

TRACTS
OF THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

General Series.



VOL. X.

PRINTED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

It shall be our endeavor to set before our readers a plain exposition of this great Christian doctrine, as taught in the holy Scriptures, and as generally held by sound Protestants.

We commence with some remarks on the *scriptural meaning of the word "justification,"* as a mistake here may spread darkness over the whole discussion.

The common acceptation of the word "to justify," in the Bible, is, to acquit from all charge, to declare the person to stand *right* in the eye of the law. It is the very opposite of "condemnation." And in this sense is the word commonly used among us. To "justify," is not, therefore, to infuse a principle of justice into the soul. It does not produce an inherent change of moral character. The import of this word is entirely distinct from that of "sanctification;" and this distinction must be carefully kept in view, if we would avoid error and confusion in the investigation of the subject.

That the word is commonly used in this declarative or forensic sense in the holy Scriptures, might be evinced by an induction of numerous passages; let a few, however, suffice. God is said to be "justified" when he speaks; that is, he appears to be just. Christ is declared to be "justified in the Spirit;" his true character was manifested and vindicated. "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked." Deut. 25 : 1. Here we have the true import of the word as

a forensic term, and standing in direct opposition to condemnation. -And in Exodus 23 : 7, it is said, "For I will not justify the wicked ;" that is, I will not pronounce the wicked to be just. And in Proverbs 17 : 15, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." But to render a wicked man inherently righteous, is so far from being an abomination to the Lord, that even to be the instrument of such a change is followed by a great reward.

In the same sense is the word employed, Isaiah 5 : 23, where transgressors are characterized as those who "justify the wicked for reward." Solomon, in his dedicatory prayer, 1 Kings, 8 : 32, says, "Then hear thou in heaven and do, and judge thy servants, *condemning the wicked*, to bring his way upon his head, and *justifying the righteous*, to give him according to his righteousness." Thus, also, is the word used by Paul: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight." "Being justified by faith—freely by his grace." And in Romans 4 : 5, God is said to "justify the ungodly."

Let it be distinctly borne in mind, that a state of justification is *the very opposite of a state of condemnation*, and there can be no material mistake respecting the true import of the word. He who is condemned is considered as a transgressor of the law, whose sins are still imputed to him; he who is justified is viewed as having, though not of his own, that which satisfies the law—he has the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth not sin, but to whom he "imputes righteousness without works."

The only method of obtaining the favor of God, which reason and conscience dictate, is, *doing the will of God*.

Moral agents, put on probation, if they persevere in obedience during the period of their trial, are "justified," and confirmed in a state of integrity and happiness.

When an accountable creature, or a race of accountable creatures, fails in obedience, the penalty of the law, whatever it may be, is incurred, and must be endured. Both justice and truth require the infliction of the punishment deserved, and threatened to transgressors. The justification of a sinner appears, therefore, at first sight, to be a thing impossible, in consistence with the divine attributes. To devise a plan by which sinners may be saved, and yet the law be maintained and justice satisfied, was beyond the wisdom of any creature; but what finite wisdom could not accomplish, the wisdom of God has found out; and to reveal this plan of salvation, and the terms on which the condemned creature may be made a partaker of it, is the great design of divine revelation. This is the mystery into which angels desire to look. It is the "good news" which the Gospel announces. It will be a theme of adoration and grateful praise in heaven, through eternal ages; and all who shall arrive at heaven by this method of salvation, will sing a song peculiar to themselves, in which no others of the heavenly host can join, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

To understand *how God can be just, and justify the ungodly*, let us contemplate the acknowledged circumstances of the case. God is a holy being, and his law is like himself, "holy, just, and good." This law cannot be set aside, or changed, in mercy to the offender, without reflecting dishonor on the Lawgiver. Better there were no law, than that its claims should be disregarded. Better that all creatures should cease to exist, than that any dishonor should be cast on the truth or justice of God. If the infliction of the penalty incurred was not a righteous act, such a penalty never

would have been annexed to the law. All hope of escape, founded on the idea that the law of God may be set aside, or its demands relaxed, must be vain; and all such hopes are impious, as they are founded on the supposition that God will "deny himself." Does not every transgressor, then, appear to be shut up to death?

