Justification

Romans V. 1.

Justification, or the pardon of sin, is a doctrine which lies at the foundation of every system of religion known among men, both true and false. For whether the heathen in his blindness, bows down to his idol, the red man of the forest burns his tobacco in sacrifice to the great invisible Spirit, or the true Christian worships the God of heaven, the leading object in every case is to appease the displeasure, or propitiate the favor of some superior power, who is able to reward the righteous & punish the wicked.

But while the pilgrim bends his weary way to prostrate himself before distant shrine, it is our privilege to approach the Author of our existence, and the author of our religion, under the pleasing assurance, that his nature and his name is Love - and that God so loved the world, as to give his beloved Son for its redemption, that whosoever should believe in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. The Supreme being of the universe is therefore, through the medium of his Son, "merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin - not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live. And when we obtain the pardon of sin, through faith in the atoning blood, we shall enjoy peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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I. We propose to notice in the first place, the nature & extent of Justification in a scriptural sense.

1 And according to father Wesley, this doctrine should not be confounded with sanctification or the new birth. The latter is indeed a consequent of the former, but a separate and distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. Justification is considered as a relative change, while regeneration is denominated a positive change. Justification implies what God does for us through his son, regeneration what he works in us by his Spirit. Justification is an act of God in favor of man, while regeneration is the infusion of a holy principle in the heart of man, producing an inherent and positive conformity to the moral image of God. And the one is always antecedent to the other. A criminal arraigned at the bar of justice, must first hear the sentence of his acquittal, before he can feel inwardly conscious of the fact. And the sinner whose pardon has been granted in the council of Heaven, must be inwardly assured of the fact, by the direct witness of the Spirit before his own spirit will testify that he is justified in the sight of God.

2. Seeing then that justification is a separate and distinct work from the new birth, the question again recurs, what is justification in a spiritual and scriptural sense. According to saint Paul it implies the pardon or forgiveness of sins. To justify a sinner, therefore, is to account & consider him relatively righteous, and to deal with him as such, by clearing, absolving, discharging & releasing him from various penal evils, and especially from the wrath

of God, & the liability to eternal death; and by accepting him as if just, & admitting to the state, the privileges, & the rewards of righteousness. Hence it appears that justification and the forgiveness or pardon of sin, are substantially the same thing. St. Paul, therefore, uses justification and forgiveness as synonymous terms, when he says — "Be it known unto you therefore men & brethren, that through this man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe, are justified from all those things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. The same synonymous terms are used in the following passage. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, & whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Here we find that the justification of the ungodly, the imputation of righteousness, the forgiveness of iniquity, and the covering of sin, are phrases which have their various shades of meaning, but which relate to the ~~[illegible]~~ the same divine blessing & spiritual privilege under different views and forms of expression.

3. We would remark, furthermore, that all our offences are pardoned by the same act, and in the same moment of time, which extends to all the guilt contracted previous to the period of justification. God does not pardon sin by degrees, as some have vainly supposed, for it would be absurd to suppose that there ~~and~~ can be any medium between life and death. There is a moment, when the sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, hopes from death to life —

4. We would observe ~~furthermore~~ also, that our present justification does not extend to the future, or terminate our state of probation. Adam before the fall was in a state of favor with God, but as he had not fulfilled to the end of his probation, the righteousness of that law under which he was placed, his ultimate and final acceptance was not absolutely certain. He was liable to fall from grace, and his high privilege was indeed actually forfeited by his subsequent transgression. Our present acceptance with God, has no more to do with our future guilt, than the present punishment of a criminal has to do with ~~the~~ his future violation of the laws of his country. Altho we may be clearly and entirely forgiven at present, yet we are on trial for eternity, and we should be careful not to loose the things we have already gained.

That our justification may be reversed because of transgression, is evident from our Lord's parable of the two debtors, in which the one who had obtained the blessing of forgiveness is represented as incurring the forfeiture of it by indulging an unforgiving spirit towards his fellow servant.

"Let us therefore fear." &c

II. We shall consider in the second place, the necessity of justification, or the pardon of sin.

1. This arises from the fallen and sinful condition of man — his original guilt & actual transgression in the sight of the Almighty. Our first parents were created in the image of their Maker, which consists of knowledge, righteousness, & true holiness. The soul of man was then the habitation of the Deity — — — Such was man when he came from the plastic hand of his Creator — Holy, righteous, & happy. This was a condition worthy the admiration of angels, and a happiness flowing directly from God, the fountain of all good. Thus constituted & nobly endowed our first parents commenced their probation on earth, with full permission to enjoy the blessings which Providence had placed around them, with one only prohibition — that of the tree of the knowledge of good & evil they should not eat, annexing the penalty, that in the day they partook thereof they should surely die. When this restriction was made by the divine Lawgiver, Satan commenced his mischievous design to frustrate the glory of God, & ruin the condition of man — His first assault was made upon the woman, & after many insinuations he succeeded in causing her to believe a falsehood, & partake of the forbidden fruit — She gave also to her husband, & he did eat.

