

been accompanied by the sloth and the remissness, and what, in the prevailing tone of moral relaxation, is counted the allowable purloining of your earlier days. But a sense of your Heavenly Master's eye has brought another influence upon you ; and, while you are thus striving to adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things, you may, poor as you are, reclaim the great ones of the land to the acknowledgment of the faith. You have at least taught me that to preach Christ is the only effective way of preaching morality in all its branches ; and out of your humble cottage-homes have I gathered a lesson, which, I pray God, I may be enabled to carry out with all its simplicity into a wider theatre, and to bring with all the power of its subduing efficacy upon the vices of a more crowded population."

In the absence of a detailed account of his conversion from Chalmers' own hand, this autobiographical contrast between the old things which had passed away and the all things which had become new is of matchless value. Indeed, when the sincerity of the man, the closeness of his observation and the range of his subsequent influence are taken into account, this must be reckoned one of the most remarkable documents in the entire range of Church History. It has a special bearing on the vocation of the preacher, and it will continue to serve to future generations of students and ministers as a beacon-light to reveal both the path to be avoided and that to be pursued by those devoting their energies to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

JAMES STALKER.

PERSONALITY AND GRACE.

IX. JUSTIFICATION.

WITH that demand for moral sincerity, grace is manifestly as loyal to the moral requirements as to the religious, as

heedful of the moral personality as of the appeal of God. But why should it go farther? Why do not ideas of personal duty and personal responsibility meet all the needs of the moral personality? What can religion be more than illumination on these matters, an illumination which, considering how hard and external our moral judgments are, we may gladly admit is a succour morality greatly needs?

But the moment we escape from a hard, external, legal judgment of conscience, the moral problem is larger and more insoluble than ever, and we feel ourselves more than ever in the coils of that hypocrisy with which we can have no right relation to truth either in faith or penitence.

The first and sternest reality we meet in life is moral failure. If we see our moral failure in the light of a new conception of responsibility, yet our morality remains in essence a legal rule, what do we face, if not a remorse from which there is no way of escape except to ignore its cause? And is not the desire to overlook the causes of remorse the well-spring of all hypocrisy? Nor can it ever cease to flow till there is some moral reality in saying that sins are pardoned. So long as the forgiveness of sins is only a legal fiction, no way lies open towards moral sincerity.

As the want of sincerity stands between us and God's appeal, so unpardoned sin stands between us and sincerity. So long as sin means mere remorse, it is impossible not to seek to break its force by self-delusions. Mere blank, unchanging guilt no one can look upon with unveiled face. We are then shut up in a vicious circle. Sin means hypocrisy, and hypocrisy means sin. To realise that, is to be made to cry out with the Apostle, Who shall deliver me from this body of death?

Plainly, it is a moral problem as much as a religious, but equally plainly it is a problem with which morality has no means of dealing. The more intensely and seriously moral

a man is, the more bitterly he feels that his morality merely "shuts him up to disobedience."

The difficulty has its source in the very nature of morality. Imputation of our doings to ourselves is the very stuff out of which personality is made. Everything else in us may change. In all besides we may say we are different persons. But the sense of responsibility abides and insists that each is himself and not another. It links inexperienced youth and intrepid manhood and decrepit age into one, and so forms the basis of our self-consciousness, our ideals, our character. If the gracious relation to God we have spoken of plays fast and loose with this imputation of our own doings to our own selves, it would be more deadly for the moral personality than even to be overridden occasionally by the direct force of omnipotent grace.

Here then is a legal relationship springing immediately from the sense of duty and responsibility which cannot be ignored. The word imputation has fallen into disrepute through falling into suspicious company, but the thing itself is the life nerve of our moral personality. Yet the very morality which without it would have no business to do upon the earth, has no solution for the imputation of wrong except, at convenient seasons, to ignore it. The blank, unchangeable past is all we look out on when we face the moral reality with unaverted eyes. What, then, is left except to avert our eyes, and ignore the hindrances of our past as best we may? But a morality not resolute to face all reality is in a perilous state. Yet, if morality is a legal requirement and every breach of it is legal guilt, and nothing can alter the past that it should not be past forever or make it other than our own, what is left except to do our best to make up in the future for our failure in the past?

The first thing is to realise that there is no legal way out of this legal *impasse*. Men have wearied out their spirits

seeking it and have not found it. Their solutions have had no moral value, have indeed only added to the perplexity of the moral problem and at times increased the practical moral evil.

The legal solution is of two kinds. The first and simplest one is that we can ourselves attain so much more merit in the future than the bare legal demands of the future will require, that we shall be able to compensate for falling below the bare legal demands of the past.

There we have the pure legalistic, moralistic spirit at its shallowest. It has no consciousness of life's varied opportunities, no infinite standard of its demands, nothing but the most mechanical conception of character. The noble and austere form even of a legal morality has not truly risen upon its spirit, and the intrusion of a morality which demands the whole devotion of a spirit of perfect love to God and man, is undreamt of.

