

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

By the Rev. F. R. MONTGOMERY HITCHCOCK, D.D.,
Formerly Donnellan Lecturer, Dublin University.

Justification is a phase of spiritual life associated with atonement. In one sense it springs *from* faith. St. Paul emphasizes faith as its source (Gal. iii. 11). In another sense faith is its vital principle. In the fifth chapter of the Romans "reconciled" in the tenth verse corresponds to "justified" in the ninth, and in the sixth chapter (v. 7) justification implies release *from* sin. The word "justified" in St. Luke means "reconciled" or "forgiven." Thus reconciliation involves a new status which, in a sense, is a new life, for it leads to a new character. It is evidently a preliminary stage in the process of salvation and sanctification, in which the human personality in its aspects of will and love plays a part, and yet it is of grace (Rom. iii. 24). We may be said to be justified by the free grace of God accepted by us ; saved by the Life of God abiding in us ; sanctified by the Spirit of God indwelling and energizing in us. These are spiritual ideas and to be spiritually discerned. Steadfast trust in God is spiritual life to them who are made just in Christ. Faith, in the sense of acceptance of Christ, does not justify, but brings us into touch and harmony with the righteous will of God, and faith issues in more life and fuller. The connection between these ideas becomes more apparent in the light of the purpose of the Atonement, when righteousness is seen to signify a right relation of man to God ; faith to mean a being true to that relation, and life to imply an abiding and a growing therein. The divine forgiveness is a new creation. The gift of God is eternal life, and that life is in His Son. The possession of such a life is theirs who are incorporated with Christ, one with Him and one in Him.

The meaning of justification can be more fully brought out by a careful consideration of the sense in which the word rendered just (*dikaios*) or righteous is used. We are familiar with the controversy that has been waged over the word "justification." One party insisted that in justification God accounts men just, and the other that in justification man becomes or is made just. Is "justification" an accounting or is it "a becoming just" ? Now if justification means that God considers man just, when he is not really just, it is unreal. God is the Supreme Moral Being in existence and cannot impute righteousness to sinners, nor sin to the righteous. It would be contrary to His Own Self, for He is a just God and looks at the heart. He cannot see impurity in the Spotless One, and He cannot behold purity in the impure. If justification be not then an accounting just, is it a being made just ? In other words, if it is not so much righteousness transferred from Christ and set down to our account, just as a bank transfers money from one account to another, is it a real righteousness wrought in us by the Grace of God ? A great many hold that

justification means this, that it is a condition of soul infused or created in us. But this is sanctification, or the work of the Holy Spirit making our hearts holy and fit tabernacles for God to dwell in. And there is no support for such a view of justification in the Hebrew or the Greek.*

What then is the meaning of justification if it be neither an accounting righteous or a making righteous? This question we shall be in a better position to answer when we have understood clearly what is meant by Righteousness. The Greek word (*dikaïosune*) rendered righteousness, is employed in three ways, but in each of these it concerns a relation, not a state. According to Aristotle,† it consists chiefly in right relations between man and man; according to Plato,‡ it is a right relation of three principles, reason, impulse and appetite to one another: for those who adopt the tripartite nature of man it is a right relation of body, soul and spirit—

That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before.

But according to St. Paul it is a right relation between man and God; and that relation is the source of, and comprehensive of, every other.

Taking this last definition as the fuller, justification means bringing man into a right relation with God, setting the creature right with the Creator. And the just or righteous are they who are placed in their right relation to God, in which He is to them what He intended Himself to be, a Loving and Holy Father, and in which they are to Him what they were designed to be, obedient and affectionate children.

