

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

BY THE REV. C. SYDNEY CARTER, M.A., Litt.D.

THERE is a dictum with which we are all familiar—"The Church to teach, the Bible to prove," and if we apply *this* to the subject of justification by faith I suppose there is no question that the authoritative standards of our Church's teaching on it are to be found in *Article XI*, with its special reference to the "Homily of Justification," by which title is undoubtedly intended the "Homily of Salvation." To this Homily, as well as to the Article, as Bishop Harold Browne declares, "every one signing the Articles has virtually assented," as "setting forth" "doctrine agreeable to God's Word." But except to remind ourselves that the Homily of Salvation by its appeal to the Fathers, and "ancient authors" in support of the doctrine of justification by faith, at once disproves any novel theory that this doctrine is only a sixteenth-century invention, I intend to attack this vast subject by way of "Bible proof" rather than from "Church teaching."

It is as well perhaps to commence by defining our terms. Justification is a Law Court term which in everyday, as well as in theological parlance, deals with *acquittal* or *vindication*, the declaring of a person just or righteous in the eyes of the law or at the judgment seat of a righteous God. It has a fuller meaning than pardon, for it implies being "made right," or as our Article puts it, being "accounted righteous before God."

Faith, again, is a term which both in Scripture and in general use stands for *reliance* or *trust* in a person, or thing which is in itself *trustworthy*. It involves the idea of confidence in *something unknown*, or which is not visible. For instance, we place reliance on a footbridge by walking over it, not because we can absolutely see that it will bear our weight, but because we have faith to believe in its sufficient strength. Faith may involve courage, but it does not include *merit*. "By" does not mean "on account of," but, as the Latin of our Article tells us, "through." It would be more correct, therefore, to talk of justification *through* faith than *by* faith. We are justified *by* Christ. We are justified, says Hooker, "not

for the worthiness of our *belief*, but for the *worthiness* of *Him* who is believed."

It is impossible to deal with the Bible teaching on Justification, on "being accounted righteous before God" through faith, without touching on the deep and mysterious subject of the *death of Christ*, and its relation to man's sin and salvation, for we are declared and accounted righteous before God on account of the *merits* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Justification is the application to the individual soul of the benefits of Christ's Atonement. It puts the soul into a right attitude and standing in God's sight. As I hinted just now we must be careful not to confuse justification with mere pardon. A criminal may be *pardoned* but he is not thereby *justified*. Justification is a state by which we are permanently put into a right relationship with God. We shall *repeatedly* need to seek God's *pardon* and *forgiveness*. Our Lord emphasizes this important distinction when He says: "He that is bathed, i.e., justified, needs not save to wash his feet, i.e., forgiveness" (St. John xiii. 10). When analysed therefore the difference between justification and pardon is almost as distinct as that between justification and sanctification. As the "judicious" Hooker concisely expresses it: "The righteousness whereby we are justified is perfect but not inherent; that whereby we are sanctified is inherent but not perfect." And as he further explains it: "The righteousness wherein we must be found if we will be justified is *not our own*, therefore we cannot be justified by any *inherent* quality" (*Works*, II., 603-6, 1850). Our Homily emphasizes this point in declaring that "Justification is the *office of God only*, and is not a thing which we *render* unto Him, but which we receive of Him, not which we give to Him, but which we take of Him by His free mercy" (2nd part).

Now the ideas of substitution, and of imputation of righteousness, and of vicarious penalty are of course familiar to all of us in connection with Christ's death and our justification. The question is, do they rest on a solid Scriptural foundation? I think there is abundant evidence in the New Testament to show that the *death of Christ* has a *direct* and not merely an *indirect bearing on the justification of man*. The ground of our justification is always associated with Christ's death. St. Paul tells us that "we are justified in His blood," and that we are reconciled to God "through