Unconfessed, however, that view is still at the root of much theory, both moral and religious, and of still more practice. It is needless to say how much religious doing, such as penance and masses, is of that nature, but there are far more people than the world recognises, going about among us to-day, who are filled with the idea, not of meeting their present duty because it is their present duty, but of compensating for the past, sometimes in strangely arbitrary and only vaguely moral ways. All our present tasks come out of the past, and to meet the consequences of our sin may be part of our present task, but the service of the present never leaves us anything but debtors to its calls.

The other legal solution is the idea that the merit of another person better than ourselves may compensate for our demerit. This may be merely the transference of the merits of the saints, or it may be the more definite conception of a substitute who takes our place.

The whole feeling by which this theory lives may have come down to us from the days when the moral personality was still submerged in the clan or city, when men's moral interests were so intermingled and undefined that such transference of guilt was not morally forbidding and may even have been morally significant. The trouble with it to-day is that it is expected to work legally in a legal situation, the essence of which is the ascription of guilt to the individual. There it does not come to shipwreck merely on details, such as the difficulty of seeing how any one's merit could both be transferred to another and still be his own to give him a higher place in the hierarchy of saints. It fails because it does not fulfil the legal conditions of the very legal difficulty which called it into being.

Even on the basis of moral law it is no moral solution. The root of the legal difficulty is precisely that the guilt is ours, ours only, and was always. In that respect the moral personality is quite isolated and impenetrable. Nor is it a moral solution, if we take a wider view and regard sin as a wrong done to the moral government of the world; for a Moral Governor who suffered the transference of guilt from the guilty to the innocent would not, according to any enlightened conscience, be a moral governor at all.

Nor is it a religious solution, for it would not explain to us in any way what is meant by calling God Father or make it in any way plainer how our relationship to Him is wholly of love. God manifestly would not be dealing with us as with sons, but at best He would be giving us some kind of state condonation for a cause foreign to ourselves and foreign to our filial relation to Him.

If, however, pardon is to break the vicious circle of sin and hypocrisy and hypocrisy and sin in which we find ourselves imprisoned, the first requirement of it must be that it deals with the actual situation. That must mean above

all else power to look the whole moral situation straight in the face. It must be no preaching of peace while there is no peace, no mere palliating or ignoring. It must mean courage to open all cupboards, assured of finding no skeletons. To be forgiven just means that all need has gone from us of trying to think anything, ourselves included, other than it is. To be justified means to be set free from moral juggling with ourselves. Justification and the power to look all reality in the face must be one. Otherwise, at least, it can do nothing to deliver us from hypocrisy. As a mere legal fiction it would only add another illusion. Nothing will avail except a pardon which will so deal with our real moral situation that we can at once have utter moral sincerity and peace. A peace of moral insincerity we can too easily obtain, but only at the price of self-deception in which, as we have already seen, the spirit is shut up in a round of sin and hypocrisy. From this it is the very business of justification to set us free.

“Blessed,” says the Psalmist, “is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile.” No guile means no desire to shield oneself in any way by falsehood, to derive profit from anything save sincerity and truth, and it is both the condition and the consequence of the Lord not imputing iniquity. But if the Lord is not a legal fiction, if He is only another name for reality, if the one thing He must do is to impute to every man exactly what is his, how can we have any blessed sense of pardon, except under some illusion ?

But that kind of forgiveness would only complete our self-deception by taking the most real thing in our lives, the imputation of sin, out of it. Instead of being our deliverance, it would only be the sanction of our spiritual annihilation.

From this practical moral standpoint, the difficulty lies precisely in this close partnership of sin with unreality. We

cannot be forgiven without spiritual death so long as there is guile, and we cannot be rid of guile till we look out upon forgiveness. That is the legal situation which cannot by any legal device be dealt with legally.

Here we come upon another antinomy of grace. It sets right our legal relation to God, but only by making it cease to be legal. The essence of grace, indeed, is that it is not legal. That is the very quality in it which makes it not a straight line of force passing direct through our personality, but a curve of personal succour encircling and embracing it.

We are said to be justified by faith. Perhaps no phrase gives us a stronger feeling that pardon is an unreality. We could far more easily believe that God justifies us on signs of amendment or in view of the moral elevation He foresees we shall attain. Even when, in deference to apostolic language, men still say we are justified by faith, they import these meanings into the words. God justifies us by faith, it is urged, because faith shows that we have altered our ways, and so faith can be completed by love and holy works, or because faith has in it the germ of all that God approves. With both explanations we are back at the old legal solution which turns out again to be nothing but the old legal fiction. Nothing in the world that changes any moral reality has come to pass. When we speak in that way of God justifying, we have merely made reality one thing and God another.