Some may be ready to reply, that *God is merciful* as well as just, and the sinner may hope in his mercy; and that to insist upon the rigid execution of law, in all cases, would expunge mercy from the divine attributes. It will also be alleged, that to represent the supreme Ruler as inflexible in his justice, and requiring the utmost farthing of what is due from his frail creatures, is to exhibit him in an unamiable light.

This view of the subject seems plausible, and falls in with the prevalent opinions and feelings of men. But it ought to be considered, that if mercy be so essential to God that he cannot but exercise it unless he show himself severe and unamiable, then there is *an end of justice*. There can be no place for it in the dispensations of a merciful God. But "a God all mercy is a God unjust."

And let it be considered again, that upon these principles there was *no need of a Mediator* to expiate our sins, and propitiate an offended God. To the sinner God may indeed appear lovely, as divested of his righteousness, and equally good to the transgressor and the obedient subject; just as the criminal condemned by human laws, would esteem that judge amiable who pardoned his crimes, while upright citizens might view it to be inconsistent with his character as a righteous judge. But the inquiry should be, how would the divine character appear to intelligent and impartial spectators, if sin should go unpunished; how would this be viewed by the "holy angels?" And surely, with the word of God in our hands, we cannot hesitate to believe

that God is just and holy, and that he "will by no means clear the guilty."

But *do not the Scriptures represent God as a merciful being*; and are not all invited to take refuge under the wings of his mercy? Yes; this is undoubtedly true. No attribute is more frequently and emphatically ascribed to God than mercy; and by no other is his infinite and divine perfection more gloriously manifested. Throughout the holy Scriptures, we have set before us a God *both just and merciful*. Those attributes, therefore, as they exist in God, must be harmonious; and the exercise of the one must, somehow, be consistent with that of the other. Let us, therefore, endeavor to discover how they may be harmonized, how the great Creator can be at the same time both "a just God and a Saviour."

One remark, before we proceed further, seems necessary to prevent mistakes. *There exists not the same necessity* for the exercise of mercy as of justice. God is obliged by the rectitude of his nature, to be always, and in all cases, just; but he is not bound, in all cases where there are miserable sinners, to exercise mercy. The example of the fallen angels settles this question. Such an idea of mercy would destroy every idea of justice. There could remain no place for its exercise. Mercy, from its very nature, is free. To suppose any binding obligation to show mercy, destroys its nature; it would then be confounded with justice. The true ground of distinction between justice and mercy is, that while the first is *obligatory*, the last is *free*, and may be bestowed or withheld at the pleasure of him who exercises it.

The true principle on which justice and mercy may be reconciled is, that *the claims of justice must be satisfied* in order to make way for the exercise of mercy. If no plan could have been devised by which the demands of the law—

which are the same as the claims of justice—could be satisfied, then had the exercise of mercy been impossible in the government of a righteous God. But herein has the infinite wisdom of God been gloriously displayed by the plan of redemption: “Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” According to this glorious plan, justice and mercy are both manifested, in the most conspicuous manner, in the obedience of Christ unto death. In the cross these divine attributes not only harmonize, but shine forth with brighter rays than anywhere else. Let it not be forgotten, that the difficulty in the way of the exercise of mercy to sinners, required to be overcome, was nothing else than *the demands of inflexible justice, and the truth of God pledged in annexing the penalty of death to the law*. No plan of reconciliation or justification, which does not provide for the removal of this difficulty, is admissible or possible. I wish this point to be clearly understood, and indelibly fixed in the memory of the reader; for otherwise he will be in danger of being misled by false theories.

