

A TREATISE

ON

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

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# JUSTIFICATION.

## SECTION I.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE SUBJECT.

'How shall a man be just with God?' is surely the most important question which can possibly be conceived. To be beloved by our friends, to be secure from the assaults of our enemies, to stand well with the world, and enjoy the favour of those who possess power and influence, are objects naturally desirable; and, as these things contribute to our happiness on earth, their pursuit, so far as it does not interfere with higher and nobler interests, is reasonable. But when we consider, that our continuance in this world, and our possession of its good things, is only for a short period, and that we are destined to an immortal existence beyond the grave, and are accountable for our conduct while in the body; so that our future happiness or misery will depend upon our character, and be measured by our conduct in this life, all temporal interests vanish into insignificance, in the comparison with those which are eternal. Of what account will it be a million of years hence, what our condition was here, whether we were rich or poor, honourable or despised, happy or miserable; but then, and through eternity, it will be of infinite importance, whether we became reconciled to God and lived humbly and piously while inhabitants of earth. It may indeed be alleged, that God our Maker is infinitely good, and will not deal severely with his erring creatures; and, therefore, we may venture into eternity, entertaining the confident assurance that it will be well with us hereafter. This is, indeed, a plausible and flattering doctrine, and men are much inclined to believe that which affords them present comfort; and it is by no means an agreeable task to disturb that peace which men seem to enjoy, on this ground, but as it is utterly fallacious, duty demands that we should plainly tell them that this is a sandy foundation. If we were innocent, then might we willingly and boldly appear in the presence of our Judge: for no one of his creatures need ever fear that he will treat them with injustice. But if we are all transgressors, the more holy God is, the more reason have we to expect punishment. The hope of

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impunity for our sins is always founded on some unworthy conceptions of the divine attributes, unless it has respect to a sufficient atonement. But it is important that we should know as accurately as possible, what the principles are, on which we shall be dealt with by the Judge of all ; or, in other words, it is infinitely important to know, how a sinner can appear with acceptance before God. These considerations are sufficient to show, that the doctrine of a sinner's justification, in the sight of God, is fundamental. On some other points error may exist, and yet the state of the person entertaining it may notwithstanding be safe ; he may still be in the right way to heaven. But a mistake, as to the method of acceptance with God, must be exceedingly dangerous : it must mislead the inquirer from the way of salvation. Let every man, then, as he regards his own eternal happiness, beware of embracing a false doctrine on this subject. But a sound view of this point is intimately connected with correct opinions on all other articles of primary importance ; and an error here, cannot but vitiate the whole system of theology, of which it forms a part. This is a central and a cardinal point in theoretical, as well as practical religion ; and the degree of error on other articles, may be inferred, from the degree of departure from the truth, in regard to this. The history of the Christian church, from the days of the apostles, confirms the statement now given. Was any heretic ever known to hold a sound doctrine on justification ? Wherever, and whenever, justification by faith, has been given up, obscured, or neglected to be preached, *then* and *there*, other errors have come in like a flood, and true religion has declined. The history of most Protestant churches, for a hundred years past, will furnish a striking commentary on the statement now made. On the other hand, when a real reformation takes place, in any part of the church, the consequence is, a speedy and cordial return to the preaching of this doctrine. How dear it was to the hearts of the reformers is known to all. Luther may truly be said to have laid the foundation for the Reformation, by embracing the scriptural view of justification. He found the need of it in his own deep conviction of sin ; but the doctrine itself he discovered in the Bible. Through his whole life, afterwards, he was zealous and uncompromising in its defence. His pithy and striking declaration, that it was "the article of a standing or falling church," has often been cited ;\* but another saying

\* "Articulus stantis vel cadentis Ecclesie."

of this great reformer, equally pithy and important, is less known. "The doctrine of justification being lost," says he "the whole system of Christian doctrine is lost."\* Perhaps, the radical error of Popery from which all the rest sprung, was the proud and unscriptural doctrine of human merit, as the ground of our acceptance with God. However this may be, undoubtedly, it was the great end of divine revelation to make known the method by which a sinner may recover the lost favour of God, and secure the pardon of all his sins. And as this doctrine is radical in the Christian system; so it stands out prominently throughout the Bible; and is more especially, the chief subject of the inspired writings of the apostle Paul. His Epistle to the Romans may without impropriety be called a treatise on the gratuitous justification of a sinner before God, with an answer to the most common objections which have in all ages been made against it. And his Epistle to the Galatians is an earnest refutation of the errors of certain false teachers, who inculcated an erroneous doctrine on this point, and had led away the Galatian churches from the truth. Paul considered the new doctrine taught by these Judaizers, as "another gospel," and denounces a curse upon all who preached it, even if it were an angel from heaven. And the receiving such a doctrine, he considered as turning from the Spirit to the flesh; and addresses those who had forsaken the gospel of Christ, for the sake of this legal system, as "bewitched," or infatuated. He represents those who were seeking to be justified by their observance of the ceremonies of the abrogated law, as having fallen from grace; that is, as having abandoned the gospel system of salvation by grace.

It can, therefore, never be a superfluous work, nor unseasonable, to exhibit the Scriptural doctrine of Justification. And this is the object at which we aim in this tract. It cannot be expected that we should discuss all questions which have been started on this point, but only the most important. And we think a short, and plain treatise on this subject, is now called for; because in the preaching of many, it is left entirely out of view.

\*"Amisso articulo justificationis simul amissa est tota doctrina Christiana."

## SECTION II.

## NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION.

It seems strange that there should be any difference of opinion respecting the meaning of the word justification. Its common popular sense is exactly the same as its scriptural and theological meaning. When we speak of a person being justified, we never think of an internal change, but a declaration of the condition of that person in relation to some law or rule. So, when a particular action is justified, it is declared and shown to be right, or conformable to law. The word *justify* is uniformly the opposite of the word *condemn*. When a man is condemned no change is effected by the act on his real character, but he is declared to be a transgressor, and obnoxious to the penalty of some law; so when a person is justified, no new moral qualities or dispositions are communicated by that act, but he is merely declared to be acquitted from every charge which may have been brought against him, and to have complied with the requisitions of the law by which his conduct is tried.

In the Bible, the word is used in the same way, almost uniformly. There are few cases, if any, in which it can be supposed to have a different meaning; and these must be considered as exceptions to the general rule, in which the word is used out of its proper signification. The use of the word in Scripture, will be evident from the following examples, "Thou shalt justify the righteous and condemn the wicked." (Deut. xxv. 1.) Here it is too evident to require a word of explanation, that, to *justify* is the opposite of, to *condemn*; and that both are the sentence of a judge declaring the state or condition of persons in relation to the law. Again, "If I justify myself, my own mouth will condemn me." (Job ix. 20.) That is, if I declare myself free from sin, my own mouth will condemn me; where again, to *justify* and to *condemn*, are placed in opposition to each other. But the following example from Proverbs, will serve to show the true sense of this term most distinctly. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord," (Prov. xvii. 15.) Here, it would be most absurd to suppose, that by justifying the wicked was to be understood, the infusion of justice, or any communication of moral qualities; for that, instead of being an abomination to the Lord,

would be an excellent act: it would be making a bad man good.

The true import of the word when justification is the act of God, may be learned from Paul, where he asks, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? it is God that justifieth." (Rom. viii. 33.) Here the contrast is between laying a charge against the elect and justifying them. It is, however, the same as if it had been said, who will condemn God's elect, when he justifies them?

Notwithstanding the meaning of this word is so evident, yet the Romanists insist, that its true meaning is, not merely to absolve from guilt, but to *infuse righteousness* into the soul. This is not merely the opinion of some of their writers, but of the whole body. The Council of Trent discussed this subject at great length, and deliberately decreed a number of canons in relation to it, in which they completely confound justification with regeneration and sanctification. They declare that justification is not the remission of sins alone, but the "sanctification and renovation of the inner man;" and they pronounce an anathema upon all who maintain that justification cannot be increased by good works. In support of this opinion, they refer to several passages of Scripture; which, however, when rightly interpreted, bring no aid to their cause. They cite the words of Paul, "Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified, and whom he justified them he also glorified," (Rom. viii. 30.) The argument is, that in this chain of saving benefits, running from eternity to eternity, it cannot be supposed that the Apostle has omitted the renovation or sanctification of the soul; but if this is included it must be comprehended under justification. But whilst we admit, that this great blessing of the New Covenant is not omitted, we maintain that it is fully included, not under justification, with which it is never confounded, but under "calling" and "glorification." The calling here spoken of, is the effectual, holy calling, by which God by his grace draws sinful men to himself, and which is the commencement of the work of sanctification, and glorification is the consummation of this internal work of grace; for what glory can there be without perfect holiness, without which no man can see the Lord.

Another text on which the defenders of this opinion rely, is, "Such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 11.) But surely



this can prove nothing to their purpose ; for the Apostle here expressly mentions sanctification ; and to suppose that he includes the same under the word justification, is an unnecessary and gratuitous supposition. He does, indeed, ascribe the whole of the great change which the Corinthians had undergone, to the Holy Spirit ; but this divine agent is instrumental in justification as well as sanctification ; for, by his operation, faith is produced, by which justification takes place. There is, therefore, not a shadow of evidence from this text, that justification and sanctification signify the same thing ; or that they should, in any respect, be confounded ; although it is admitted, that these two benefits of the covenant of grace are always conjoined, and are ever contemporaneous ; so that he who is justified, is at the same time renovated ; and he who is renewed is justified ; but they are, nevertheless, perfectly distinct.

But the passage of Scripture on which they place most reliance is, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still—and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still—and he that is holy, let him be holy still," (Rev. xxiii. 11.) The phrase, "he that is righteous let him be righteous still," might be rendered with propriety, "he that is justified let him be justified still." But there is nothing in the text thus interpreted to induce us to depart from the usual meaning of the word "justify." Why may it not mean, he that is now justified let him continue in a justified state ? Why should we suppose that inherent holiness is intended, when that idea is strongly expressed in another part of the verse, "he that is holy let him be holy still." There is no necessity of admitting, that an increase of justification is here signified. There is nothing said of increase, but only of continuance. There is, however, good reason to believe, that the common reading of this text in our Greek Testaments, is not the correct reading. According to the best authorities, the text should be read, "he that is righteous, let him do righteousness." This correction Griesbach has received into his edition of the Greek Testament, which Dr. Owen had defended as the true reading of the passage, long before.