Here the work of Christ comes in. For it is He alone Who can restore man to this true relation to the source of their physical and spiritual life. It is Christ, then, Who justifies by restoring man to the true conditions of this spiritual life. And this is done by the way of forgiveness and the Holy Cross, beneath the shadow of which man has come to recognize that all is not right between him and his Maker, that he has erred and gone astray like a lost sheep. Standing beneath that great and awful shadow that lies cruciform upon the world, we begin to recognize what we once had; to feel what we lost awhile; and to discover what we have since regained. The tragedy of the human race is flashed across our minds, and its pathos penetrates our hearts. We see man standing forth a grand and noble creature, superior to every other living thing, a moral being, free to choose the good or the evil, master of his fate, but made in the Divine image. It is the Father's Will that he should continue to grow and develop until he reaches a higher stage in spiritual life—the likeness of God. That is the glorious end and object of his existence—to be like God, pure, strong, loving, righteous. But the moral supremacy is not retained, the divine image is marred, and the likeness almost completely effaced. The story of the fall of man in the idyllic narrative of *Genesis* does depict

* "Neither the Hebrew *Tsadak* (Pi and Hiph) nor the Greek *dikaïoun* means to make righteous, but simply to put in a righteous relation." Hastings' Dict. "Justification" (II. 826.)

† *Ethics*, V. 9, 10, 11. Cf. Confucius on the duties of man in five relations; Righteousness is the duty between Ruler and subject, etc.

‡ Rep. 441 E; 442 C; 443 C—E. "And such is right in its true essence: concerning itself not with the outward doings of man's affections, but with the inward springs which are his true self and life."

the manner in which sin entered into the life of man and how it propagates itself, but it is also a poetical account of every moral lapse, every deliberate choosing of the known evil, every fall from the recognized righteousness since man was created. The moral significance is surely something more than that expressed in Shakespeare's powerful line delivered by Mark Antony :—

“ Then you and I and all of us fell down,”

and yet it does emphasize a real fact that although the responsibility of sin be not inherited, the consequences most surely are. For it is obvious that the actual sin of the fathers propagates itself, leaving the moral force, the will of the children, weaker to withstand the temptation and increasing their natural propensity to sin. This point, too, may be brought out in that sad tragedy of the parents' weakness, fear and expulsion, and the brother's hate and crime and banishment. But the actual story of the Temptation is a pictorial representation of the manner in which each man falls ; in which each several temptation succeeds in deceiving and mastering the better impulse in the life of man.

While the story is, therefore, a poetical attempt to describe the way in which sin entered into the life of man, it is a true allegory of the way in which sin enters into each individual life ; and therefore of the conflict between good and evil which will ever be waged in the heart of man. It is the Cross of Christ that has taught us that. That Cross symbolizes self-sacrifice and obedience unto death—the two principles that man throws away when his will surrenders to evil ; the two principles that Christ restored to the world by His Cross and Passion, and now restores to each sinner who has fallen into sin, if he seeks His Divine forgiveness, His pardon and His peace. That Cross, standing between the heaven and the earth, has an immortality which nothing human or earthly can possess. It has witnessed the rise and fall of many mighty nations, the sorrows and trials of many mighty peoples in the onward march of unthinking multitudes to a grim and relentless destiny. And it teaches us, by the patience and peace of the Crucified, that to be self-willed is to die and to be forgotten ; but that self-sacrifice is life everlasting and continual remembrance. Under the dominant shadow of that which was once a symbol of shame, but has been converted by the death-scene on Calvary into the sign of the highest life, we learn how sad a thing it is for the human will—so petty, impotent and foolish—to defy the almighty, all-holy will of God.

To the impenitent and prodigal, those who are still living in sin, and have not yet learned their fault and blindness, that Cross means “ All is wrong with you.” To the penitent and grateful, who have discovered their need and found mercy, that Cross signifies “ All is atoned,” and points forward to a new career—and this is justification.

As sin came by disobedience, justification came by obedience—the obedience of One. To analyse this process more closely. Man declined and ever declines to obey the laws in which God has appointed for his walk. He set up at the first, and ever sets up, his own self

against God ; he refused, and ever refuses, to be conformed to the likeness of God. This was and is sin, which is the opposition of the finite will to the infinite will. This sin established and establishes a wrong relation between man and God, and so threw and throws man into discord with his fellow-man and himself, and consequently with the conditions, the laws and the sphere of the natural, moral and spiritual life. Thus it resulted and ever results in death, degradation, hate, misery, and despair. For when man forgets that God is his Father, he likewise ceases to remember that man is his brother. So ungodliness leads to unbrotherliness, and when man loses his regard for his fellow-man he ceases to show kindness or consideration to animal life, and thus his life becomes harsh and out of tune with the creation, which is to share in our redemption (Rom. viii. 22).