Let us then take an accurate survey of THE CONDITION OF A SINFUL MAN, under the righteous government of God. We take for granted, that the demands of the law of God are neither annihilated nor diminished in consequence of his transgression. Fallen man is as much under *obligation* to love God with all the heart, mind, and strength, as innocent man. It is a dictate of reason, that the obligation of no law is removed by transgressing it. Neither does the fact that the sinner has fallen under the condemnation of the law, free him from the *obligation to obey it*. Although some have held this opinion to prop up a rotten system, nothing can be conceived more absurd. This supposes the enduring the penalty of the law to be a full equivalent for perfect obedience. According to this, the man who had

stood in the pillory for perjury as long as the penalty of the law required, would be as deserving of esteem and of a reward as the man who had completely obeyed the laws of his country. Then let it be distinctly kept in mind, that *on a transgressor the law has a double demand*: first, the original requisition of perfect obedience; and secondly, a demand that the penalty, according to the demerit of the offence, be endured. And before he can be justified according to this law, both these demands must be met and satisfied.

A mistake on this point has led many astray in regard to the nature of a sinner's justification. They have maintained that nothing else was necessary but that the Surety endure the penalty of the law, or make atonement for sin; and that nothing more is included in justification than the forgiveness of our sins. But if this were all, justification would leave the person in the same relation to the law in which Adam stood when created; that is, he would be free from the penalty, but would have no title to the reward of a righteous person. But the very word "justify" expresses much more. Strictly speaking, and excluding the merits of Christ, pardon and justification are incompatible; for the first supposes the person to have been a transgressor, the last that he has a righteousness fully answering the demands of the law; but when a sinner is *justified by faith in Christ*, while he receives remission of sins through his blood, he is accounted righteous, by reason of the perfect obedience, unto death, of his Surety, rendered in his behalf.

Those who deny the necessity of the active obedience of Christ, as included in the meritorious ground of a sinner's justification, are driven to the necessity of maintaining, that the person must acquire a title to eternal life by his own obedience; and they suppose that this doctrine is inculcated in all those texts which speak of believers being rewarded

“according to their works;” whereas, if eternal life was granted only in consequence of Christ’s obedience, they allege all would share alike, and there would not be different degrees of glory among the saints in heaven. But this is to confound the title to eternal life with the degree of happiness to be enjoyed. As to the title, all do stand upon a perfect equality. Heaven is as sure to the weakest believer as to the strongest; to the man who lived only to perform one good work, as to him that abounded in good works through a long life. But it does not follow from this, that the happiness and glory of all believers shall be equal. All, it is reasonable to believe, will not have the same capacity of heavenly happiness; and it is meet, that they who have labored most and suffered most, should enjoy most hereafter. This furnishes a good reason for what we find clearly taught by our Lord and his apostles, that in the day of judgment the good works of the righteous will be brought into public view; as well that they may furnish a measure of their respective rewards, as that they may furnish conclusive evidence of the sincerity of their profession.

Although the active obedience of Christ, as well as his sufferings and death, are necessary to a justifying righteousness; yet there is no necessity nor propriety in curiously endeavoring to separate the parts of our Saviour’s finished work. As has been well remarked by a profound theologian, “*In his sufferings he obeyed, and in his obedience he suffered.*” His mediatorial work, like his robe, cannot be divided into separate parts. Still, we can conceive of a distinction between that which was necessary to satisfy the precept, and that which was required to satisfy the penalty of the law. And if there were any uncertainty whether all the acts of Christ’s obedience were strictly vicarious, yet it would be our safe course to exclude nothing which God has not excluded. When the apostle says, “by

his OBEEDIENCE many are constituted righteous," no man has a right to limit the word, which is left in the holy Scriptures without limitation.

Having seen, that in order to a sinner's justification, the law demands a righteousness which shall answer both its precept and its penalty; let us next inquire, HAS JESUS CHRIST THE MEDIATOR PROVIDED SUCH A RIGHTEOUSNESS? And here it is comfortable to the convinced sinner to learn, that "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." That "He of God is made unto us righteousness," and is called, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." And that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." That "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

But why may not a sinner be justified by *his own* righteousness? For the best reason in the world: because he has none which will answer the law's demand. All will admit, that the external obedience of an unrenewed man, whether to the moral or ceremonial law, cannot be a righteousness that a holy God can accept as the ground of his justification. Such a righteousness is, indeed, well described by the prophet, as "filthy rags." That which has no particle of real holiness in it, surely cannot answer the demands of that holy law which requires "truth in the inward parts," and perfect rectitude in every thought and desire. It is, therefore, universally agreed among Protestants, that "dead works," or mere external obedience, can justify no one.