Sometimes the words in Isaiah have been adduced, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many."—But by his knowledge, in this place, we should understand the "Gospel," which is the knowledge of Christ, or "faith" which is nearly identical with the knowledge of Christ. By the knowledge of himself, by means of the Gospel, or by the instrumentality of faith, shall my righteous servant justify

many ; and the true import of the passage is cleared of all doubt by the reason assigned in the following words, " for he shall bear their iniquities." The true import of the word "justify" seems to have been corrupted among the Romanists, when the Latin Vulgate alone was taken as the guide ; for the Latin word, from which our English term is derived, taken aside from its use seems to carry with it the signification, not of declaring, but making a man just ; but in the original terms, both in the Hebrew and Greek, there is no ambiguity. The words express uniformly the sense which we have put on them ; that is, they mean, to *account*, to *esteem*, to *declare* a person to be just or righteous, and never to make a man just or righteous by the infusion of grace. Justification and Sanctification should, therefore, be carefully distinguished, although they should never be separated. The difference between these two benefits which arise from union with Christ, is well expressed in the answer to the 77th Question, in our Larger Catechism. "Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that, God in justification imputeth the righteousness of Christ, in sanctification his Spirit infuseth grace, and enableth the exercise thereof: in the former, sin is pardoned, in the other, it is subdued: the one doth equally free all believers from the avenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation: the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection."

There is another error respecting the import of the term "justification," which, while it admits that the word is forensic or declarative, maintains that it means the forgiveness of sin, and nothing more. This error is current among Protestants, being embraced and defended by the Arminians, and Hopkinsians, generally. But as this error will be brought fully under consideration, hereafter, we will dismiss all further consideration of the meaning of the term in this place, and proceed to inquire into the true ground of a sinner's justification in the sight of God.

### SECTION III.

#### JUSTIFICATION BY THE LAW IMPOSSIBLE.

When we assert that justification by the law is impossible, we do not mean to say, that this was always the case ; or

that this method of justification was not a good and reasonable one. Indeed, to innocent creatures, it is the only reasonable method of justification; and we suppose, that God's creatures, who have retained their original state, have obtained justification in this way alone. And when man was created and placed under a law, his obedience through the prescribed period of probation would have secured his own justification, and that of all those represented by him. While Adam continued in his original integrity, he was free from all condemnation; but it could not with propriety be said that he was then justified; for justification is the sentence of the judge declaring that the law has been fully obeyed; but in his case, the time had not arrived for pronouncing the sentence of justification, before he sinned. When any creature is put on probation, for a certain period, he cannot be justified until that period of perfect obedience is completed. There is a difference, therefore, between an innocent and a justified person. All moral agents are created in the image of God, that is, in a state of conformity to the holy law of God; and it is more than probable, that all such creatures are put on probation as soon as created; and as the goodness of God leads him to prescribe a limited time of trial, a sentence of justification cannot take place until this period is ended, and the required obedience rendered without failure. When justification takes place, either on the principles of law or grace, we suppose that the creatures who have finished their course of obedience are confirmed in a state of favour; they will be forever preserved from falling into condemnation. The angels who remained obedient were once as liable to fall, as those who kept not their first estate; but now their probation is ended; their justification is perfect, and they are no longer on trial, but "elect," confirmed forever in their holy and happy state. And if man had continued in his obedience, he would have obtained not only justification, but confirmation; and that for all included in him, in the covenant of works. And upon the same principles, all who are united to Christ, and justified by his righteousness, are no longer in a state of probation: the trial is over; the justifying righteousness has been rendered, and imputed to them; and they are no more liable to fall into condemnation, but are in a condition of perfect safety, "kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

As justification is the sentence of a judge declaring the true condition of a person, in relation to the law, it becomes necessary to inquire, what law it is which is the rule of judgment in pronouncing a creature just; or in condemning him, for

want of obedience. In a human court the judge is bound to proceed in his judgments according to the law of the land, and when a person has been arraigned, and found to have been guilty of no failure of obedience in the matters charged against him, he is acquitted; or, in other words, is justified. So, when God pronounces sentence upon any one, it will be strictly according to his own righteous law. This is sometimes called the law of nature, as it arises out of the natural relations which subsist between God and the creature; and because it is written on the heart of man, or interwoven with the principles of his constitution, as a moral agent. This law requires us to love God with all the heart, mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves. That is, it requires a perfect exercise of all our faculties and powers, in conformity to the will of God. It binds us to every thing which God commands, however his will may be made known. It is not necessary, therefore, to make any distinction here, between moral and positive laws. The moral obligation extends to all that God commands; and if he were to institute a thousand positive duties, they would all be morally obligatory on the same principles that what are called moral duties are binding. Every law requires perfect obedience to itself, and it requires no more. This, indeed, is a mere truism; for it would be a contradiction to say, that perfect obedience was not required by any law whatever; for if not required, then it could not be obedience. The idea of a law being satisfied by an imperfect obedience is utterly absurd.

Now, if the law be holy, just, and good, and every way adapted to man's constitution, why may he not obtain justification by the law? Paul has given the reason, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak, through the flesh." The fault is not in the law, but in the fallen sinful nature of man. The same Apostle testifies, in another place, "That which was ordained unto life I found to be unto death." One transgression of the law renders justification by it as impossible as a million. God, who cannot lie, never can pronounce him to be free from guilt and liable to no charge who has, in a single instance, disobeyed. Man fell under the curse by one transgression; and it is probable that the same was the fact in regard to the angels, who kept not their first estate. Those whom the law charges with sin, it can never justify. To suppose the contrary would imply a contradiction. The Apostle Paul assigns, as the reason why no man could be justified by the law, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin." As though he had said, the law demonstrates

that all men are sinners, therefore, it is evident, that it never can justify those whom at the same time it condemns. His words are, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin." That righteousness, therefore, which justifies the sinner, is said to be "without the law;" that is, without respect to our obedience to the law, for in justifying a sinner upon any plan, it is impossible that God should pay no regard to his own law. This righteousness which equally justifies Jews and Gentiles is by faith, not by works. And it must be so, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The apostle then declares that we are justified gratuitously, by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That which is free or gratuitous, is, without our works; "For to him that worketh, is the reward not reckoned of grace but of debt." (Rom. iv. 4.) And he reasons, that unless there had been provided some other righteousness than our own, God could not have been just in justifying him that believeth in Jesus. It would be an unrighteous act to pronounce him just, who has sinned, and come short of the glory of God, if Christ had not been set forth as a propitiation for our sins, and thus provided for us a complete righteousness. And this method of justification which God has devised and made known, is so contrived as to exclude all boasting. "By what law? Of works? nay; but by the law of faith." "Therefore, we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." And the method of justification is the same to Jews and Gentiles; "Seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith."

#### SECTION IV.

THE ABOVE DECLARATIONS OF PAUL RELATE TO ALL WORKS OF EVERY KIND.

To evade the plain testimonies of Scripture, which have been adduced, some have maintained, that the only works which the apostle excludes from being any ground of justification, are works in obedience to the ceremonial law, or the Mosaic rites, on which the Pharisees depended for salvation; but that it was no part of his design to exclude good works of a moral or evangelical kind.

In answer to this objection, it may be remarked, first, that

what is assumed in it cannot be true, because the inspired writer assures us, that what he said on this subject related to Gentiles as much as Jews ; but we know, that the Mosaical rites were not given to the Gentiles, and they, therefore, could not trust in the ceremonial law, or boast themselves in works of this kind.

Again, the sins which the apostle enumerates to prove, that both Gentiles and Jews were all guilty before God, are all transgressions of the moral law, as may be seen in the first and third chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. It was a law which was not to be abrogated, but established by the Christian dispensation, which was not true in regard to the ceremonial law. It was that law by which is the knowledge of sin, and which said "thou shalt not covet," that law which is "spiritual"—which was ordained unto life, but now was found to be unto death, all which things agree to the moral law, but not at all to the ceremonial law, "which was a shadow of good things to come, and was now ready to vanish away." To which we may add, that all works are excluded of which men might boast; but they will be as much disposed to boast of moral, as ceremonial works, therefore the apostle excludes those as well as these. And finally, there is no just ground for this distinction, in regard to an obedience which is to be the ground of justification. Ceremonial or positive duties, commanded by God, are as truly binding until abrogated, as duties of the other class, and when rightly performed, they are as truly acceptable to God. Indeed, in essence, what is called a ceremonial duty, is moral, and the act as really, and truly holy as any other act, when performed, as it should be, from love to God, and with a view to his glory. If, therefore, our own works of any kind, were a proper ground of justification these should be included. And as to imperfection, it cleaves to moral duties as much as to positive. It is evident, therefore, that there is no just ground for the opinion, that when the apostle declared, 'that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified,' he meant ceremonial works only.

Another evasion is, that the works excluded by Paul from having any part in our justification before God, are "dead works," done by an unregenerate person ; or such works as the Papists affirm may be performed by free-will before grace is received. To which it may be replied, that there is not a word in all that the apostle has written on this subject, which gives the least countenance to this opinion. There was no need to asseverate with so much emphasis and so repeatedly that

*dead works*, or those which are not holy, or genuine acts of obedience, cannot procure justification. But as this false opinion is not much insisted on at present, at least among Protestants, it may be dismissed without further discussion, with this single remark, that it will be demonstrated in the sequel, that the most holy obedience of the most holy men forms no part of that righteousness by which they are justified in the sight of God; and this will show that all the works of men of every kind are excluded in the business of a sinner's justification.

### SECTION V.

#### THE ACT OF FAITH IS NOT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS THE GROUND OF OUR JUSTIFICATION IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.

The theory of justification which considers the act of believing the ground of our acceptance with God is, perhaps, the most plausible of any of the erroneous schemes of justification, for the single reason that it has the appearance of scriptural support. This is pure Arminianism, as held and inculcated by Arminius himself; also by Limborch, and by Whitby. The foundation of this theory is found in Gen. xv. 6. "And he, (Abraham) believed in the LORD, and he counted it to him for righteousness." Which is cited by Paul when discoursing on justification. "For what saith the Scripture, Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." This theory has the advantage too of seeming to agree with those texts which assert that we are justified by faith. The great difficulty in this plan of justification is, that it represents God as reckoning or imputing for righteousness, that which is not a righteousness, commensurate with the demands of the law. This they say he does by a gracious *acceptation*; receiving in favour, *that*, as a complete righteousness, which considered in itself, is not such. That a single act, and that an imperfect one, should be judged to be a complete justifying righteousness, is to ascribe to God an erroneous judgment; or, as grounding his judicial acts upon a supposition acknowledged to be false, which is a doctrine that never can be admitted. It is inconsistent both with truth and righteousness. It is maintained, indeed, that Christ by his death has merited the right of establishing a new covenant upon terms adapted to the present condition of men; for they hold, that the power of believing in Christ was not lost

by the fall, as not being a blessing included in the first covenant. But if the sinner may be justified before God by a single act of faith, instead of a perfect obedience to the law, why might not that have been done without resorting to so costly a sacrifice? The death of Christ, however meritorious, can never render it proper in the divine government, to consider things different from what they really are.

