sentence conceived in the divine mind, by the decree of justifying.”

Now, as before observed [*earlier in his Body of Doctrinal Divinity*], as God’s will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them; as it is an immanent act in God, it is an act of his grace towards them, is wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous, through the righteousness of his Son; and, as such, did not first commence in time, but from eternity.

(1) THE ELECT JUSTIFIED BEFORE ANY ACT OF FAITH

First, It does not begin to take place in time, or at believing, but is antecedent to any act of faith.

Faith not the cause but the effect of justification

1. Faith is not the cause, but an effect of justification; it is not the cause of it in any sense; it is not the moving cause, that is the free grace of God; *Being justified freely by his grace (Rom. 3:24)*, nor the efficient cause of it; *It is God that justifies (Rom. 8:33)*, nor the meritorious cause, as some express it; or the matter of it, that is the obedience and blood of Christ (*Rom. 5:9, 19*), or the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his active and passive obedience; nor even the instrumental cause; for, as Mr. Baxter himself argues, “If faith is the instrument of our justification, it is the instrument either of God or man; not of man, for justification is God’s act; he is the sole Justifier (*Rom. 3:26*), man doth not justify himself:

nor of God, for it is not God that believes”: nor is it a *causa sine qua non*, as the case of elect infants shows; it is not in any class of causes whatever; but it is the effect of justification: all men have not faith, and the reason why some do not believe is, because they are none of Christ’s sheep; they were not chosen in him, nor justified through him; but justly left in their sins, and so to condemnation; the reason why others believe is, because they are ordained to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and are justified by it, and shall never enter into condemnation: the reason why any are justified, is not because they have faith; but the reason why they have faith, is because they are justified; was there no such blessing of grace as justification of life in Christ, for the sons of men, there would be no such thing as faith in Christ bestowed on them; precious faith is obtained through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ (*2 Peter 1:1*), nor, indeed, would there be any room for it, nor any use of it, if a justifying righteousness was not previously provided. Agreeable to this are the reasonings and assertions of Twisse, Maccovius, and others. Now if faith is not the cause, but the effect of justification; then as every cause is before its effect, and every effect follows its cause, justification must be before faith, and faith must follow justification.

Faith the evidence of justification

2. Faith is the evidence and manifestation of justification, and therefore justification must be before it; *Faith is the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1)*, but it is not the evidence of that which as yet is not; what it is an evidence of, must be, and

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

Faith adds nothing to the essence of justification

3. Faith adds nothing to the *esse* only to the *bene esse* of justification; it is no part of, nor any ingredient in it; it is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, without the being or consideration of faith, or any foresight of it; a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God; and after he does believe, his justification does not depend on his acts of faith; for though *we believe not, yet he abides faithful (2 Tim. 2:13)* ; that is, God is faithful to his covenant engagements with his Son, as their Surety, by whose suretyship righteousness they are justified; but by faith men have a comfortable sense, perception and apprehension of their justification, and enjoy that peace of soul which results from it; it is by that only, under the testimony of the divine Spirit, that they know their interest in it, and can claim it, and so have the comfort of it.

Justification must exist before faith can receive it

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

The elect justified in Christ before they believe

5. All the elect of God were justified in Christ, their Head and Representative, when he rose from the dead, and therefore they believe: Christ engaged as a Surety for all his people from eternity, had their sins imputed to him, and for which he made himself responsible; in the fulness of time he made satisfaction for them by his sufferings and death, and at his resurrection

was acquitted and discharged: now as he suffered and died, not as a private, but as a public person, so he rose again, and was justified as such, even as the representative of his people; hence when he rose, they rose with him; and when he was justified, they were justified in him; for he was *delivered for their offences, and was raised again for their justification* (Rom. 4:25; see 1 Tim. 3:16), and this is the sense and judgment of many sound and learned divines; as, besides our Sandford and Dr. Goodwin, the learned Amesius, Hoornbeck, Witsius, and others.

(2) JUSTIFICATION IS FROM ETERNITY

Secondly, Justification is not only before faith, but it is from eternity, being an immanent act in the divine mind, and so an internal and eternal one; as may be concluded:-

Election and hence justification is from eternity

1. From eternal election: the objects of justification are God's elect; *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifies*; that is, the elect. Now if God's elect, as such, can have nothing laid to their charge; but are by God acquitted, discharged, and justified; and if they bore this character of elect from eternity, or were chosen in Christ before the world began; then they must be acquitted, discharged and justified so early, so as nothing could be laid to their charge: besides, by electing grace men were put into Christ, and were considered as in him before the foundation of the world; and if they were considered as in him, they must be considered as

righteous or unrighteous; not surely as unrighteous, unjustified, and in a state of condemnation; for *there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ (Rom. 8:1)*, and therefore must be considered as righteous, and so justified: “Justified then we were, says Dr. Goodwin, when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came to have a being and an interest in him.”

Justification a branch of election

2. Justification may well be considered as a branch of election; it is no other, as one expresses it, than setting apart the elect alone to be partakers of Christ’s righteousness; and a setting apart Christ’s righteousness for the elect only; it is mentioned along with election, as of the same date with it; *Wherein*, that is, in the grace of God, particularly the electing grace of God, spoken of before, *he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6)*. What is this acceptance in Christ, but justification in him? and this is expressed as a past act, in the same language as other eternal things be in the context, he *hath* blessed us, and he *hath* chosen us, and *having* predestinated us, so he *hath* made us accepted; and, indeed, as Christ was always the beloved of God, and well pleasing to him; so all given to him, and in him, were beloved of God, well pleasing to him, and accepted with him, or justified in him from eternity.

Justification one of the ‘all spiritual blessings’

3. Justification is one of those spiritual blessings wherewith the elect are blessed in Christ according to election-grace, before the foundation of the world (*Eph. 1:3, 4*). That

justification is a spiritual blessing none will deny; and if the elect were blessed with all spiritual blessings, then with this; and if thus blessed according to election, or when elected, then before the foundation of the world: and this grace of justification must be no small part of that *grace which was given in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was* (2 Tim. 1:9). “We may say,” says Dr. Goodwin, “of all spiritual blessings in Christ, what is said of Christ, that *his goings forth are from everlasting*—in Christ we were blessed with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), as we are blessed with all other, so with this also, that we were justified then in Christ!”

The elect justified in Christ as their surety from everlasting

4. Christ became a Surety for his people from everlasting; engaged to pay their debts, bear their sins, and make satisfaction for them; and was accepted of as such by God his Father, who thenceforward looked at him for payment and satisfaction, and looked at them as discharged, and so they were in his eternal mind; and it is a rule that will hold good, as Maccovius observes, “that as soon as one becomes a surety for another, the other is immediately freed, if the surety be accepted;” which is the case here and it is but a piece of common prudence, when a man has a bad debt, and has good security for it, to look not to the principal debtor, who will never be able to pay him, but to his good bondsman and surety, who is able; and so Dr. Goodwin observes, that God, in the everlasting transaction with Christ, “told him, as it were, that he would look for his debt and satisfaction of him, and that he did let the sinners go free; and so they are in this respect, justified from all eternity.”