the death of His Son" (Rom. v. 8-10). God "justifies us freely by His grace" because Christ has been set forth as a *ἱλαστήριον* "through faith in His blood" (Rom. iii. 25). Now propitiation must involve some idea of anger to be appeased, or of favour to be conciliated, and here it is undoubtedly *God* who is to be propitiated, and this propitiation is accomplished, according to Scripture, by Christ making our sin and death to be His, so that His life and righteousness may be imputed unto us. And this is made operative through faith. "Faith," as Bishop Hopkins of Derry (1675) puts it, "is the marriage bond between Christ and the believer, and therefore all the debts of the believer are chargeable upon Christ and the righteousness of Christ is installed upon the believer." It is difficult to see how we can exclude the idea of imputed righteousness when we are distinctly told by St. Peter, "Who Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead unto sin might live unto righteousness" (1 Peter ii. 24). Or again when St. Paul tells us plainly that "God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21). As St. Augustine paraphrased it: "Delicta nostra sua fecit ut justitiam suam nostram justitiam faceret" (on Ps. xxi. 3, *Op.*, Tom. iv, par. 1, c. 95, Paris, 1681). Hooker, commenting on this passage, declares, "Christ has merited righteousness for as many as are found in Him." "Such," God "accepts in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous as if he had fulfilled the whole Law" (*Works*, II., p. 606). That great saint and scholar, Bishop Handley Moule, in speaking of this doctrine of imputed righteousness, puts it, I think, concisely when he says that "Christ *for* me must be my peace with God, Christ *in* me is the very flower and splendour of the Gospel" (*Justification by Faith*, p. 46). In other words, the one is the foundation of our peace (justification); the other is the basis of our purity (sanctification).

The cumulative evidence, both in the Old Testament teaching through types and prophecy, as well as in many New Testament passages, to the fact that the *death of Christ has a direct and unique relationship to man's justification is very strong*, but I can do little more than touch on it. "All things which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the psalms concerning me" must be fulfilled, said Our Lord, and He explained that the chief of these "all things" was "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer . . . that

repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name " (Luke xxiv. 46). We may safely say that it was to Him and His one great sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, that the Old Testament sacrifices pointed. It was of Him and of His sacrificial work that the Old Testament prophets spoke. I would, however, like to observe in passing that this evidence does seem to me to point strongly to some idea of *substitution*, i.e., that our justification is due to the fact of Christ dying *in our place*.

In the epistle to the Romans St. Paul is arguing that the death of Christ has satisfied the claims of the Law on the sinner. It has broken our bondage to the law and its condemnation. In the seventh chapter, when using the analogy of the widow freed from the law of marriage through the husband's death, He declares, "Ye are become dead to the law through the body of Christ," i.e. through the death of Christ (*v.* 4). "We are delivered from the law," he adds, *v.* 6, "that being dead wherein we were held." In Christ's being put to death for us *we* have been put to death. His death for us is our death. "One died for (or on behalf of) all," therefore all died (2 Cor. v. 14). As Bishop Christopher Wordsworth puts it, "the Second Adam as the universal proxy of mankind underwent the curse due for disobedience and so liberated us from the law." Or as another commentator expresses it, "The essential points of comparison" (i.e., between the widow freed by the death of her husband and the Christian freed by the death of Christ) "are that we are set free from the law according to the principles of the law, and by the *death* not of ourselves but of *another*" (Beet, *Romans*, p. 98). The whole section teaches us plainly that we are justified through the death of Christ, and the same truth is emphasized by St. Paul to the Colossians: "You hath He now reconciled in the body of His flesh through *death*" (*i.* 21-2).

But I think if we are to be true to the teaching of Scripture we must advance a step further and say that *Christ's death affects our justification* not merely because it was a crowning act of obedience but *because it was in some real sense a satisfaction for sin, a ransom and a poena vicaria*.

Of course it is true that the sinlessness and obedience of Christ were all necessary to our redemption, and that our justification is in some sense the result of these, but it is not due to the *merit* of them, but to the *merits of Christ's death*. Our ransom—our

expiatory redemption—was only effected by Christ's death, "once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away *sin* by the *sacrifice* of Himself," i.e. on the Cross (Heb. ix. 26).

As Professor Denney well expresses it: "It is the Atonement which explains the Incarnation. The Incarnation takes place in order that the sin of the world may be put away by the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ (Heb. x. 10). Christ did not come into the world to be a good man. It was not for this that a 'body was prepared for Him.' . . . To preach the love of God out of relation to the death of Christ—or to preach the love of God in the death of Christ, but without being able to relate it to sin—or to preach the forgiveness of sins as the free gift of God's love, while the death of Christ has no special significance assigned to it—is not . . . to preach the gospel at all" (*Death of Christ*, pp. 234, 284).