It is also a solid objection to this theory, that while Paul sets up an entire opposition between faith and works, faith according to Arminius, is the greatest of all works, being, in fact, a substitute for all obedience. If faith itself is our justifying righteousness, then it justifies as a work, as truly as any other works could. And as the express design of this gratuitous method of justification was utterly to exclude boasting, upon this theory that end cannot be attained; because if a man is justified on account of the act of believing, and that act he can perform by the power of free will, he has as much ground of boasting as he could possibly have, if he had been justified by other works.

It is also an objection that the faith of God's elect being exceedingly different in strength, it would seem to follow, that those believers who exercised a strong faith would possess a more perfect justification than those who had a true but feeble exercise of faith. On account of these difficulties, and to take advantage of what is said in Scripture of justification by works, the modern Arminians have abandoned the scheme so far as it confines the righteousness which is the ground of our justification to faith alone; and under the name *faith*, or in connexion with it, include the whole of evangelical obedience.

## SECTION VI.

### JUSTIFICATION IN THE SIGHT OF GOD IS NOT BY EVANGELICAL OBEDIENCE IN WHOLE, OR IN PART.

By evangelical obedience is meant that obedience which flows from a genuine faith, or those good works which are the fruit of regeneration.

We are ready to admit; yea, we strenuously maintain, that such obedience is connected with justification, and furnishes the only Scriptural evidence that we are in a justified state. But two things may be inseparably conjoined, as blessings of the covenant of grace, and yet, may be perfectly distinct. It would, in our opinion, be much nearer the truth to



say, that evangelical obedience was the fruit and consequence of our justification, than that evangelical obedience is the condition of our justification. The truth is, our persons must be accepted in Christ before we can perform any evangelical works; and these works when performed, can only be accepted as the sincere obedience of those whose persons are already accepted in Christ; that is, who are already justified. Besides the positive testimonies of the word of God, that justification is not by the deeds of the law, nor by works of righteousness which we have done, there are two fatal objections to this theory of justification; the first has already been brought into view; and if justification takes place when the sinner believes, it is manifestly unanswerable. It is, that we are fully justified before we have performed one act of evangelical obedience, except believing in Christ. That which comes after and proceeds from another thing, can never be its cause.

The other objection is equally conclusive, which is, that our evangelical obedience in this life is always imperfect, and an imperfect righteousness never can be the ground of a sentence of justification, pronounced by an infinitely righteous Judge.

To which may be added what has been already observed, that this theory destroys the strong opposition which Paul institutes between works and faith. According to this scheme, justification is as much by works as it can be on any other. Paul declares that it is not by the deeds of the law—not by works of righteousness which we have done. To him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned of grace but of debt.—“We are justified freely, by grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,” therefore not by our own evangelical obedience. And by this scheme, all boasting is not excluded, as the ground of our justification is, our own works.

The adherence to a covenant of works, under which man was created, is so strong, that it is exceedingly difficult to induce him to seek life in any other way. Reason seems to dictate, that this must be the method of acceptance, to obey and live; and conscience, unenlightened by grace, urges to the same course. Every man, when first awakened, is ready to inquire, “What must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” And it is necessary in order to convince men of their helplessness, to urge the demands of the law; to tell sinners, as our Saviour did the rich, young ruler, “keep the commandments.” We need not be surprised, therefore, that men guided by carnal reason, and whose pride is not sufficiently humbled, turn

themselves every way to avoid the necessity of receiving the humbling doctrine of salvation by grace, without any dependence on their own works, legal or evangelical.

The objections which have been urged against evangelical obedience, as our justifying righteousness, have been attempted to be evaded by some one of the following methods.

First, by maintaining that there is a twofold justification; the first by faith, when the sinner believes; the second by works, when he has performed them; and especially, when he is judged according to his works, at the last day. But if our evangelical obedience is truly the ground of our justification, what is called the first justification is no justification at all. How can a man be justified until the obedience is rendered which constitutes his justifying righteousness? If a man become truly justified in the sight of God, he needs no second justification. As the sentence of justification includes a full pardon and acceptance of the person, what more in the way of justification can he want, or possess?

There may be, and is, a manifestation of the justified state of the believer, both in this world before men, when he shows his faith by his works; and at the day of judgment, when his works of piety and mercy shall be brought forth to view, to prove that he is one of Christ's brethren; and that his future reward may be equitably apportioned according to the number and excellence of the good works performed in the body. But I repeat it again, there cannot be a twofold justification of the sinner, unless the first should be annulled; because it comprehends every thing, if it be a true justification, which can be included in this act. When a man is pardoned, and adopted as a child of God, and made an heir of the heavenly inheritance, and a joint-heir with Christ, how can he, as to the law, and as to his title to eternal life, receive any thing more by a second justification?

This being a plain case, and not easily got over, some have said that we were justified by faith, and kept in a justified state by good works. But this is a way of talking so foreign to the Scriptures, and resorted to by so few in our days, that we have no need to stop to refute it.

A more consistent method of evading the difficulty is to maintain, as is done by Dr. Macknight, that there is properly no such thing as justification before the day of judgment; and when the word is used in relation to the present state, it is to be understood as not employed in its strict and proper sense. Now this is consistent. The only objection to the theory is, that it is as directly contradictory to the whole

tenor of Scripture, on this subject, as any thing can be. Never for the sake of a consistent theory did any man set himself in opposition to a greater array of plain and pointed texts. There is no system which was ever conceived, that may not as easily be sustained as this. Where, according to this scheme, are the high and glorious privileges of true Christians, of which the apostles speak in terms so exalted? But we will not condescend to reason this point. It carries its own refutation on its front, and therefore needs none from us; and accordingly has had few advocates. Since we have mentioned the peculiar opinion of this learned man, we will further observe, that by *works of law* by which no flesh can now be justified, he understands, a perfect obedience to the law, which none can now perform; but by faith, as opposed to this perfect obedience, he understands, a gratuitous justification, on account of our imperfect obedience; the former would be meritorious; but this being only a sincere but imperfect obedience can give no claim, on the ground of merit; and therefore the counting this as a righteousness, is a matter of grace or favour, because it might have been withheld.\*

The whole force of the objection against a sentence of justification being founded on an imperfect righteousness, lies against this scheme; and the argument need not be repeated.

To obviate this objection, which every one that understands the terms, must admit to have decisive force, two methods have been resorted to; or perhaps, they may both be reduced to one. It has been supposed, and is now strenuously maintained by a large society who deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the ground of a sinner's justification, that the law of innocence, or the law given to Adam and to angels, in a state of integrity, is not now in force; but that a milder law, better adapted to the fallen condition of man, has been introduced by Christ, the Mediator: so that now under the Gospel, the old moral law is not the rule of judgment in the justification of a sinner, but God, through the grace of Christ, accepts of obedience to the evangelical law, or "law of liberty." Our first remark on this scheme is, that it is repugnant to first principles in theology. The moral law is in principle and in the nature of the obedience which it requires, immutable. This law arising out of the relations which subsist between God and his accountable creature, can never be abrogated, nor changed; unless you

\* See Dr. Macknight's Essay on Justification, prefixed to his Translation of the Epistle to the Galatians.

could conceive of a change in God. It must remain eternally the same. It is God's published rule of government; and to suppose a change, would be to suppose his whole moral government altered.

The second remark, on this theory is, that we read of no such relaxed or mitigated law in Scripture. Some, indeed, have supposed that Christ added to the moral law, and made it more spiritual and perfect; but this is also a mistake. Christ expounded the law, and inculcated its true nature and spirituality; but every where he recognizes the same law as that given to the people by Moses, and summarily comprehended in the ten commandments. But to suppose that he came to relax the law, so that it might require less love and obedience, is far more revolting. It is, indeed, a refined system of Antinomianism. If the moral law could be relaxed in its demands, it might be removed altogether, and then there would be no need of justification.

But we ask to know precisely, what this new law is? What are its requirements? If we are not bound to love God with all the heart, and mind, and strength, what degree of love and obedience are now required? The answer to such questions has never been given; and cannot be given. It is loosely said, that repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, accompanied with Gospel obedience, are the things required to our justification. But still we ask, must these duties be perfect; or does any man repent as perfectly as he ought, or believe as firmly and constantly as he ought? If not, then we are in the same difficulty as if we were under the moral law; that is, an imperfect obedience to the Gospel is made the ground of our justification. The relaxation of the law, as to this objection, therefore, answers no purpose. We must have a perfect righteousness, to authorize a just judge to pronounce a sentence of justification.

This brings us up to the second method of obviating the objection, which is, to maintain the doctrine of perfection, or pardon from all sin, in this life. This doctrine has not only been maintained by fanatics, but by many others; and, indeed, is essential to this scheme of justification, by obedience to the new law of grace. For if we cannot render a perfect righteousness to this mitigated law, we might as well have remained under the old Adamic law. If an imperfect obedience to the Gospel is sufficient to justify, an imperfect obedience to the law might have done the same. It seems a necessary part of this scheme, therefore, that our obedience, in order to win justification, should be perfect. But though

this inference seems plain enough, there remain some formidable difficulties in the way. As first, even if perfection be attainable in this life, it is admitted that it is the privilege of few to possess it. How then can the many who remain imperfect be justified, by a law, to which they have not rendered a complete obedience? This is not all. When we stand before God in judgment, we must account for the actions of our whole lives, and even those who are supposed to have arrived at perfection, reached this point, after years of sin and imperfection, by whatever law you judge them. If a saint becomes perfect at the last hour of life, will an hour's perfect obedience answer the demands of the law for a whole life? Surely not. Then, we see that even the doctrine of perfection, if all attained it, would not remove the difficulty. The truth is, it cannot be removed.

Those in New England, who claim for themselves, peculiarly, the denomination of "Hopkinsians," but who are more properly the disciples of Dr. Emmons, maintain a doctrine on the subject of justification, as well as on some other points, which among Protestants, is new and somewhat startling. They hold, if we understand their views, that Christ, as Mediator, did nothing else for our salvation, but by his sufferings make an atonement for our sins. They reject entirely his righteousness as imputed for justification, and teach, that while believing penitents receive the remission of all their sins, through Christ's atonement, they acquire a title to eternal life by their own obedience; which they do not hesitate to say is meritorious; or deserves the reward which is bestowed on them. Still they maintain, that all Christians upon earth are imperfect in holiness; but their notion of this imperfection is, that it does not consist in any deficiency in the particular acts or exercises of holiness; each of which they suppose to be as perfect as it can be, but in the intermixture of sinful acts. Their opinion is, that an act cannot be partly sinful and partly holy, but must be either the one or the other, entirely. Hence it follows, that if all the sinful actions be forgiven through the atonement, the holy acts, which are perfectly conformed to the law, will merit the promised rewards of obedience. This theory is connected with other peculiar and novel opinions, but as it is evidently on the wane, it will be unnecessary to enter into any discussion of the doctrine of justification as held by its abettors. Properly speaking, according to this theory, though believers obtain pardon in this life, they are not justified until their course of obedience is completed. Their title to eternal life is acquired by their own

works ; and their obedience must be finished before the title is secured.