"Her rash hand in evil hour
Forth reaching to the fruit she plucked, she ate
Earth felt the wound, & nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe
That all was lost!"

Now mark, the consequences of this first & fatal act of disobedience. The glory of man in that sad hour departed, & his rectitude of character was lost — the crown dropt from his brow, this pristine holiness was shrouded in the abyss of misery. The curse of the Almighty came down upon him, according to the penalty annexed to the law which God had given ~~him~~ for the trial of his faith. He died a spiritual death immediately, & received into his body the seeds of mortality, & was hastening on to realize that death, the pains and agonies of which continue to wrack & torment the soul forever. The animal, the vegetable, & the mineral kingdoms felt the poison which man had taken. The garden of Eden, with all its flowers & fruit trees was blasted by the curse of God, & became a barren waste, where thorns & thistles were destined to grow & man was sent forth in all his guilt & misery to dig in the earth, & procure the means of subsistence by the sweat of his brow, until he should return to the dust from whence he came. {this is substantially, the Bible account, of man's first estate — his original purity — his transgression — his dreadful fall, and exposure to the bitter pains of eternal death —

Who can contemplate the happiness of man in the paradise of God, this present fallen condition, & not feel a pang of regret & drop a tear of sorrow. "By one man sin entered into the world & death by sin, so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

From the day of man's apostacy until the present period of time, the moral contagion of sin, has been extending its ravages among all classes of society — it has extended its withering influence to every land — visited every country, & obtained in every human heart.

From these considerations, it is evident, that the soul of man has lost the image of God, & every grace & virtue which rendered it lovely in his sight. That man has lost his original innocence & rectitude of character — that man is a guilty corrupt, depraved, & rebellious being, and exposed to the righteous displeasure of Almighty God.

How a sinner, therefore, in such a state, can be justified before God, is a question of the utmost importance to every son & daughter of Adam. It lies at the foundation of all true religion, & if we fall into a mistake on this subject, it will be an awful & fatal blunder at the very foundation of our hope of salvation

We are told by Father Wesley that he was engaged in the work of the ministry for several years, before he became experimentally acquainted with justification by faith. While he was in the State of Georgia, 1737, preaching to the Indians, in the character of a gospel Missionary, he was ignorant and destitute of experimental religion — He was a mere moralist & mechanical preacher of the doctrines of his own church. He knew nothing of a change of heart until his return from this country to England. During his voyage across the ocean, he formed the acquaintance of a moravian minister who explained to him more fully the spiritual nature of this great & important doctrine. Soon after this interview, he realized the truth of justification by faith in his own experience, and shortly after reaching his native land, he began to preach the glorious doctrine in the churches of the establishment — in the street of London, & in private houses. The consequence was, the commencement of a great & glorious revival of primitive christianity, which has been in progress from that time until the present — It was instrumental in stemming the tide of infidelity which was then sweeping over the kingdom of England — It waked up the slumbering churches of the Establishment, and has given real energy to the whole christian world. But we fear, that many like Mr. Wesley, in the beginning of his ministry, have put themselves into the priestly office, without an experimental knowledge of salvation by faith — They are blind leaders of the blind &c —

We fear that thousands in the Churches are building their hope of heaven upon a little morality – upon the mere externals of religion, while they have no well grounded assurance that their sins are forgiven, that they are justified and accepted in the sight of God. It behooves us therefore, as moral agents, bound to the bar of God to examine with the utmost care and attention the true ground of acceptance in the sight of God.

III. We shall consider, in the third place, the condition upon which we obtain the pardon of sin – "Being justified by faith we have peace with God" Paul & Silas said to the Philippian Jailer, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved"
It should be observed however, that the originating cause of justification is the free grace & spontaneous love of God; and the design of his mercy were accomplished through the intervention of a Divine Redeemer. The extent of the atonement, made by the vicarious death of Christ, reaches both the original guilt and actual transgression of the whole human race, so that its benefits are appropriated to idiots and infant Children without any condition on their part. "For 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" But those who grow up to years of accountability, and transgress the law of God, must obtain forgiveness by the exercise of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here then the question arises, what is the nature of that faith by which we are justified, pardoned, & accepted in the sight of God.

1. In the first place, it is that act of the mind by which an individual gives credence to revealed truth; and it supposes that such an one has examined the character of Ch. & his apostles and finds them worthy of credit, he has examined the doctrines which they taught, and finds them worthy of reception, he has examined the miracles which they wrought in the presence of many witnesses, and finds them to be real & highly important ~~interesting~~ facts, he has examined the prophecies which they delivered, and finds them to be exact predictions of future events. Upon these & several other important grounds he gives free credit to all the truths and doctrines of the gospel; - such as the Being & perfections of God, the government of the world by divine providence, the original purity & happiness of man, his awful apostacy from God, the atonement of the world by the death of Ch., the agency of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, the necessity of inward and outward holiness, the resurrection of the dead, a day of Judgment, and eternal rewards & punishments. Thus far we may go with the assent of our minds; and we may exercise this degree of faith, while we are the children of wrath without hope and without God in the world. Thousands have this degree of faith, while they have no more religion than the Prince of darkness. For the Devil believes & trembles at the reflection that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that blood of Christ atoned for all our race

and all who repent and believe the gospel, may be saved from the guilt, the power, the dominion & the consequences of sin.