To appeal, as is sometimes done, to the parable of the Prodigal Son (a story given to illustrate one special aspect of the Divine character) as a proof of a popular doctrine of "forgiveness without atonement" is surely an attempt "to expound one place of Scripture that it be repugnant to another." For to assert that the Incarnation was the sufficient proof which a holy God gave us of His willingness to give a free pardon to repentant sinners and that Christ's death had nothing to do with the grounds of that forgiveness, but was merely the chance work of "wicked men," is to do violence to the whole teaching of Scripture concerning justification and sin, which has created a barrier to our fellowship with God. It is not in Christ's taking our nature upon Him—in the "Word becoming flesh" and dwelling amongst us, that God reveals His love for us and the possibility of our forgiveness, but in His being here "as a propitiation for the sins of the world." God commends His love for us in that Christ *died* for us (Rom. v. 8). Our Church at least makes it quite clear that the purpose of Christ's Incarnation was "to be the Lamb without spot, who by sacrifice of himself, once made, should take away the sins of the world" (Article XV).

I suppose the passage which brings out most fully the ideas of satisfaction, of a ransom and of vicarious punishment as necessary for our justification, is St. Paul's statement in Romans iii. 24-6: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through

faith in His *blood* . . . to declare His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." Now, however crude and extravagant may have been the patristic theory of a "ransom paid to Satan," there is no doubt that a principal end of the death of Christ was to destroy the power of the devil, "him that hath the power of death" (Heb. ii. 14). There is also little question surely that the "*lutron*" of this redemption was the vicarious death of Christ. As Prof. Goodwin says: "Our Lord's declaration that He gave His life 'a ransom for (*anti*) many' (Matt. xx. 28) really settles the vicarious character of the Atonement. For we may boldly challenge any gainsayer to produce one solitary passage in the whole compass of Greek literature where 'anti' does not involve the sense of ransom" (*Thoughts on Atonement*, p. 48). Or as Dimock, one of the profoundest and most learned of our modern theologians, puts it, "If then it is clear that we have set before us in this passage (Rom. iii. 24) a Divine judicial proceeding by which sinners worthy of death, justly the subjects of condemnation, are justified, and justified for nothing and yet justified justly—and if we are here taught to see this effect as resulting from the death (the blood) of Christ, is it possible that we are not to see here the Divine Atonement made by (in some sort) a poena vicaria?" (*The Death of Christ*, p. 116).

There is one thing further which I think the teaching of Scripture entitles us to say, and that is that if we are to rule out all ideas of imputation, substitution and vicarious penalty from Christ's death, then it is *very difficult indeed* to understand the connection between *that death* and the *justification of man*. These ideas of imputation, substitution and vicarious suffering seem to be written quite clearly on the pages of Scripture and they certainly explain quite simply the close connection between the Cross and justification. For the whole argument and remonstrance of St. Paul to the Galatians for their attempt to turn aside from justification through faith to justification through "the works of the Law," is based on this appeal to Christ's *death*. "Who hath bewitched you that you should not obey the truth before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth crucified among you?" (Gal. iii. 1). This question necessarily presupposes the direct connection between Christ's death and the sinner's justification, and the Apostle explains this further in v. 13 when he adds, "Christ hath redeemed us from the

curse of the law being made a curse for us"—that is, by undergoing crucifixion. Lightfoot says the expression "being made a curse for us" involves the religious conception of "the victim being regarded as bearing the sins of those for whom Atonement is made. The curse is transferred from them to it. It becomes in a certain sense the impersonation of the sin and of the curse. This idea is very prominent in the scapegoat, Lev. xvi. 5" (*Galatians*, p. 138). "Try if you can," says Dr. Dale, "to remove from this passage (Gal. iii. 10) the idea that Christ endured the penalty of the Law—the curse—in order that those who had transgressed the law might be redeemed from the curse and inherit the promise. Make the Death of Christ an appeal to the hearts and consciences of men, and let there be nothing in it which can be described as a vicarious endurance of penalty, and what becomes of the whole structure of the Apostles' argument?" (*Atonement*, p. 222.) "The wages of sin is death," and to the soul convinced of sin death is an awful reality delivering the soul into the hands of him "who hath the power of death." Our deliverance from the consequences of sin comes through the death of the One who took our nature upon Him and died our death for us—of the One who "by the grace of God tasted death for every man" (Heb. ii. 9). Surely if death is the punishment for sin, and Christ "tasted death for every man," then His death must be the penal consequence of sin? At any rate, we can truly say that the reality of Christ's finished work on the Cross for sin has led men in all ages to sing, "When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