If that part of the system, which supposes all holy acts to be perfectly holy, could be sustained, there would be something plausible in the theory. But it is not more a matter of conscious certainty, that we have sinful exercises, than that our holy affections are deficient in their intensity. When we feel reverence for God, is the emotion as deep as it should be? Who among men, ever loved Christ, for one moment, as fervently as he ought? When we feel gratitude for the divine goodness, are we ever as thankful in degree, as we should be? Every one must answer these questions for himself; the appeal can only be made to experience. But the opinion, it is probable, arose out of the theory, and the origin of the error, as we must esteem it, is to be traced to incorrect views of the nature of sin; which they make to consist only in positive acts. But if sin may consist also in *defect*, and if this be truly the origin and formal nature of sin, as almost all sound divines have held, then, while there is sincere love to God, the affection may not, in intensity, be as strong as it should be. And that this is the real state of the case may be known by an appeal to our own consciousness.

## SECTION VII.

**JUSTIFICATION DOES NOT CONSIST MERELY IN THE PARDON OF OUR SINS, BUT ALSO IN THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PERSONS AS RIGHTEOUS.**

This discussion might with propriety have come under the head of the "*Nature of Justification*," which involved the true meaning of the word; and there, the subject was adverted to; but as this is a main point in our controversy with the Arminians, the consideration of it has been reserved for this place. The object, doubtless is, to get rid of the imputation of Christ's active obedience; for if justification is nothing more than the pardon of sin, then, manifestly, there is no necessity for the righteousness of Christ, properly so called. In defence of their opinion, they allege, that the Scriptures speak of justification and pardon as the same thing; and that the law cannot, at the same time, have a two-fold claim on the sinner both for suffering and obedience. It is their opinion, that, if we obey the law, we are not bound to endure the

penalty ; so, if we suffer the penalty there can be no demand for obedience, for the time past. This, therefore, may be considered a cardinal point in this controversy. If we cannot overthrow the Arminian foundation as now exhibited, we shall fail in establishing the doctrine of our standards. But we feel a strong confidence that we have truth on our side, and if it should not be fully vindicated, it should be attributed to the unskilfulness of the advocate who has undertaken its defence.

Deliverance from the guilt of sin is that which the convinced sinner is led most earnestly to seek. There can of course be no justification of the person unless sin is pardoned, for unpardoned sin is a state of condemnation. Justification must, of necessity, therefore, include the forgiveness of sins. And as this is the blessing first sought, and most needed, the whole effect and consequences of Christ's mediatorial work, while under the law, is often expressed by the "remission of sins ;" and the blessings procured by the active obedience of Christ are in these cases to be understood as included. Just as in the expiatory sufferings of Christ, in common, nothing but his blood is mentioned ; whereas his most bitter and oppressive sufferings were in his soul, without bodily wounds. But though it is very common to comprehend the whole of the blessings purchased by Christ by the remission of sins ; yet in other passages other blessings are expressly mentioned. Indeed, every passage in which Christ's mediatorial work is designated by the word *righteousness*, ought to be considered as inculcating the doctrine that he fulfilled the law for *us* by his active obedience. But as this point will be fully discussed in the sequel, it is unnecessary to say more in this place.

The pardon of sin alone, can with no propriety be denominated justification. Pardon and justification are not only distinct, but in common cases, utterly incompatible. A culprit tried and condemned, may among men be pardoned, but it would be a solecism to say, that such a man was justified. Pardon supposes that the law has been broken, and its penalty incurred ; justification supposes, that upon trial, the person arraigned is found to have complied with all the demands of the law. The same incompatibility would exist between pardon and justification, in regard to the sinner, under the Gospel, if nothing took place but a mere remission of past sins. The name justification, in that case could not have been properly used. But by the plan of Salvation through Christ, there is not only a ground for pardon, but

there is rendered to the law a **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, which lays the foundation for an act of justification. By pardon, the sinner is freed from condemnation, by justification, he is entitled to the heavenly inheritance. This, Christ has purchased for him, by his perfect obedience, unto death.

But the dispute is not merely about the propriety or impropriety of a term; there are important principles involved in this controversy. We maintain, that the law when violated has a double claim on the transgressor. It still retains its original demand of obedience, of which he never can divest himself; and it now binds him over to the endurance of the penalty. To suppose that suffering the penalty, is an equivalent for obedience, and entitles to the same rewards is extremely absurd. It would be to suppose that Jehovah who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, would be as well pleased with sin, accompanied with its due punishment, as with perfect obedience to his own most holy law. The enduring a penalty in his own person, or by another, never can entitle any one to any thing else than exemption from that which he has already endured. To illustrate this principle by a familiar case, let us suppose a law enacted in the state, which promises an inheritance to him who shall obey it without one failure, but threatens ten years imprisonment to him who shall transgress its precepts: a person under this law incurs the penalty, and suffers his ten years in prison. When this is suffered, has he the same rights and claims, as if he had rendered an unsinning obedience? Would any man in his sober senses believe, that when he came out of the penitentiary, he had as good a right to the promised inheritance, as the citizen who had perfectly obeyed the law? And if the penalty were endured by a substitute, the effect would be the same. If a surety would secure the inheritance for him, he must obey the law in his stead, as well as suffer its penalty. Hence it appears evident, that justification includes more than merely the remission of sins, or it would be no justification; and although pardon is included in justification; yet the transaction receives this denomination not from the forgiveness of sin, but from the imputation of righteousness, by which the believer is constituted righteous; and by which a title to eternal life is procured for him by the merit of his surety.

Justification, therefore, is not merely the forgiveness of sin, but in addition to this, a declaration that the justified person has a right to the blessings promised. He not only obtains deliverance from the sentence of condemnation, but instantly



is constituted an heir of God,—a joint-heir with Christ to the heavenly inheritance.

### SECTION VIII.

#### THE ONLY MERITORIOUS GROUND OF A SINNER'S JUSTIFICATION IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST.

By the righteousness of Christ, we mean, all that he did and suffered to satisfy the broken law of God, for those whose salvation he undertook to secure. It has been shown, that the law has a double demand upon the sinner, both of which must be satisfied before a sentence of justification can righteously be pronounced. But although the law has these two demands, the one for suffering on account of the penalty incurred, and the other for perfect obedience in order to obtain a right to the promised reward; yet it is not necessary, to attempt curiously to distinguish between obedience and suffering in the satisfaction of Christ; for as has been correctly observed by Dr. Owen and others, 'in suffering he obeyed, and in obeying he suffered.' It is sufficient, that we find in him, a full satisfaction both to the penal and preceptive requisitions of the law. As the law requires perfect holiness in the nature of man; so Christ's nature was holy. He was in all respects like other men, except that he had no stain of original sin on his soul. He was without sin—"undefiled," in infancy a perfectly holy child. His actions during every stage of his life, and in all the circumstances and relations in which he stood, were perfectly conformable to the precepts of the law. And as he performed every duty which it enjoined, so he abstained from every thing forbidden in thought, word, and deed. The eye of a holy God saw in him no sin, original or actual; neither of omission or commission; neither in the secret purposes and imaginations of the heart, nor in his external conduct and conversation. In his obedience the law was magnified and made honourable. He furnished the best exposition of the law in his public teaching, and what he inculcated, he exemplified, and illustrated in his whole life, from the beginning to the end. He performed all moral duties in relation to God and man with undeviating correctness, and attended on all the positive institutions, then in force. In childhood he was circumcised; when of sufficient age he attended on the stated institutions of the Mosaic religion; and

as God had commissioned John to baptize the people for the remission of sins, he came and was baptized in Jordan; giving as a reason, that it became him "to fulfil all righteousness;" that is, as he had placed himself under the law, it behoved him to render obedience to all that the law commanded. But it is evident, that he could neither be circumcised or baptized for the removal of any impurity from himself; neither could he join in the sacrifices which were daily offered, with any relation to his own person; but whatever the law enjoined upon others *that* he performed; thus rendering an obedience such as they had failed to perform.

It has been objected, that if Christ obeyed the law for us, he should perform the identical acts which every one for whom he obeyed was bound to perform, but this was impossible, because he did not sustain all the relations which they sustained. He could not perform the duties of a father, of a husband or wife, of a servant, of a magistrate, &c., therefore he could not render an obedience which would satisfy the law for us.

This objection is founded on very contracted views of the subject. When one places himself under a law, to render an obedience in behalf of another, it is no how necessary that he should perform the very same external duties. These vary in the same person, with every change of circumstances. What the law requires is a perfect obedience, and such an obedience must arise out of the existing relations of the person performing it. It is a matter of no consequence what the particular external acts of obedience may be, the only question is, are they conformable to the demands of the law under which the substitute is placed. But the objection most commonly insisted on against the active obedience of Christ as a necessary part of our justifying righteousness, from Socinus downward, is, that he owed obedience for himself, and therefore could perform no works of supererogation, which can be applied to the benefit of others. Socinians may with some propriety urge this objection, because they think that Christ was no more than man; and it is admitted that every mere creature is bound to obedience for himself, to the utmost extent of his powers. But it is a matter of grief to find men claiming to be orthodox, and who are so, so far as relates to the person of the Mediator, borrowing this often refuted objection of heretics.

In answer, we say, that Christ, though he must be holy, was under no necessity to place himself under the obligation of any law made for mere creatures. The obedience which

Christ rendered, though performed in his human nature, was the obedience of the God-man, the obedience of him who is Lord of lords and King of kings. It could not be that He, whom all the angels of God are commanded to worship, should be subject to the law, except so far as he voluntarily placed himself under it. Indeed, the human nature of our Lord is not a distinct person. This nature never was any other than a constituent part of the divine person of the Mediator. Besides, his putting himself under the law was not to gain any thing for himself, but to obey for us. If it be said, that having taken upon him the obligation of the law, his obedience was due; we answer yes, it was due for the end which he had in view in placing himself under the law; that is to obey, for his covenanted people. And if that voluntary obligation would render it impossible that his obedience should be for the justification of others, the very same objection would lie against his suffering for others; because in the covenant of redemption he took on himself an obligation to suffer as much as he did to obey. It might then with just as much propriety be said, that he suffered for himself, because by his own engagement he was bound to suffer, as that he obeyed for himself.