Still, it is contended by some, that the "new obedience" of a sanctified soul may, by a gracious God, be received as a justifying righteousness. Others, to be more conformable to the language of Scripture, ascribe our justification to the

single *grace of faith*, or *act of believing*. But we will now show that no works of ours, nor any holiness wrought in us, is the ground of our justification.

The arguments from which it is evident that our justification is *not on account of inherent holiness, or good works proceeding from faith*, are these :

Justification is *a sentence according to law* ; but the law demands a perfect righteousness : the imperfect, though sincere obedience of the believer, is not a ground on which God, as a righteous Judge, can pronounce the sinner justified. Even if the believer could attain to perfection in this life—which none ever did—this would not answer for a perfect righteousness ; for when a man stands in judgment before God, he must answer for the whole of his life, and not a part only. The believer cannot be justified by his evangelical obedience, because this *follows* his acceptance with God, and cannot therefore be its cause. The ungodly are the persons whom God justifies ; therefore, they are not justified by their own obedience, for they remain ungodly up to the very moment when they are justified.

The justification of the sinner, according to the apostle Paul, *excludes boasting* ; but if a man is justified by his own works, of whatever kind, he has a ground of glorying ; therefore justification is not by “works of righteousness which we have done.”

Again, justification is entirely *gratuitous*, and therefore not by works of any kind. “Being justified freely by his grace.” Now, between works and grace there is, according to Paul, an irreconcilable opposition as it relates to the ground of a sinner’s acceptance. “And if by grace, it is then no more of works ; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace ; otherwise work is no more work.”

It *detracts from the honor of Christ* and the merit of

his mediatorial work, to ascribe justification, in whole or in part, to man's obedience. If it had been consistent with God's perfections to accept of an imperfect obedience from the creature, where was the need of a divine Mediator? Did Christ the Son of God come into the world and die on the cross, merely to render the imperfect obedience of the sinner acceptable? This supposition is not honorable to the divine Redeemer, neither is it in accordance with holy Scripture. There, *all* is ascribed to Christ's redemption—to his blood—to his righteousness—to his obedience. Christ is the foundation—the corner-stone—the way, the truth, and the life—the alpha and omega—the beginning and end of our salvation. He that glories, must glory in the Lord. The everlasting song of the redeemed will be, "Not unto us, but unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

And what says *the experience of the children of God*? Are they willing to trust for salvation to such a broken reed as their own obedience; and are they disposed to detract any thing from the glory of the Redeemer in their salvation? Is there one among them who would wish to put in a claim for any part of the honor of this work?

But what need is there to argue a point which is so explicitly and positively decided by the pen of inspiration? "Therefore," says Paul, "by the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." And, as if to cut off all pretence that he meant the ceremonial law of Moses, he immediately adds, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Now, Paul tells us in another place *what law* produced in him the knowledge of sin, namely, the law contained in the ten commandments; "for," says he, "I had not known sin, unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." And this is given as a reason by the apostle, why there could be no justification by the law; for if a man was only

convicted of one sin by the law, it is evident that justification, to him, by that law, is as impossible as if he had violated every precept. As justification and condemnation are opposite states in relation to the law, he who is condemned, if it were only for one sin, and that the smallest, never can be justified by a broken law. For one sin incurs the penalty; as it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them."

Some dream of a new and milder law under the Gospel, by which believers are justified; but there is none such—there can be none such. The Scriptures never mention any other moral law than the law requiring perfect love, and which is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments. To this our Saviour continually appeals, as universally binding—as intended, originally, to give life to those who obeyed it; and as the perfect rule which all should follow. The apostles refer to no other law, as might be proved by numerous testimonies. Indeed, the very supposition of a change in the moral law is monstrous; it would imply a change in the Lawgiver, which is nothing less than blasphemy.

God does, it is true, accept from his people an obedience mingled with defects and imperfections; but not as their justifying righteousness: it is for Christ's sake, and because they are already "accepted in the Beloved." "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," they are adopted into the number of sons and daughters; and having his righteousness imputed to them, or set down to their account, there is no condemnation to them. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?" It is said of believers, that "they are passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation."