It is well perhaps to mention the *moral objections* which are raised against that which, without any exaggeration, *very many* believe to be the Scriptural doctrine of *vicarious suffering*. We are told for instance that it is unjust for the innocent to suffer for the guilty, but as Dr. Dale points out "the voluntary suffering of the innocent for the guilty is one of the loftiest forms of heroism." "Love is stronger and diviner than justice," and even human love delights to suffer for the base and unworthy, and so "if we have to save and serve the unworthy by suffering for them, God has saved and served *us* by suffering for us" (*Christian Doctrine*, p. 251). The penalties for sin are not dependent upon God's threats against it, but upon an irreversible moral Law which condemns all unright-

eousness, and thus although God's *love* for us needed no atonement, yet to free us from the penalties due to our sins in the violation of this eternal moral Law Christ's death was necessary. "Is there any immorality," asks Dale, "any crime to provoke a cry of indignant shame in the resolve of God Himself in the person of Christ to endure suffering instead of inflicting it?"

Again, whatever may be urged on the score of injustice we have in the end to reckon with the fact of the very *definite categorical statements* of the inspired Word of God. For St. Paul gives it as a direct divine revelation "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3). Or as St. Peter records it, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter ii. 24). Now as Dr. Denney well puts it: "The Apostle does not here raise the question whether it is possible for one to assume the responsibilities of others in this way, he *assumes* (and the assumption is common to all New Testament writers) that the responsibilities of sinful men have been taken on Himself by the sinless Lamb of God. This is not a theorem he is prepared to defend, it is a *gospel he has to preach*" (*Death of Christ*, p. 99). "Let it be counted," says our own Hooker, "folly or frenzy or fury whatsoever, it is our comfort and our wisdom, we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned and God hath suffered, and that God hath made Himself the sin of men and that men are made the righteousness of God" (*Works*, II., p. 606).

There are also two other facts which we must recognize. One is that Christ *did* suffer untold sufferings and that they were certainly *unmerited* sufferings. The second is that sinners *do* merit suffering and that even if they were repentant and were forgiven, their forgiveness is *unmerited*. These facts surely create admitted difficulties in dealing with a righteous God who has allowed them, but are not they in a measure removed when we remember that Christ *voluntarily*, in accordance with His Father's purpose of love, bore the *unmerited* sufferings that we might have the unmerited pardon "That Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust to bring us to God" (1 Pet. iii. 18). The Cross of Christ makes it possible for God to forgive sin. As Dr. Griffith Thomas, whose recent death is such a great loss to conservative scholarship, puts it, "The Cross of Christ liberated His love (which sin held back) while maintaining His righteousness." "What His justice demanded His

love provided" (*Catholic Faith*, p. 80), so that through the death of Christ, "God is at once just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 26).¹

But I suppose that in whatever way we try to explain the justification of man we shall all readily endorse the wise conclusion of Archbishop Magee when he says "the principle or the rationale of the Divine procedure we may not be able fully to explain. Like the permission of sin by a just and holy God, the remedy He has provided for sin may involve mysteries which we cannot fathom. But whatever may have been the reasons for appointing and accepting of the sufferings of Our Lord as a propitiation for the sins of believers, the fact that He has done so is undeniable" (*Atonement*, Diss. XXXVIII., pp. 93-5).

As our Homily states it, "God sent His own Son . . . to fulfil the law for us and by shedding His most precious blood to make a sacrifice and satisfaction or (as it may be called) amends to His Father for our sins. . . . And whereas it lay not in us to do that, He provided a ransom for us. . . . And so the justice of God and His mercy did embrace together and fulfilled the mystery of our redemption" (*Homilies*, p. 17-18).

Justification by faith may very well be summed up in the precise definition of Bishop Moule as "the acceptance of guilty man by the holy God in view of man's reliant acceptance, as his sacrifice of peace, of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the righteous, the propitiation for our sins, who Himself bare our sins" (*Justification by Faith*, p. 35).

¹ It has been well said that "when the sinner places his confidence in forgiveness *without atonement*, he contradicts the strong conviction of his *conscience*, that sin ought to be punished" (Edwards, *Doctrine of the Atonement*, p. 169.)