The principle may be illustrated by a memorable fact in Ecclesiastical History. Paulinus, bishop of Nola, in the fifth century, expended all his large estates, in redeeming from captivity his brethren enslaved by the Goths and Visigoths, who had overrun the empire. When his resources were exhausted, a poor widow came to him to represent her sad and destitute condition, in consequence of her only son, on whom she depended, being carried as a slave, into Africa. Paulinus, whose charity seems to have had no limit, immediately went over to Africa, and having found the young man, he entered into an agreement with his master, to take the place of the young man, and become a slave, that he might return to his destitute mother; and, accordingly, he continued under the yoke for some months, until his master happened to discover his high standing, and sent him home. Here then is a case in point. Paulinus was under no obligation to obey this barbarian, until for the redemption of the captive youth, he consented to take his place, and submit to all the hard laws of servitude. But can any one suppose that because he was now bound to obedience he could only perform it for himself? No: the very reason why he took this place and came under this obligation was for another. The case is too plain to need any further explanation.

As the obedience of the Mediator is expressly mentioned as the ground of our justification by Paul, where he says "As by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, (or condemned) so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," (or be justified,) the opposers of the imputation of Christ's active obedience have alleged, that by obedience here, we should not understand his holy life, but his obedience in dying; and they bring up another text, in which it is said he was "obedient unto death," to show that not his general obedience, but a particular act of obedience, namely, in dying for us, is intended. Now, for the sake of argument, conceding all that these contend for, the principle will not be altered. It will still be true, that we are justified by the active obedience of the Mediator. The only difference is, that according to the orthodox doctrine, all his holy acts go to make up his righteousness, by which we are justified; but by this hypothesis, one act of obedience is that by which believers are constituted righteous. But this is a mere hypothesis, having no shadow of proof, except the interpretation of the text in Philippians. The expression "obedient unto death" does not properly signify a single act of obedience in dying; it properly means an obedience continued even unto death; or rather an obedience which did not falter, even when a cruel and accursed death was to be endured. If the apostle had intended to express the idea of a single act of obedience in dying, he would have employed another form of expression. If God cannot be just and justify the ungodly, without a perfect righteousness, as we have in a former part of this treatise endeavoured to show, then the active obedience of Christ must be the ground of this sentence, or no one of Adam's sinful posterity ever can be justified in the sight of God; for there is no other righteousness which is in all respects perfect; for even if perfection were attainable in this life, the perfection of duration would be wanting. He who pleads justification on the ground of perfect obedience, must exhibit such an obedience through the whole course of his life; for the just Judge surveys the whole life of the creature whom he declares to be justified, as has before been shown.

An opinion has lately met with favour among a certain class of American theologians, which we believe to be new. It is, that justification by grace, has no respect to the law whatever. It is a scheme of bringing the sinner into a state of reconciliation without any satisfaction to law or justice. Literally, it is "without law." And this not only respects the active obedience of Christ for his elect people, but his

atonement, which they deny to be an endurance of the penalty of the law; but merely a public exhibition which comes in the place of a legal process. Thus they utterly subvert the righteousness of Christ, as it has hitherto been held by the orthodox. In support of their opinion they plead that a full satisfaction is inconsistent with gratuitous pardon; that none can possibly satisfy the law, either as to its precept or penalty but the sinner himself, because the law has no claim on any other; and that God is not bound by the holiness of his nature, to execute the penalty of the law; and therefore may take the sinner into favour, notwithstanding the demands of the law against him; which demands, they assert, will remain forever unsatisfied, even while the sinner is saved. Yet they maintain, that God could not consistently with the good of the universe pardon sin, without giving a signal exhibition of his dislike to it, and his settled purpose to punish it. On this account, he sent his own well beloved Son to die an ignominious death for sin, that is, to show his views and feelings of its evil nature. By this device, a way is opened for the gratuitous pardon of every one who repents of his sin and believes the Gospel. If asked, whether the sufferings of Christ are *vicarious*, they promptly answer in the affirmative; but when they come to explain their meaning, it is far enough from the orthodox doctrine of substitution, and vicarious satisfaction to the law, in the room of the sinner. It is something entirely different from this legal process, but which comes in the place of it, and is therefore properly called *vicarious*. This is a specimen of *new divinity*, which is now zealously inculcated from the pulpit, and from the press; and that too by men, who have adopted without exception, as their creed, the Confession and Catechisms of our Church!

In refutation of this theory, which is in fact, "another gospel," I have only room for a few remarks.

And the first is, that the word *justification* can have no intelligible meaning, unless it be a sentence according to law. An unjust judge may disregard the law and justify the wicked, and condemn the righteous; but a righteous judge will impartially try every person arraigned before him, by the law of the land, and will pronounce sentence accordingly, justifying the righteous, and condemning the wicked. And God the Judge of all the earth, who is infinitely righteous, will surely never cast his own holy law behind his back, and disregard its demands, when he pronounces a sentence of justification. If he cannot deny himself, he cannot cast dis-

honour upon his own law. Every sentence of justification must be either a just sentence, or an unrighteous sentence; but how can this be determined but by ascertaining whether it is according to law, or the contrary. In this case, it is admitted that it is a sentence contrary to law; which still condemns the sinner. How then can God be just, while he justifies the sinner? It is in vain to allege, that this scheme of pardon answers all the purposes of the penalty of the law; for, if the sinner bound to suffer, is taken away from under the law, without satisfaction to its demands, the law is not only dishonoured, but completely subverted; which is in direct contradiction of what the Lord Jesus Christ asserts, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil." "I came to magnify the law, and make it honourable." And also in direct opposition to Paul's solemn testimony, where he says, "Do we make void the law through faith, God forbid; yea we establish the law."

Again, the penalty of a holy, violated law, was the only thing which stood in the way. Mere sufferings of any one are of no value, except in relation to some end. The sufferings of Christ could no otherwise open a way of pardon but by removing the penalty of the law; but they could have no tendency to remove the penalty, but by his enduring it. Sufferings not required by law and justice must have been unjust sufferings, and never could effect any good. ~~God's hatred of sin, for it was not the punishment of sin;~~ Such an exhibition could not have the effect of demonstrating God's hatred of sin, for it was not the punishment of sin; nor could it make the impression on the world, that the Ruler of the Universe would hereafter punish sin; for, according to this theory, sin goes unpunished, and dreadful sufferings are inflicted on the innocent to whom no sin is imputed. This scheme as really subverts the true doctrine of atonement, as that of Socinus; and no reason appears, why it was necessary that the person making this exhibition should be a divine person.

But if the righteousness of Christ, consisting of his perfect obedience to the law and of his meritorious sufferings, be the only foundation of a sinner's justification, why do we not find it clearly and repeatedly inculcated in the Scriptures? In answer to this question, we say, that this doctrine is taught in the Bible with abundant perspicuity. As it relates to the vicarious sufferings of the Redeemer, every one who reads the Scriptures will find the doctrine inculcated, every where, and in every form; not merely in words, but by expressive emblematical ceremonies; especially by the bloody sacrifices

of the law. No ingenuity nor sophistry can ever obscure this prominent doctrine of divine revelation. It would seem to be the centre of the whole system; and is equally conspicuous in the Old and the New Testament. Take this doctrine from the Bible, and you have destroyed the whole plan of redemption.

But the difficulty with many does not relate to the expiatory sufferings of Christ for the redemption of his people, but only to the necessity of his active obedience to the law in their behalf. Let us hear, therefore, the testimony of Scripture on this point. Christ says "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy but *to fulfil*," (Matt. v. 17.) In Rom. v. 18, 19, we have this doctrine taught with great clearness, "Therefore 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 the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Nothing can be more express than this testimony. 'The righteousness which is here made the ground of justification is explained to be Christ's obedience; and that this is his active obedience is evident, because nothing else can properly be called *righteousness* and *obedience*. All obedience is active. Mere suffering cannot properly be denominated "obedience." It deserves also to be remarked, that this righteousness and obedience are contrasted with the offence and disobedience of Adam, which shows that as by the latter we must understand the breach of the law, by the former we must understand the fulfilment of the law. Another strong proof of our doctrine is contained in Phil. iii. 9, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." To the same purpose is that in 1 Cor. i. 30. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and *righteousness*, and sanctification, and redemption." Here righteousness being distinguished from sanctification, must relate to our justification; and thus the enumeration of the blessings received through Christ will be complete. He affords his people instruction, furnishes a righteousness for their justification; obtains their sanctification, and finally, their complete and eternal redemption. And in the twenty first verse of the fifth chapter of the second Epistle to the Corinthians, it is written "For he made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the

righteousness of God in him." And in Rom. x. 3, 4. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." What in one place is termed 'God's righteousness,' in the latter verse is described as being produced by Christ's becoming "the end of the law," that is the accomplishment, or fulfilment of the law. And by the prophet Jeremiah the Messiah is emphatically called "JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS," Jer. xxiii. 6.

## SECTION IX.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST CAN NO OTHERWISE JUSTIFY THE BELIEVER BUT BY BEING IMPUTED TO HIM.

Whatever Christ has done or suffered for our salvation, in order that it may be available to us, must in some way become *ours*, or be set down to our account. That act of God by which this is done, has long been called *imputation*; which is, simply reckoning to us what Christ as Mediator has done, and treating us as though we had done or suffered the same. It is only upon the principle of substitution, that salvation by a Mediator is conceivable or possible. What obstacles stand in the way of the salvation of a sinner? They are twofold, the penalty of the law which denounces a curse upon every one who transgresses, and depravity of nature which incapacitates the creature for enjoying the heavenly inheritance. He who undertakes to save a single soul, must remove both these obstacles. The latter can be removed by divine efficiency alone; but the former requires something more than the mere exertion of power. No exertion of power has any tendency to satisfy the demands of a broken law. The Mediator can remove this obstacle in no other way, as appears to us, but by placing himself under the law, and rendering such an obedience, and enduring such sufferings, as will be satisfactory to divine justice. The lawgiver might, indeed, have insisted on the punishment of the transgressor, and the execution of the law upon him in person. The acceptance of satisfaction from a substitute, is a matter of sovereign grace. No creature could, therefore, have known, that such a plan of mercy was practicable, until God revealed the mystery. But since he has made known his