Men so speak of faith because they think of faith itself as fulfilling some kind of legal condition for a legal acquittal. They must, therefore, discover some justifying virtue in faith itself as a mental state, with the result that they are brought into a distressing and morally calamitous conflict between faith and intellectual honesty and even between faith and moral sincerity.

The whole perplexity arises from forgetting what the faith by which we are justified is faith in. It is simply faith in a

new world of spiritual realities. There the old hard legal requirements with the old hard boundaries of our personalities, and all their old self-regarding distinctions, have disappeared. Love alone is power and ultimate reality. The cross is the sign of victory, because we also can fill up the sufferings of Christ for His body's sake. To find God is to find His will of love working through us for our fellow-men. To love one another is the fulfilling of all law, and the bearing of each other's sins as much required as the bearing of each other's sorrows. Not to share our brother's shame would be even more unbrotherly than not to share with him in his want or not to comfort him in his bereavement.

In that world, and not in any other, atonement is a reality. There the sacrifice and service of Jesus Christ are no longer the moral absurdity of taking so absolutely personal a thing as guilt and transferring it to the shoulders of another, an innocent person. They are the manifestation of the deepest significance and holiest relationships of our own personality in a world, the meaning of which, in spite of everything to the contrary, is love. They form the holy of holies of a new world with new and healing moral conditions, where legal ideas of meeting God's judgment fall away from us and God's service rises upon our spirits, not with legal demands and threats, but as a divine righteousness which we shall ever rejoice to pursue, yet ever rejoice also to know is always beyond us. Then forgiveness is a reality and a deliverance because the whole moral order of our life is transformed.

Only in that world is atonement ever preached in the New Testament.

When Paul went to the outside world, he preached that men should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance. In short, he asked simply for moral sincerity, with an appeal to the things which made moral sincerity possible. Only in the writings he wrote out of the bosom of

the Christian community, for the community itself, did he speak of being justified by grace, and even then only in that marvellous setting of personal devotion in the service of love which was at once the outcome and the interpretation of his faith.

John's order is equally illuminating. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." The note of that world of light is to have fellowship one with another. In that bearing and forbearing with one another, we have the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and enter the sphere where Christ's blood, meaning His service and sufferings, cleanses from sin.

The reality of pardon appears in the simple fact that penitence is made the way to peace and peace the way to a truer penitence, that in short the vicious circle of sin and hypocrisy and hypocrisy and sin is turned into the emancipating road of sincerity and inward liberty and inward liberty and sincerity. It does not mean that we can continue in a world of merely legal moral responsibilities, yet have a device found for us by which we may evade them.

Even if such a device could be found, the forgiveness of sins would not be a good in itself, bringing us out of our self-regarding state, but only a means to a self-regarding good beyond—escape from the unpleasant consequences of sin. And if the device is the substitution of the innocent for the guilty, it is a way of escape which could only be accepted through pure self-regarding fear and, therefore, could not be a moral trust at all.

If the theory of substitution, thus legally interpreted, has, as it doubtless has, brought peace to burdened souls, if it has not hardened them in self-love but has given them deliverance from self as well as from sin, the reason is not that the theory is capable of some subtler legal interpretation which

makes it truly meet some need of conscience, or that it is capable of some more comprehensive legal application, which solves for us some problem in God's government. The true reason is that the cross of Christ has, in spite of theory, interpreted and displayed to religious souls the new world in which hard legal conditions do not obtain and where we are not shut up in them with adamant walls, but that these legal frontiers of our moral personality have been lost in a new moral fellowship with our Father and our brethren, wherein we realise that the bearing of each other's burdens, whether of sorrow or of sin, is the deepest and the surest of all realities, and that the bearing of sin in particular is the very heart of God's gracious relation to us, which is love.

By crucifying in that way the old world of moral actions for legal awards to us, and by crucifying us with our self-regarding performance of moral tasks to it, the cross of Christ joins for us into inseparable unity sincerity and peace.

For that reason faith in Christ is above all else justifying faith. In itself and merely as an inward grace, faith in Christ no more effects pardon by legal merit than any other faith. It is not the faith but the cross with the love of God which speaks in it that works peace. Precisely because the faith is not of ourselves, but because Christ's cross so speaks to us and makes certain to us what, understanding it out of the sufferings of Christ and our partaking of them, we may call an atoning order, it is the gift of God.

Justification in that sense deals not with the consequences of sin, but with the sin itself. It is not condonation, but forgiveness. It is not a letter from the father to the prodigal saying, Come home and nothing will be said about the past. In that case the past would not require to have anything said about it. Its own voice would be quite loud enough. True forgiveness demands positive manifestation of a love which will surmount the evil past and silence its voice. It is the

father who says, My son, let us share the sorrow together and let us live down the past together. That is what the cross means. It works peace because God is manifesting that redeeming love every day and in every event of every day. It is the high altar of sacrifice because it shows that the world is its temple.

JOHN OMAN.