But we are said to be JUSTIFIED BY FAITH: how is this to be understood? This doctrine stands out prominently in the New Testament, and the Reformers considered it the cardinal point, or the centre of the Christian religion. Luther, as far as doctrine was concerned, *commenced the Reformation by restoring this doctrine to its proper place*; and all true reformers, ever since, have placed justification by faith at the foundation of their system, and made it the burden of their preaching; and the neglect of this doctrine, or a disposition to explain it away, or not to maintain it in its simple and obvious meaning, is an evidence of a corrupt system of theology, and marks a deviation from the truth in other particulars. This doctrine is as essential in the system of divine truth, as the centre of gravity in bodies; in both cases these points must be firmly supported, or the system falls.

But we return to the important question, How does *faith* justify a sinner? Certainly not on account of any merit in the *act* of faith. They who maintain this, fall into no less an error than substituting an act of our minds for Christ and his righteousness. Faith may, in a certain sense, be called a work; but it is not *as a work* that it justifies, or it would never have been, as it is, placed in strong contrast with works. Though faith be an act of obedience to the law of God, it is not as such that it justifies. Hear what Paul teaches on this point: "Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." To interpret this last phrase as though Paul intended to teach that *the act of believing* was the righteousness by which the ungodly are justified, would be to make him most palpably contradict himself;

for that construction would not only make faith *a work* in the affair of justification, but a *substitute* for all other works; whereas the apostle, in this passage, says, "But to him that *worketh not*, but believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly;" that is, who performs no works as a righteousness by which he expects to obtain the favor of God; but in regard to works, is considered, when justified, as an ungodly person—one who has no goodness of his own to plead, "*but believeth.*" Here faith must be considered as a mere instrument, or organ, by which Christ is received.

But why is it said to be "counted for righteousness?" For no other reason but because it is that act of the soul by which Christ, who is THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, is apprehended, appreciated, and appropriated. A reprieve is obtained by a great price from the king; the benevolent person who procured it offers it to the condemned criminal, who eagerly stretches out his hand to receive it. If his acceptance were made the condition of his deliverance, the case would be a striking parallel to the offer of pardon and the divine favor to a sinner. The blessings of the Gospel are suspended on the act of believing. This is, in fact, the cordial reception of the blessing. But who would think of ascribing merit to the mere act of receiving a pardon by a condemned criminal? As little reason is there for considering the act of faith by which we receive Christ's righteousness as either meritorious, or as standing in the place of a perfect righteousness, and accepted as such, though manifestly very far short of being all that the law demands.

But *how can the righteousness of the Redeemer be available to the justification of the sinner?* To this I reply, that from eternity Christ undertook, in the covenant of redemption, to satisfy law and justice for all who were given to him by the Father in that covenant—all who should be-

lieve on him. When incarnate, he bore their sins, and for them fulfilled all righteousness—did all that was required as a satisfaction to law and justice. “As by the disobedience of one many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made,” constituted, “righteous.” “He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” Now, if the union, by covenant between the first Adam and his posterity, was so close that by his fatal transgression they all died, why may there not be formed a union as intimate between Christ and his people? This is the very principle on which the apostle argues in the fifth of Romans. But the children of God are, “by nature, children of wrath, even as others.” They, in their natural condition, are under the curse of the law; for we read, that “Christ was made a curse for us, to redeem us from the curse of the law.” They continue aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, until, by the gracious intercession of their Redeemer, the Holy Spirit is sent to bring them to Christ. On their part, faith is the act by which they receive Christ. This consummates the spiritual union between him as the Head, and them as the members. This union is of such a nature, that, in law, whatever the Surety has done or suffered, can be set down to their account; or, as the apostle’s phrase is, “righteousness is imputed to them.” By having this perfect righteousness reckoned to them, they are instantly and completely justified. God is now reconciled to them through the death of his Son. All their sins are freely pardoned, and they are adopted as sons, and immediately made heirs of eternal life. Here then we see how faith justifies as an instrument of union and reception; and in what sense it is “counted for righteousness.” We also see how a contrast can be set up between faith and works—between grace and debt.