divine counsel, in regard to this matter, we can see a wisdom in the plan, which is truly astonishing. The Son of God becomes incarnate, obeys the law perfectly in our nature, and to furnish a justifying righteousness for the sinner, &c. subjects himself to the penalty of the law, as an expiation for our sins. The law having thus been fulfilled and honoured, God can be just and justify the ungodly who believeth in Jesus. This righteousness is complete, and God is well pleased with the work of the Redeemer; but it can answer no purpose to him, unless it is some how made over to him. The law still charges him with innumerable transgressions, and his legal standing is no how altered by the mere fact that the law has been satisfied by another. That satisfaction must by some means be so connected with him, that his relation to the law shall be changed. If such an appropriation of Christ's work to his benefit cannot be made, as some tell us, then salvation is impossible, and Christ has died in vain. But God has told us that this righteousness may become ours; that he may become our righteousness; and we the righteousness of God in him. He does become the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. But how can his righteousness become ours? How can we be justified by his obedience? In no conceivable way, but by the imputation of his righteousness to us. No part of evangelical doctrine has met with a more determined opposition, than the doctrine of imputation. It has been loaded with reproaches, as a doctrine the most unreasonable, the most dangerous, and the most impious. It is a remarkable circumstance, however, that all the objections which have been made to it are founded on a misapprehension, or a misrepresentation of the true nature of imputation. It has been objected, that it implies the transfer of personal acts, and the communication of the moral character of one to another, which things are manifestly impossible. But this is an entire mistake. Imputation implies no change, whatever, in the inherent character of the person to whom righteousness is imputed; or to speak more correctly, though there is a renovation of nature effected at the same time, this is not by the act of imputation. By this act, the legal relations of the sinner are changed. Whereas, before righteousness was imputed, he was condemned, he is now justified. His guilt, or liableness to punishment, is taken away, and the Judge views him as standing fair in the eye of law; not considered in his own righteousness, but as clothed with the righteousness of the SURETY. His debt is cancelled, because another has paid it, and has caused it to be

set to his credit. We might, indeed, express the same idea without employing the word *impute*. No doubt, some, through prejudice against this word, do so; and firmly hold the doctrine, while they reject the language in which it has commonly been expressed. And some are disposed to ask, why be tenacious of a word? Why not avoid its use, since so many are offended by it? To which we answer, 1. Because the term is Scriptural. 2. It is convenient and expressive; we do not know any single word which so exactly expresses the truth, in this matter. 3. Because the opposition to the phrase is not all; there is an aversion to the doctrine itself; and history teaches that errorists and heretics are accustomed to make the first attack on the established language of orthodoxy; but this is but a cover for their design to subvert the doctrine itself.

Again, it has been objected to the doctrine of imputed righteousness, that it is nothing else than to ascribe to God a false judgment, esteeming those to be righteous whom he knows to be not really so. They have represented the word *imputed* to be synonymous with *putative*, and have so far mistaken the whole thing as to assert, that a putative righteousness, was a mere suppositious thing; an erroneous judgment or estimation, which cannot be attributed to God without blasphemy. Now, we are surprized at such misrepresentations of our views. There is nothing false or suppositious in the case. When God imputes the righteousness of Christ to a sinner, he actually bestows it upon him for all the purposes of his complete justification. The sinner owes a righteousness to the law, which he cannot pay; but God in mercy reckons to him the perfect righteousness of another. For the sake then of Christ's satisfaction to the precept and penalty of the law he is pardoned and accepted as having a perfect righteousness in his Surety. The Psalmist says "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." The non-imputation of sin is not a false judgment, but a gracious act by which no charge is made against the transgressor on account of his iniquities: they are remitted. So when God imputeth righteousness, the guilty sinner has his legal responsibilities changed. These are transferred to another who has borne the curse in his stead, and the righteousness of another is so charged to his account, that by it he is accepted as fully as if he had in his own person rendered a complete righteousness.

The idea of imputation is well understood in the transactions of men. As when one owes a debt for the payment of

which a friend makes himself responsible, there is a transfer of legal obligation to the sponsor, and if the debtor be unable to pay, the surety is bound. When in law one man becomes bail for the appearance of another to answer on some certain day, he enters into a recognizance by which he incurs a penalty if the other should fail. But it will probably be alleged, that these cases of pecuniary suretyship and obligation are entirely different from cases of moral delinquency; where one man's good conduct is never made the ground of the justification of a guilty person. It is certainly true that no transactions among men can furnish a complete parallel to the mediation of Jesus Christ, and our justification through his perfect righteousness. This device is as much above human conception, as the heavens are higher than the earth: but still there are principles admitted in human transactions which may serve, in some small degree, to illustrate the Gospel plan of justification. Take the following case. Suppose a man to have become by his heroic acts and achievements, and by his wounds and sufferings, the saviour of his country. The debt which the people owe him for his meritorious services can never be fully paid. Now suppose the son of this benefactor is detected in some treasonable practices against his sovereign. He is arraigned before the supreme tribunal of the kingdom. The evidence against him is full. Sentence is about to be pronounced, when the father presents himself before his sovereign, and begs that his son may be pardoned on account of his services; and at the same time points to the scars of the numerous wounds which he received in fighting for his country. Moreover, he is willing to become responsible for the good conduct of his son in time to come. The king feeling the obligation which he is under to the father, for the sake of his services, agrees not only to remit the punishment, but to restore the offender to all the rights and immunities which he had before enjoyed. If such a pardon could be granted consistently with the good of the state, no one would say that there was any thing wrong in the transaction. In this case the good conduct of the father is imputed to the son, and he is pardoned and restored to the favour of his prince, by the meritorious conduct of another. Indeed, the principle of treating with special favour the near connexions of those whom we greatly love, or to whom we have been laid under peculiar obligations, is brought into view almost every day. But the wisdom and propriety of imputing Christ's righteousness for the justification of sinners does not depend on any resemblance to it which may be found

among men. It is sufficient for us to know that God has revealed it as his chosen plan for the salvation of his redeemed people.

It is again objected to the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, especially his active obedience, that it releases the sinner from all obligation, any longer to obey the law. If this were a just inference from the doctrine it would indeed be an unanswerable objection; for it should be received as a first principle in theology, that the obligation to be conformed to the law of God can never cease. But there is not the least foundation for the objection. Suppose that the first Adam had continued to obey until his probation was finished, would any one think that afterwards either he or his posterity would be freed from the obligation to be holy? Well, what he failed to do, the second Adam has performed, but the obligation to be holy is immutable. It may be asked, does the law of God require a double obedience, one from our surety, and one from ourselves? We answer, that it requires but one righteousness in order to our justification; but it requires that the justified person continue in conformity with its holy precepts. Our obedience is not now required as a condition of justification; to entertain such an opinion would be to leave the covenant of grace, and to go back to the old covenant of works. It would be *to fall from grace*, as Paul expresses it, that is from the doctrines of grace. Suppose each one of us had a probation for life under the law, and that we had completed our obedience and obtained justification, we should be required to render no more obedience with a view to being justified, for this is supposed to be already done. But the obligation to obey God would not cease, because we were in a justified state. We would still be required to be conformed to the law, because that was our reasonable service, arising out of our natural relations to our Creator, and because holiness is pleasing to God, beneficial to men, and essential to the promotion of our own happiness.

Another objection to imputation is, that if Christ's righteousness becomes ours in this way, then we shall be made as righteous as Christ was. This scarcely deserves a serious answer. Upon the same principle they ought to argue, that because our sins were imputed to Christ, He must by this be made as great a sinner as we are; which is blasphemy? But in both cases, the inference is false, and does not follow from the doctrine. If a rich man permit a poor debtor to draw upon him for as much money as will pay his debts, and obtain his release from prison, it does not follow that by this

act the poor man is made as rich as his benefactor. When the king pardoned the treason of the son for the sake of the extraordinary merits of the father, this did not invest the son with personal merit equal to that of the father. The truth is, that the imputation of righteousness, although it procures perfect justification, produces no change in the inherent character of the man; but as we stated before, it merely changes his relation to the law; and therefore, the idea of our being made as righteous as Christ, is without reason alleged against this doctrine.

It has, moreover, been objected, that if the righteousness of Christ is imputed to every believer, then all must receive an equal reward in the world to come; but the doctrine of Scripture is, that there are degrees of felicity and glory in heaven. It is true, that the righteousness of Christ is equally bestowed on all believers, and the consequence is, that they are all equally justified; but persons equally justified, and equally entitled to a part of the heavenly inheritance, may partake of happiness in different degrees. Some may have a larger capacity than others, and may on this account enjoy more; and yet all have liberty to drink in as much as they can; just as if you throw empty vessels of different dimensions into the river, they will all be filled as full as they can hold, but the quantity in each will be very different.

Again, though the good works of believers are in no measure the ground of our justification, yet they will be exhibited at the day of judgment, for two reasons. The first is, that they may be a public evidence to the universe, that they are the genuine disciples of Christ; and secondly, that these acts of sincere but imperfect obedience may be the standard by which they shall receive their portion of happiness. "They who sow sparingly shall reap also sparingly; but they who sow bountifully shall reap also bountifully." Hence we so often read, that men shall be rewarded according to their works. And this mode of proceeding commends itself to our reason, as congruous. Some have attempted to evade the doctrine, by alleging, that not the righteousness of Christ but its effects are imputed to us. They who talk thus, do not seem to understand what they say. It must be by the imputation of the righteousness, that the good effects are derived to us; but the imputation of the effects themselves cannot be. To talk of imputing pardon—of imputing justification—imputing peace, &c. is to use words without meaning. What we are inquiring after is the reason why these blessings become ours. It cannot be on account of our own righteousness,

which is of the law; it must be on account of the righteousness of Christ. The next question is, how does that righteousness avail to obtain for us pardon, justification, and peace with God? The answer is, by imputation; that is, it is set down to our credit. God accepts it on our behalf: yea he bestows it upon us. If there be any such thing as imputation, it must be of the righteousness of Christ itself, and the benefits connected with salvation flow from this imputation. We conclude, therefore, that the righteousness of Christ can only justify us, by being imputed to us. The last objection which I shall mention to the imputation of Christ's righteousness, is, that it makes the sinner's justification a matter of justice, and not of grace; for if our debt is fully paid, and the law obeyed in our stead, the whole proceeding, upon this hypothesis, is one of law and justice, and not at all of mercy and grace; but the Scriptures teach nothing more clearly and constantly, than that our justification is "without law," and purely gratuitous.

As this is an old Socinian objection which has been borrowed and revived by men wishing to be esteemed orthodox, it will deserve a special attention.