In this way sin makes man all wrong ; but the Saviour came to make man all right. And this He does by causing us to remember what God has endowed us with—this discursive intelligence, this expansive soul, this up-soaring spirit ; and what God intended that we should become, good and wise and kind ; and by restoring to us the only true conditions of life, the knowledge of the Father and the love of His word, and so making it possible for us to realize the divine ideal, to attain the divinely appointed goal and to be conformed unto the divine image of the Son—the first-born of many brethren.

And this change was effected by the sacrifice of the death of Christ the representative man, the Head of the race. In that sacrifice all humanity, so far as it is in Christ, shared. With Him, we all who are His have died to sin ; we have been buried with Him by baptism unto death, and with Him we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, that we may also be planted together in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. vi. 1-11). In this way the acts of Christ are the acts of those who believe in Him. In virtue of His organic relation to the constitution of man we are His, and His sufferings are ours because He really and actually took our nature upon Him. He died to sin that we might likewise die to sin. And He was raised again for our justification, that we might rise with Him to a new birth of righteousness.

Thus the Saviour restored and restores the image of God to man. Thus He blots out the memory and burden of an evil past, cleanses the heart by purifying its thoughts, motives and desires, and by giving man the opportunity of a new life under altered conditions places man in his true relation to God. For then the love of God glows in the heart again, the light of God shines on our path again. We are uplifted by His mercy, strengthened by His grace ; and we enjoy the full communion with our Heavenly Father which self-will had interrupted, and we resume the privilege of sonship in God.

This restoration of the relation that had once existed between the divine Father and His human child is what is meant by justification—an act of divine grace which sets a man right with God.

This view of justification throws a new light on the meaning of faith. Many have an indistinct idea of what is meant by faith. By some it is identified with orthodoxy or correctness of creed, and by

others with assurance of one's own salvation. But faith is something deeper, higher, holier. It is the instinct of our sonship in the Father ; the feeling that we are sons of God ; the impulse to remain His children and to do His will. Faith, then, is a holding fast our right relation to the Father. We can now interpret the expression "justification by faith." By justification we are placed in a right relation with God through the work of Jesus Christ ; and by faith we remain steadfastly and strenuously in that new relation. Faith accepts and recognizes the restored relation, lost awhile by sinning man. Faith grasps and makes its own the new life in God. Thus faith issues in life ; for "the just shall live by faith." And as life has a beginning and a continuance, faith must quicken and sustain it. The two Sacraments of our Church are symbols of this work of faith. The Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the admission of the babe into the Body of Christ represents the beginning of spiritual life by faith. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the refreshing of our bodies with the Bread and Wine signifies the sustaining of our spiritual life by faith in Christ.

Faith, then, is a living principle ; it is not emotion ; it is not excitement ; it is deeper than sentiment ; it is more than formula. It is a vital bond of union, a living connection with the Author and supporter of our spiritual life. It is abiding in the Vine, living with and in Christ. This kind of faith means life.

When the sin-conscious soul yearns to be restored to the Father's love, it wishes for something that Christ has made possible. In His Name the lost one is found and received back upon the old familiar footing of a son. Henceforth a new life dawns upon him. The past life with its sorrows, its stains, its shortcomings, is atoned for, and Christ makes all things new. New prospects of holiness and happiness expand before the eyes of the newly emancipated. The sun of God's love and grace once more shines upon him with warm, genial rays, imparting health and gladness of soul. New powers uplift, new emotions kindle, and new ideals brace the soul for the life begun in Christ ; the dead weight of sin that had crushed him, as a juggernaut crushes the poor Hindu beneath its colossal wheels, has rolled past into the darkness, and he feels his new freedom pulsating in every limb. Such a man is a new creation. His motive of life is new—the Love of Christ constraining ; his standard of life is new—the example of the Master ; his object in life is new—the Likeness of the Christ. Is not this being brought into a new relation, a restoration of the conditions of true living ? Into this new life we enter by making the work of Christ our own, by grasping Him with the hand of faith. And in this new life we continue and progress by being steadfast in our obedience to our heavenly Father, and by being faithful in our communion with His eternal Son.