We may assent to all the truths of the Bible, and cordially embrace them in our minds, yet if the heart remain unchanged, & the conduct unreformed, our faith is dead and nothing worth. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.

2. But that degree of faith, by which we obtain justification, is not only an assent to the truths of the gospel, but an unshaken trust & confidence in Christ as the Saviour of mankind. – Justifying faith says Father Wesley, is not only a divine evidence that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, but a sure trust and confidence, that Ch. died for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me

This degree of faith is generally preceded by what may be denominated a negative obedience, that is to say, an effort to reform & keep the commandments God; for it is by trying to observe the divine precepts that our faith is brought into exercise – It is by trying to keep the commandments that we discover the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The unrenewed man would never know the strength of his passions & appetites, unless he endeavored to resist them – he w^d never know that he could not keep the commandments without divine assistance, until he had made the effort – he would never know that he could not be justified by the deeds of the law, until he had endeavored to yield obedience to its requirements.

But when we have labored in vain to keep the law inviolate, we shall soon discover, that in us dwelleth no good thing — that to will is present with us, but how to perform that which is good we find not — We shall soon discover a law in our members, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to sin — We shall soon be brought to exclaim in the language of the Apostle "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death."

And when we have discovered from our most cautious efforts, that we cannot keep the law of God — When we have labored in vain to control our passions and propensities — When we have discovered that our hands and feet are fettered, and that we can do nothing to merit salvation — that we have nothing wherein to trust — not one rag of righteousness to recommend us to the favor of God — We shall then be lead to the fountain open for sin and uncleanness — We shall then ful constrained to lean ourselves upon Christ — And having given up every other plea, and while struggling in all the confidence of self despair — "Faith lends its realizing light" The humble penitent feels that his load of sin is gone — the love of God is shead abroad in his heart, and he is reconciled to his favor through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The surrender which the sinner is required to make of himself to Christ, may be illustrated by the following circumstance — An Indian in the west heard one of the Missionaries till his congregation, "that a sinner must give up all, before he could obtain pardon". The idea struck his mind with great force, while travelling thro the buckles fount he be gan to reflect. He felt that he was a guilty sinner before the Great Spirit, and without pardon he should be lost and ruined forever — But he recollected what the Missionary had said — "He must give up all for Christ" His property consisted of a blanket, a dog, and a rifle. He began to enquire what he could most conveniently share to appease the Great Spirit, finally concluded to give up his blanket

He laid his blanket aside, and travelled on, but still he found no comfort — He then tied his dog to a tree, and pursued his journey through the dreary desert, but still his heart was sad as ever — He then threw down his rifle, and exclaimed, here good Spirit, I give up all to thee — but still all was darkness and gloom. He then exclaimed in his last extremity, here good Spirit take your Indian too — and when he had made this surrender, he said that his heart laughed, and his soul was filled with joy, inexpressible & full of glory.

Let the humble penitent come to the cross of Christ, and there confess his guilt and shame — Let him believe that God will pardon his sins for the sake of Jesus Christ — — — and while he struggles in faith and humble prayer, God will speak in mercy — — —

IV. We shall consider in the last place, the result of our justification by faith — "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." When this great change is wrought in the soul of man, the enmity of the carnal mind will be destroyed — the will is subdued, the understanding is enlightened and all the thoughts and affections are brought under captivity to the obedience of Christ. The heart being renovated by grace divine, becomes the soil of heavenly plants, which in due time, will yield the fruits of the spirit — such as love joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, against which there is no law.

2. From such an experience, we shall enjoy peace of conscience. Its clamors will be hushed to silence, while we hear the sound of its approving voice.

While the sinner is lashed with a guilty conscience — while he shrinks back from death and the future state, the good man enjoys a calm & heavenly frame of mind. "For there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."

3. And this reconciliation with God will promote peace among all men. The Holy Spirit having eradicated from the heart, every thing like injustice, oppression, guile, fraud, covetousness, pride, anger &c., there will remain no further cause of discord & strife. And if these evils were removed from among men, society would be left to enjoy the blessing of uninterrupted peace. O what a scene of blessedness would this world exhibit, if this state of things were to prevail! — neighborhoods and families would no longer be torned with broils and feuds — our country wd no longer be agitated with political strife — Zion would no longer mourn on account of apostate brethren, but every heart wd yield to the soft influence of heavenly peace, and like kindred drops, flowing together, forming a sweet perennial stream — rolling along its high & flowery banks to the great ocean of boundless love, and joy & peace, where the saints of the most High, shall bathe themselves forever in seas of heavenly rest, and not a wave of trouble roll across their peaceful breast. Amen!

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