And first, let it be observed, that all theories which suppose that grace is exercised at the expense of justice, or that in order to the manifestation of grace, law and justice must be suspended, labour under a radical mistake in theology, which cannot but introduce darkness and perplexity into their whole system. Indeed, if law and justice could have been set aside or suspended, there had been no occasion for the plan of redemption. The only reason why sinners could not be saved was, that the law and justice of God stood in the way; but if by a sovereign act, these obstacles could have been removed, salvation might have been accomplished without an atonement. But though the Scriptures, every where, ascribe salvation to GRACE—FREE GRACE; yet they never teach that this grace requires God to deny himself, as to his attribute of justice; or that law and justice are at all interfered with; or, for a moment suspended. On the contrary, the idea is continually kept in view, that grace reigns *through righteousness*; that the propitiation of Christ is necessary, that God may be *just*, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. Redemption is the obtaining deliverance by paying a price; and yet redemption and grace, so far from being inconsistent, are constantly united, as parts of the same glorious plan, according to the Scriptures. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his

grace." (Ephes. i. 7.) The only way in which it was possible for grace to be exercised, was by a plan which made provision for the complete satisfaction of law and justice. This was the great problem, to the solution of which no finite wisdom was competent; but which the infinite wisdom of Jehovah has accomplished by the mission and sacrifice of his own dear Son. What is objected, therefore, is a thing essential to the exercise of grace. And the whole appearance of plausibility in the objection arises from not distinguishing between God's dealings with our substitute, and with *us*. To him, there was no mercy shown; the whole process was in strict execution of law and justice. The last farthing due, so to speak, was exacted, of our Surety, when he stood in our place, under the holy and sin avenging law of God. But this exercise of justice towards him, was the very thing which opened the way for superabounding mercy towards us. And this cost at which the sluices of grace were opened, so far from lessening, constitutes its riches and glory. If grace had required no sacrifice, such as has been made, its loveliness and glory would not have been half what they now are. If I were in prison for a heavy debt, and some generous friend should do me the favour of releasing me, by paying the debt, would I have any right to say, that there was no favour in the case, because justice was satisfied before I could be released? The idea is preposterous. And as to what is said about being justified, "without law," it has been explained already, to mean, without our own works of obedience to the law, as many parallel passages of Scripture show. Upon any other plan, the law and Gospel would be completely at variance; or the law would be made void by the Gospel, which the apostle rejects with so much vehemence, and declares that instead of being made void, it was established.

#### SECTION X.

##### JUSTIFICATION BY THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST IS OBTAINED BY THE EXERCISE OF A GENUINE FAITH.

It has already been shown that neither the act of believing, nor the evangelical obedience which flows from faith is the meritorious ground of a sinner's justification. It now remains to consider what part faith performs in obtaining justification for us. That it is an essential thing in this business is manifest throughout the Scriptures. "The just shall live

by his faith," (Heb. ii. 4.) "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe," (Rom. iii. 22.) "Therefore being justified by faith," (Rom. v. 1.) "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ," (Gal. ii. 16.) The righteousness by which we are justified is called *the righteousness of faith*. "Not having on mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," (Phil. iii. 9.) "What shall we say then? that the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith," (Rom. ix. 30.) "But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise." (Rom. x. 6.) That faith justifies is so clear in Scripture, that no words could make it plainer. The only thing necessary is to ascertain *how* it justifies? And as much that might have been said here has been anticipated, we will confine our observations within narrower limits, than we otherwise should have done. The single question which needs to be now discussed is, whether faith justifies as a *condition*, or merely as an instrument. There is a sound sense in which faith may be called the condition of justification, and is so called by some of the most distinguished orthodox divines; and is once so denominated in our Larger Catechism, in the answer to the 32d Question, "and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him." They are not therefore to be censured as departing from orthodoxy, or from a sound theological language, who choose to retain this word. But it should be carefully remarked, that when they use the word *condition*, they neither mean a meritorious consideration on which the blessings of the new covenant are suspended; nor an act performed by our own strength previously to our receiving any benefit from this covenant, but as a duty which God requires to be performed by us prior to our justification. It is a condition in the sense, that without it justification cannot be enjoyed. But as the word *condition* is so vague, and as it has been so commonly used in an erroneous sense, it is expedient to drop the word as it relates to faith, in a sinner's justification; for all orthodox theologians acknowledge, that faith itself is one of the richest blessings of the covenant of grace, and cannot, therefore, be the condition of that covenant, in a strict and proper sense. The sound doctrine then is, that faith is the *instrument* of our justification; just as the hand is the instrument of receiving the food which saves us from starvation; or the



relieve which delivers from death. It is well represented by the case of a drowning man to whom a rope from a boat is cast out to draw him in. If he neglects to seize the rope, whether owing to dependance on his own ability to buffet the waves, or from a suspicion of the weakness of the rope, or the want of sincerity and good-will in those who have thrown it out, he perishes with help within his reach. This is precisely the case of those who reject the Gospel. But, if the man, convinced of his own helplessness, and having confidence in the strength of the rope, and of the good-will of those who have extended this means of relief, grasps the rope, and is drawn into the boat, this seizing the offered help, will represent the act of faith by which the sinner obtains deliverance, and is brought into a state of safety; except that in his case the ability to stretch out the withered hand is given by him who commands it. The question has been often asked, whether justification is by faith alone; and if so, why has this grace in this business a prerogative above every other? Why does faith justify rather than love? That justification is by faith alone is clear from the testimonies of Scripture, already adduced. Other things are necessary to our complete salvation; but faith is the only instrument of our justification. We are never said to be justified by repentance, or by love, or by hope, nor by perseverance, and yet all these are necessary to our salvation; but they follow justification, and are evidences of it. The Scriptural doctrine is, that we are justified by faith, and nothing else, "is imputed for righteousness." Our justifying righteousness is "the righteousness of faith." This point may be considered too clearly established, by express testimonies of Scripture, to admit of doubt or controversy.

The question still arises, why is justification ascribed solely to faith, or how does faith justify. The common and correct answer is, because faith apprehends and receives the righteousness of Christ. But the subject requires some further explanation. In all cases where the good or bad acts of one are imputed to another, who did not personally perform them, it is in consequence of a very close and intimate union between the parties. Thus, if the acts of a wife are ascribed to the husband, it is because, in law, as in Scripture, they are considered not twain but one—"one flesh." When the child of a man condemned for treason, in Great Britain, loses the title and inheritance entailed on him, it is because he is closely connected, in blood, with the guilty person. When all Israel suffered a desolating plague because of the sin of

David, it was because they all formed one body politic, of which he was the head. Upon this principle the posterity of Saul were executed on account of his sin towards the Gibeonites, which was imputed to them. On the same principle of union between the parties, God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation; and the sins of many generations are punished at last upon one, when the cup of their iniquity is full; according to the words of Christ to the Jews, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation," (Matt. xxiii. 35, 36.) But the only case which furnishes a complete parallel to the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, is the imputation of Adam's first sin to all his posterity, on account of their double connexion with him, first as their natural progenitor; and secondly, as their federal head and legal representative in the first covenant.

Upon these principles, there must be a union formed with Christ, before his acts of obedience to the law, and satisfaction to its penalty can be imputed to us. The first step towards this union is Christ's assumption of our nature, by which he becomes truly a man, like unto us, sin only excepted—bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. But this union is not yet sufficiently intimate. As a man, Christ was equally united to our whole race; but before his righteousness can properly be imputed to us, we must become one with him by a close, and spiritual union. No truth of Scripture is more prominent or more strikingly illustrated than Christ's union with his elect people. He is the head, and they are the members; which, though many, constitute but "one body." He is the vine, they are the branches, and derive all their life and fruitfulness from him. He is the foundation of the spiritual temple, they are living stones builded upon this elect and precious corner stone. And lastly, He is the husband, and the spiritual Church is the spouse. "For as the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the Head of the Church," (Ephes. v. 23.) Where the apostle carries out the resemblance to a great length. Now if we inquire how this union is formed, it will readily appear that it is by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his," (Rom. viii. 9.) The converse of which is implied, If any man have the Spirit of Christ he is his. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members

of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body," (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13.) The whole context shows, that the bond which unites all Christians to their Head, and to one another, so as to constitute one body, is the Holy Spirit. And in another place, the apostle says "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The soul thus united to Christ and a part of his mystical body, is brought into so close and intimate a union with him, that a foundation is laid for the imputation of his righteousness to them. But as God chooses to deal with his people according to the free and rational nature with which they are endowed, he has connected their justification, which is the commencement of their actual salvation, with their faith in Christ, which is the first act of the soul united to Christ, and by which Christ is apprehended and received. It is common to say that faith unites the soul to Christ; it would be more correct to say, that faith was the first fruit of this union, and its sure indication. Thus it appears, that we are clothed with this perfect and unspotted robe of our Redeemer's righteousness, as soon as we become one with him. He is now in reality our Mediator and sponsor; our wisdom and righteousness; and thus are we justified by faith, as the act or instrument by which we apprehend and receive Christ's righteousness. It is evident from what has just been said, that it is not every kind of faith which justifies; but only that which is produced by the Holy Spirit. It is the act of the soul which is united to Christ. Not such a historical assent as men commonly give to human testimony, but a lively, and deep persuasion of the truth and excellence of divine things, grounded on the illumination of the mind by the Holy Spirit. There is that in the truth of God which, when spiritually discerned, carries with it convincing evidence of its divine origin. A true faith is not a mere intellectual act which leaves the heart unaffected with the truth believed, but such a full persuasion of the excellence as well as the truth of God's revealed will, that it carries the heart along, and sweetly inclines the will to receive Christ as he is exhibited in the Gospel. As Christ, as our Redeemer, is the central object in divine revelation; so he is the primary object of justifying faith. There can be no faith where Christ is not known. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The first views of believers are exceedingly various as to clearness; for while some regenerated souls have a mere glimmering of spiritual light, others are favoured with such a bright shining of the light of the glorious Gospel, that their

'assurance of faith' is accompanied from the first, with the "full assurance of hope." But although in believers there are different degrees of light and vigour in the exercise of their faith, yet all true faith is produced by the same agent, founded on the same kind of evidence, respects the same object, and produces the same sort of fruits. But it should not be imagined, that the weak believer is less justified than the strong; the very weakest child is as truly a child as the most vigorous; and the humblest believer is as completely justified as was Abraham or Paul. I cannot adopt the opinion maintained by some eminent theologians, that there is a difference between a saving faith and a justifying faith. They allege, that a justifying faith respects Christ only in his sacerdotal office; whil a saving faith respects all divine truth. But although it is true, that Christ's work as a priest is the true ground of our justification, yet in the first exercises of faith, the mind does not always distinguish the several offices of the Redeemer, but receives him wholly, and for every purpose connected with salvation. But when the person is united to Christ, whatever may be the incipient exercises of faith, they are justifying; otherwise a soul might be supposed to be the subject of saving faith, and yet remain, for a time, in an unjustified state, which would be an unscriptural supposition. And if justification depended upon the clearness and distinctness of the views of the object, it would seem that the soul must fall from justification, when Christ as a priest was not distinctly in view. Even regenerated infants, by virtue of union to Christ are justified; certainly then all who exercise a saving faith are justified; and the reason why faith is said to be saving is because it justifies, for that which does not justify cannot be saving.