But although faith alone justifies, and justifies not as a

work, yet it is a *working faith* which justifies. It is the fruitful principle of sanctification, and of all evangelical obedience, or good works. And as there is a "dead" as well as a living faith, and many have been deceived by glorying in the former, while they were destitute of the latter, we should guard this point with especial care. The doctrine of justification by faith without works, is very liable to be perverted and abused by carnal men, who vainly dream of being saved *in*, not *from* their sins. This corrupt leaven began to ferment in the church in the days of the apostles. James wrote his epistle with a view to detect and expose this dangerous error. He seems, at first view, expressly to contradict what the apostle Paul had taught; for he says, "Ye see, then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." But when the context is impartially considered, the appearance of contradiction vanishes, and we find his doctrine harmonious with that of Paul; for he is speaking of a mere nominal "dead faith," which manifested itself by no good works. No man was ever justified by such a faith. He is not speaking of that justification which takes place when a sinner first believes—the only foundation of which is the merit of Christ—but he is speaking of that justification arising from the evangelical works of believers, *by which their faith is proved to be genuine*, and their profession is evidenced to be sincere; and with which acts of obedience God is also well-pleased, for he will not "forget the works of faith and labors of love" of his own dear children. The instances which he gives, especially that of Abraham, show his meaning plainly enough. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" But Abraham was in covenant with God, and of course justified a long time before he performed this act; but this proved his sincerity and the strength of his faith. By that extraordinary

act of obedience, in which Abraham, without hesitation or reluctance, offered up his only and well-beloved son at the command of God, he met the approbation of his Maker; and this approbation was publicly expressed; which expression of divine favor is, by James, without much departure from the usual signification of the word, termed "justification," and is of the same kind with that public approbation of the good works of the righteous which will take place at the day of judgment, which is also called justification by our Lord. "For," says he, "by thy words thou shalt be justified." Matt. 12 : 37. Many, however, in reconciling James with Paul, choose to interpret the word *justify*, as used by James, to signify the manifestation of the sincerity of our profession of faith in the sight of men; to which I make no objection, as this interpretation doubtless accords with truth, but I consider what I before stated as the precise meaning of this apostle.

As the word justification is borrowed from the proceedings of courts of justice, and is therefore said to be a forensic term, I will, by way of illustration and practical application of the subject, suppose the case of a *convinced sinner arraigned before the tribunal of God*, to be tried for the actions of his whole life. The Judge being omniscient and infinitely just, can neither be deceived nor biassed. The rule of judgment must be his own perfect law: no other standard of right can be admitted or conceived of in this court. The demands of this law are, perfect obedience in heart and life: all deviations from the law, even in thought and desire, as well as in word and deed, are marked as sins. If any man had uniformly done all that the law required, he might be adjudged to the possession of eternal life on account of his own obedience; that is, he would be justified by his own works. The language of the law is, "He that

doeth these things, shall live in them." "This do, and thou shalt live." "The law was given unto life."

But the person arraigned is *conscious that he is a sinner*, and therefore cannot possibly be justified in this way. While his conviction is partial, and his knowledge of sin indistinct, he very naturally makes efforts at amendment and reformation. His ignorance of the extent and spirituality of the law leads him to hope that he can make, by future obedience, a compensation for the past. But increasing light convinces him that these hopes are utterly fallacious; for he finds that no future obedience, however perfect, would have any effect to cancel the debt already contracted; and he now finds, by sad experience, that he cannot keep the law perfectly for one moment.

Under this conviction we suppose him to stand arraigned before the heart-searching Judge; and when confronted with the law and a list of his sins—of omission as well as commission—of thought, word, and deed, with all their aggravations—what plea can he offer; what defence can he make? Alas, he attempts nothing of the kind. *His mouth is stopped*. He stands speechless before his Judge. Or rather, he acknowledges every thing. He admits every charge to be true. He joins in his own condemnation; and justifies God for the sentence which he is convinced that justice requires him to pronounce. He sees no way of escape; for all his vain refuges in which he once trusted are now swept away. And he expects nothing else but that he shall be sent away into everlasting punishment. But under this awful conviction, he brings no complaint against the law which condemns him, nor against his righteous Judge. He takes all the blame and guilt to himself, and fully "accepts the punishment of his sins," as a just award. His language is like that of David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou

mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

He has, indeed, heard of a proclamation of mercy; but though it excites a vague, trembling hope that relief is possible, yet *he sees not how it is possible for him to escape* from the grasp of inflexible justice in which he is held—for now he dares not even ask that the law which condemns him should be either set aside, suspended, or relaxed. Any thing of this kind his enlightened conscience correctly judges to be altogether out of the question. No doubt, this is an awful moment in the existence of the sinner, and he is ready to give himself up for lost.

But hold—AN ADVOCATE rises in the court, and offers to undertake his cause. And it is ONE who has the ear of the Judge, and who appears in the sinner's own nature. It is the incarnate Son of God, who says to the convicted sinner, "Commit your cause to me with confidence, and I will bring you off victorious. However deep your guilt, however multiplied your transgressions, a full and free pardon will be sure, the moment you *trust yourself into my hands.*" And then, to encourage confidence in his ability, he shows that he *has rendered an infinitely meritorious obedience* to this very law, and has in his own body endured the curse which it denounces upon transgressors; and that he has acquired the right to obtain the redemption of all to whom this righteousness shall be applied.

The convinced sinner sees, with joy and astonishment, that *there is a way* in which all his grievous sins can be pardoned, and he be restored to the favor of a justly offended God. Now he believes with all his heart. Now he accepts the kind offer of the Saviour to be his advocate. Now he commits himself, and all his soul's concerns, into the hands of a faithful Redeemer. Now his burden of grief is removed, and he rejoices in the riches of grace in Christ Jesus;

and his heart, hitherto so insensible, melts into love and gratitude. And now, though he may have confidence that his sins are all blotted out, and shall never rise in remembrance against him, yet his heart breaks with ingenuous relentings, and godly sorrow gushes out in a flood.

He can now look up with humble confidence to his Judge, and plead the perfect righteousness of his SURETY. He sees that God is propitiated by the meritorious sacrifice of his own Son; and feels that a blessed reconciliation has taken place between him and his God. For, on the part of God, his anger is appeased. He is well-pleased with his own dear Son, and with all who stand robed in his perfect righteousness: and as to his own enmity against God and his government, he finds that it is *slain by a view of the cross*; and already he begins to experience something of the sweet spirit of *adoption*, and the *hope* which maketh not ashamed springs up in his breast, never more to leave him, but to be, in all temptations, troubles, and storms, as “an anchor to his soul, sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil.”

Thus is the sinner actually JUSTIFIED BY FAITH in Christ Jesus. There is no longer any legal condemnation to him; for though he sin—and there is no man that liveth, and sinneth not—his ADVOCATE ever lives to intercede for him, and to plead, for his pardon, the complete atonement which he has made. And a soul once justified never can fall again under the condemnation of the law, unless Christ should cease to intercede, or should no longer apply to his benefit his own perfect righteousness. Clouds and darkness may often obscure his evidences of sonship, and his comfort may be greatly interrupted through his own remaining unbelief, and the temptations of the adversary; but none shall be able to pluck him out of the hands of his heavenly Father, nor out of the hands of his ever-faithful Shepherd.

After this account of the gospel method of a sinner's gratuitous justification, will any still bring forward the old stale objection, that by this plan we are overthrowing the obligation of the moral law, and *undermining the foundations of morality and good works*? If there be any such objectors, let Paul answer them: "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law." "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid; how shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Some did, indeed, slanderously report of the apostle and his fellow-teachers, that they said, "Let us do evil that good may come." Concerning all who would say this, Paul declares, that "their damnation is just."

And what does uniform experience testify in regard to the lives of those who maintain this doctrine? Are they more loose in their lives than others? Have they not, in all ages, rather been the humble, self-denying, faithful imitators of Christ? So far are they from pleading any exemption from the law as a rule of life, or taking occasion to indulge in sin because grace abounds, that they "delight in the law of God after the inner man"—hunger and thirst after righteousness—and feel the remainder of sin dwelling in them to be their greatest burden and sorest affliction, which causes them to groan, and to exclaim with Paul, "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Justifying faith works by love, and love is the very spring and essence of all holy obedience. Gratitude impels the reconciled sinner to be zealous for good works. "The *love of Christ constraineth* him." He feels that being "bought with a price," he is "not his own," and should "glorify God in his body and spirit, which are God's."

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION.

The Scripture doctrine of justification may be briefly summed up in the following particulars.

1. It is God that justifies.

2. Justification is wholly gratuitous, without merit and without any works of our own as its ground.

3. The merit of Christ, as Mediator, expressed in Scripture by his righteousness, his obedience, his blood, his death, his life, his sacrifice, is the true and only meritorious ground of a sinner's pardon and acceptance.

4. The justification of the ungodly includes the remission of sins, by which often it is expressed in Scripture; but it also includes their acceptance as righteous, for the sake of Christ's perfect righteousness reckoned to their account.

5. Justification is by faith, as the instrument of union to Christ, and the reception of his righteousness.

6. The faith which justifies is always a living, operative, fruitful faith. No one is justified by a faith which is *alone*, or unattended with good works.

7. Justification and sanctification, though inseparably connected, and equally necessary to salvation, are nevertheless distinct blessings of the new covenant; and the latter is the only certain evidence of the possession of the former.

8. Justification takes place at the moment of believing, and is as perfect at once as it can ever be, and there can be no place for a second justification in the sight of God, and in relation to his law; but there is a manifestation of the genuineness of our faith and sincerity of our profession, both in this world and at the day of judgment, which is also sometimes called justification.

9. No plan of justification which does not make a complete provision for the satisfaction of all the demands of law

and justice, is honorable to God or agreeable to Scripture. By this single test may all erroneous theories of justification be tried and condemned.

The importance of the doctrine of a sinner's justification before God, is not exceeded by that of any other in the whole circle of divine truth. Without justification it is evident that no man can be saved. It is then a vital subject. Eternal life is involved in it. For let it be considered, that there is here no middle ground. He that is not in a state of justification must be in a state of condemnation; and if he continues in that state, he must perish for ever. One unpardoned sin will sink the soul to hell. What then must be the condition of sinners who are pressed down with the guilt of innumerable transgressions?

O reader, let me entreat you to apply this truth to your own case. You are, at this moment, either in a state of condemnation or justification. You are now either reconciled to God, and his adopted child, or his wrath abideth on you. If the latter, how can you be at ease? How can you sleep quietly in your bed? How can you partake, with any pleasure, of your daily food? Alas, your condition is far more dangerous, far more deplorable than any words are capable of describing. And now, while the moments pass, you are approaching nearer and nearer to the lake of fire.

And are you determined to take no warning, to listen to no advice? Will you shut your eyes against a danger so imminent and so dreadful? How will you regret this carelessness, when perhaps the day of mercy is ended. Those words of our Saviour to Jerusalem are most touching: "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the

things which belong unto thy peace ; but now they are hid from thine eyes." In a little time your eternal destiny will be immutably fixed. There is a limit beyond which the call of mercy and the strivings of the Spirit do not reach. When once the sinner has passed that awful boundary, his soul is completely lost ; his hopes are extinguished ; the blackness of darkness for ever lies before him. His sins will cluster round him like so many ghosts, to torment him. The fire which can never be quenched already is enkindled ; and the worm which never dies begins to gnaw his vitals. O wretched creature ! how dearly didst thou buy a little mirth and ease in the world ; how little profit hast thou now in all thy worldly riches and honors. They cannot purchase for thee one moment's relief, one drop of water for thy scorched tongue.

"Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would persuade men." If you were now actually beyond the reach of mercy, it would be no kindness to disturb you ; but while there is life, there is hope. The sound of mercy is still heard, the door of hope is open, salvation is yet attainable. But there is no time to be lost. The least delay may be ruinous. Escape for your life. Flee from the coming wrath ; seek safety in the house of refuge ; press into the ark ; flee to the altar, and seize on its blood-sprinkled horns. This very day may be the accepted time, and the day of your salvation.