Much has been written about the various acts of faith; some making a greater and some a less number of essential acts; but although what they ascribe to faith belongs to its various actings, yet if we examine the matter more accurately, we shall find that faith is one simple exercise of the mind, including, however, both the understanding and will; and that all its various acts arise from the various truths brought into view. A full persuasion of the truth revealed, is faith, in every case; but when the truth believed is a divine promise, this persuasion is of the nature of trust or confidence. Most of the phrases which speak of faith are figurative, and express the common actings of faith in allusion to some analagous thing. Thus *receiving, flying for refuge, looking, coming, hungering, and thirsting, &c.* are used to convey to our minds

in an intelligible and striking manner, the exercises of a soul when it believes in Christ, but cannot be considered so many distinct acts. Of these figurative expressions, no one is more frequently used, or better suited to express the whole of a genuine faith, than that of "receiving" Christ. "To as many as received him gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Thus it is described in our Larger Catechism. "Justifying faith is a saving grace wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God; whereby, he being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures, to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ and his righteousness therein held forth, for the pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation." This view of the subject is at once accurate and practical. How refreshing would it be to the people of God to hear preaching in the strain and spirit of this, and many other answers in our Larger Catechism, instead of cold moral harangues or metaphysical disquisitions, with which they are too frequently put off.

Another description of faith in our "Confession" is remarkable for giving, in few words, a just and comprehensive view of the nature of faith in its diversity of actings, under the view of truths of a different kind. It is as follows, "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word. \* \* \* "By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true, whatever is revealed in the word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone, for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."\*

From the view which has been taken of this subject, it is plain, that the thing to be believed, is not that Christ is already mine; or that he died for me in particular; or that my sins are pardoned. All these things may be certainly

\* Confession of Faith, chap. xlv. 1, 2.

believed to be true by him who has first received Christ as offered ; but until this is done, he cannot have any just ground of evidence that these propositions, or others of a similar kind, are true. We may, and ought, however, to believe that God does truly and sincerely offer Christ and all his benefits to us in the Gospel, and this gracious offer is the ground of our warrant for receiving him as our Saviour. Some choose to call this offer a grant of Christ to the world ; and insist, therefore, that we ought to believe in the very first instance, that Christ is ours. On this subject, we hope there is no real difference of opinion at bottom ; we like to adhere to the plain language of the Scriptures, and of our standards. If it be asked whether there is not an *appropriating* act of faith ? I answer that no act of ours can be more of an appropriating nature than *receiving*. He who receives Christ receives him as his complete and all sufficient Saviour. If one offers to another a large estate, the acceptance of the offer is the appropriating act. It would, however, in our judgment, be more correct to say, that God appropriated Christ and his benefits to us, when he imputed to us Christ's righteousness, and justified our persons.

We must not, however, overlook the necessity of a real and deep conviction of sin ; not as a preparation for regeneration, but as a process suited to us as rational, moral agents. It is suitable that a sinner, whom God is about to save, should be made sensible in some measure, of his true condition. How otherwise could he exercise due gratitude for redeeming mercy ? This appears to have been the common experience of those brought to believe in the times of the apostles ; as on the day of Pentecost, in the prison of Philippi, and in the experience of Paul himself, who says, " I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." And again, " I through the law am dead to the law that I might live unto God." " For I had not known sin, unless the law had said thou shalt not covet." So then, " And the commandment which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death."

## SECTION XI.

### THE TIME OF JUSTIFICATION.

On this subject men have erred on the widest possible extremes ; for while some strenuously insist that justification is

from eternity, thus confounding it with election, or the purpose to justify; others are equally confident, that there can be no proper justification until after our account is rendered at the day of judgment; while a few would refer it to the time of Christ's resurrection when he as our substitute received an acquittance, and arose from the dead as the triumphant Head of all his people. But all these opinions are unscriptural. If we are justified by faith, we cannot obtain this blessing until we believe; and it is equally certain, that upon this principle, our justification cannot be postponed until the final judgment.

The orthodox opinion may be thus expressed. From eternity, God determined to justify his chosen people, freely, through the mediation of his Son; by the obedience and death of Christ a solid foundation was laid for their justification, in consistence with the demands of law and justice; when an elect sinner is united to Christ and believes, his faith is imputed for righteousness; that is, the righteousness of Christ which is the object of faith, is made over to him, and his sins are, in that moment, pardoned, and his person accepted as righteous, in the sight of God, or in other words he is justified; and at the day of judgment, there will be a public manifestation of their being the disciples of Christ and the servants of God, by bringing to view before the assembled universe all their works of piety, justice, and mercy. Their thoughts will then be made manifest, also their words, and deeds; and the Judge of all, will declare them to be exempt from every charge, and will assign to them a portion in the heavenly inheritance, according as their works shall be found. He will say, "Come ye blessed inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

## SECTION XII.

### THE DOCTRINE OF JAMES.

There is an apparent contradiction of Paul's doctrine by James, where he says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his son upon the altar." Again, "Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith alone."

"Likewise, also, was not Rahab, the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way."

The reconciliation of these declarations with those of Paul can only be made by supposing James to speak of another kind of faith, and, perhaps, of another kind of justification, from Paul. And when the whole passage is carefully examined this thing becomes evident. He is censuring such as spoke good words to the needy, but gave no relief. "Even so," says he, "faith if it have not works is dead." Paul speaks of a genuine faith which works by love and purifies the heart; James of a barren and dead faith. "Though a man say he hath faith and hath not works can faith save him?" That is, can this empty profession of faith—this barren faith—save him? So through the whole passage he is evidently speaking of a mere empty profession of faith, or a mere historical faith, such as devils have. And some suppose that this is sufficient to remove the whole difficulty. They allege, that by *works*, James evidently means a true faith distinguished by the works which it produces; and that all that he aimed to establish was, that justification could not be obtained by a dead faith, but by a living operative faith which could only be manifested to others by works. But if we suppose, that he uses the word *justify* in a sense different from that of Paul, the difficulty will be still further relieved. Paul was speaking of a sinner's first acceptance with God by faith in Christ, James of cases in which a good man proves himself to be such by performing eminent works of righteousness, by which it became manifest that his faith was genuine, for while nominal professors said they had faith, which they could not show, as having no works to evidence it, he justified himself, by showing his faith by his works, as Abraham did, when he performed that extraordinary act of obedience of offering up his own son; and Rahab, in concealing and sending away the spies at the peril of her own life. Abraham's first justification took place long before this memorable event; but by this he manifested to all men, the sincerity and vigour of his faith. "Seest thou," says James, "how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect." Faith was operative in producing good works, and these works served to evince the sincerity of his faith, showing most clearly, that his faith was of the right kind. What the apostle James inculcates so earnestly is, that that faith which was imputed to Abraham for righteousness, was not a dead faith, such as these false professors boasted of, but was a faith productive of good works; and in this sense he was said to be justified by works.



## CONCLUSION.

In conclusion we will sum up the leading particulars; and add a few thoughts, not sufficiently brought forward in the body of the essay.

1. Justification is an act of God. "It is God that justifieth."

2. Justification is a forensic term, that is, borrowed from the proceedings of courts of justice among men. It is the opposite of condemnation; and is not a work wrought within a man, but an act by which he is acquitted from every charge, and declared to be righteous in the eye of the law.

3. Justification by the law is impossible to a sinner; for the law cannot justify a man whom it condemns as a sinner. But "by the law is the knowledge of sin."

4. Justification without respect to some law, and some righteousness rendered to the law, is inconceivable.

5. No righteousness can be the ground of a sinner's justification, but one which is perfect; therefore faith cannot be our justifying righteousness; neither can our evangelical obedience and good works. When faith is said to be imputed for righteousness, we should understand the object of faith, namely Christ's righteousness. This is called the righteousness of faith, because faith apprehends and receives it.

6. The righteousness of Christ consists of his perfect obedience to the law, and his atoning sacrifice; both of which are requisite to be set down to the sinner's account, before he can be justified.

7. Justification does not consist merely in the pardon of sin, but includes adoption, and the acceptance of our persons as righteous.

8. The righteousness of Christ by which we are justified does not become ours by transfusion, or by the transfer of his holy acts to our souls, but by *Imputation*, which is the reckoning this to us, or granting it to us, and treating us accordingly.

9. Justification is complete in the first moment of believing. It may be rendered more evident to ourselves and others by holy living, but our obedience adds nothing to the perfection of our justification.

10. Justification includes a full pardon for all our past sins, and an ample provision for the pardon of all which the believer may afterwards commit. Just as if a man owes a debt to a merchant, and some rich man deposits a sum and has it set down to his account, which is not only sufficient to

cancel his debt already contracted, but also to be a set-off against debts which he may afterwards contract.

11. Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, through faith, is in consequence of the soul's union to Christ. What he has done and suffered for his people becomes actually and legally theirs, in virtue of their being one with him.

12. Faith, justifies because it receives Christ and his righteousness; but a dead faith will justify no one. Our faith and profession must be justified by our works, as Abraham justified his faith and piety by offering up his son at the command of God.

13. Justifying faith is the result of divine illumination. It is the gift of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and shows its genuineness by the works which follow it.

14. A justified state is never lost. When a man is justified he is confirmed in a state of grace, and will never fall into condemnation; but the justified person continues to be in a justified state because his union to Christ is indissoluble. "They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

15. Justified persons have the privilege of enjoying peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

16. When the Apostle James says, that a man is not justified by faith alone, he means a faith without works—an empty profession of faith—"a dead faith."

When he says, that Abraham was justified by works, he means by a faith producing good works, and not by an unfruitful faith; or by justification he means the clear manifestation of his true character; showing his faith by his works.

17. Though all believers are equally justified, it is not a necessary consequence, that they will all enjoy an equal reward. While all have a title to the heavenly inheritance; those who shall appear at the day of judgment to have most good works will have bestowed upon them a greater reward; for they shall be rewarded according to their works.

18. Justification and sanctification though perfectly distinct, the one being a change of our legal relations and responsibilities; the other of our inherent character; yet are they never separated. The person who is justified, always has a commencement of the work of sanctification; and faith is a necessary instrument of both. A justifying faith is always a sanctifying faith.

19. Believers may go forward with confidence to judgment, because their sins are forgiven, and the robe of Christ's righteousness will cover all their shame, and render them

glorious in the eyes of the whole universe and acceptable to the Judge.

20. Their poor works also will be mentioned to their honour; and will receive a reward surpassing all their hopes, and even all their conceptions. This will be a reward of pure grace. A reward which God bestows on them because of their union with Christ. As he is a King and Priest, so shall they be made "kings and priests unto God." As he has overcome, so also shall they: and as he has sat down with his Father on his throne, so shall they sit down with him on his throne. But all words, all ideas of mortals, are perfectly inadequate to this subject. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when he doth appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in HIM, purifieth himself even as he is pure."

THE END.