

Salvation—Justification (3rd)

(Our study for today continues with the subject of justification. In this study we begin discussing the ground of justification. Obviously, there must be a reason or a basis on which a person is justified.)

In a previous podcast we showed that justification is a judicial or legal term that does not change the individual but that it merely pronounces a person to be just or righteous before the law. In our last podcast we discussed how it is that a sinful person can be justified because Christ was the Surety of His people in eternity before the world began. Regarding Christ as our Surety from all eternity, allow me to quote from a sermon entitled “The Justification of God’s elect [*sic*]” by John Bailey, preached in a Baptist meeting house in Brockham Green, Surry, England, on September 21, 1806. He said as follows:

Justification is a law term, and is never understood to make any one righteous, but is judicially pronouncing a person so, as in Isai. xliii. 25, 26. *I, even I am he, that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance, let us plead together, declare thou that thou mayest be justified.* But it may be asked, when God did justify his elect? 1. I answer, from all eternity. For justification is an act of God’s grace, an immanent act in the divine mind and eternal, for nothing new can arise in the mind of God: hence saith the apostle, Eph. i. 3, 4. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.* Now the apostle says we were chosen in Christ (that is elected) before the foundation of the world (that is, from all eternity); and as we were elected from all eternity, so likewise justified; for eternal justification must be among the all spiritual blessings the apostle speaks of. Thus we were justified when first elected, though not in our own persons, yet in our dear Lord and Head, as he had our persons then given him, and we came thereby to have a being and interest in him: so that those who object to the glorious doctrine of eternal justification, on the ground that persons cannot be justified before they exist, must also on very same ground object to the soul-supporting doctrine of eternal election, for it may as well be asked how can a person be elected before he exists. Such greatly err not knowing the Scriptures, and the power of God, for known unto God are all his works from the beginning, or from all eternity. Yes, blessed be God from everlasting he knew his people, and from all eternity, they had a representative being in Christ, were chosen in him, and blessed in him with all spiritual blessings; and why not then justified in him? for God’s will to elect is election; so, God’s will to justify is justification.

Bailey enlarged on this much more in his sermon but it would require multiple podcasts to quote all of it. Nevertheless, I thought it good to give this one small quote because it seems to summarize, and hopefully, gives more insight of the mystery of the Divine workings of our glorious God and Savior. Now I want direct our attention somewhat concerning the ground of justification.

George Smeaton stated that *the righteousness of God* “is descriptive of the finished work of Christ, as approved at the divine tribunal, and the meritorious cause of our acceptance...” He further said, “The term righteousness ... does not in any passage mean the state of justification. If the state of justification does not proceed on an underlying righteousness as its basis, we are lost in the mists of uncertainty.” And when showing that this righteousness is not the attribute of God, he states, “God does not demand from man His own essential righteousness, but that which is competent to a creature....” (*Atonement According to the Apostles*, pp. 52-55.)

Charles Hodge said, "Hence this righteousness is not our own. It is nothing that we have either wrought ourselves, or that inheres in us. Hence Christ is said to be our righteousness; and we are said to be justified by his blood, his death, his obedience; we are righteous in him, and are justified by him or in his name, or for his sake. The righteousness of God, therefore, which the gospel reveals, and by which we are constituted righteous, is the perfect righteousness of Christ which completely meets and answers all the demands of that law to which all men are subject, and which all have broken." (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 31.) Allow me to clarify one thing regarding this quote from Hodge. We do not mean to imply that the Person and work of Christ was for the whole human race in the last part of the quote by Hodge when he said that the righteousness of Christ "completely meets and answers all the demands of that law to which all men are subject, and which all have broken." Though Hodge may have meant to imply this, it is clear from our previous studies that the salvation of God and the justifying righteousness of Christ is only for those given to Christ before the world began. Christ only became the Surety for the sheep for which He died. See John 10:11. Nevertheless, Hodge was correct in that the *righteousness of God* whereby we are justified "is not our own," but it is "the perfect righteousness of Christ which completely meets and answers all the demands of" the law.

Commenting on Romans 1:17, John Gill said that the phrase *the righteousness of God* does not mean, "the essential righteousness of God, the rectitude of his nature, his righteousness in fulfilling his promises, and his punitive justices which though revealed in the gospel, yet not peculiar to it; nor the righteousness by which Christ himself is righteous either as God, or as Mediator; but that righteousness which he wrought out by obeying the precepts and bearing the penalty of the law in the room of his people, and by which they are justified in the sight of God." (*An Exposition of the New Testament*.)

"Many other citations also affirm that *the righteousness of God* refers to the finished work of our glorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But before we enlarge on the ground of our justification, let us pause and consider the blessedness of this truth. Oh, the wonder that a sinner is found not guilty before the bar of God and that Christ Jesus has taken his sins and paid the debt in full! Dear one, is this your hope and stay? Are you trusting only in the finished work of Christ? Do you have rest and peace in falling at the feet of the Lord Jesus and offering sacrifices of praise unto Him? How miserable are those who look to anything or anyone else for acceptance with God. Know well that God will accept nothing other than pure, flawless, complete, and total obedience. One can never meet God's conditions. *It is Christ or nothing!*" (*Justification: The Heart of the Gospel* by Jimmy K. Barber, p. 57.)

The Scriptures abundantly teach that the ground of justification is called *the righteousness of God*. Let us look at a few.

In Philippians 3:9, Paul wrote, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Here Paul clearly stated that he did not want to be found in his own righteousness but in "the righteousness which is of God." Paul again spoke of this righteousness in II Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him *to be sin* for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This verse plainly says that God made Christ "to be sin for us" so "that we might be made the righteousness of God" in Christ. It is this same righteousness that Paul desired in the verse supplied above from Philippians.

It is to be regretted, to say the least, that there are some that deny that Christ took our sins and bore the penalty for our sins against the law of God. Listen to the words of Albert Barnes commenting on Galatians 3:13 regarding Christ being made a curse for us. He wrote, "It cannot be meant that the Lord Jesus properly bore the penalty of the law. His sufferings were *in the place* of the penalty, not *the penalty itself*. They were a *substitution* for the penalty, and were, therefore, strictly and properly **vicarious**, and were not the identical sufferings which the sinner would himself have endured." And commenting on II Corinthians 5:21 concerning Christ being made sin for us he said, "But what is meant by this? What is the exact idea which the apostle intended to convey? I answer--It cannot be that he was literally *sin* in the abstract, or sin as such. No one can pretend this. The expression must be therefore, in some sense,

figurative. ... Nor can it mean that he was, in any proper sense of the word, *guilty*, for no one is truly guilty who is not personally a transgressor of the Law; and if he was, in any proper sense, *guilty*, then he deserved to die, and his death could have no more merit than that of any other guilty being; and if he was properly guilty, it would make no difference in this respect whether it was by his own fault or by imputation: a guilty being deserves to be punished; and where there is desert of punishment there can be no merit in sufferings." It is obviously true that Christ Himself was not a sinner or guilty of committing any sin or violating the law of God. However, the verse says that Christ was "made sin for us." (The "to be" is in italics showing that it was added by the translators.) If Christ could not be legally constituted "sin for us" then conversely we who are sinners and unrighteous cannot "be made the righteousness of God in him."

Many other quotes could be supplied by commentators who deny the penal substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of those for whom He died but we will not weary you with such. However, I do suggest that one carefully read the comments of authors because they are not often so clear in presenting their true colors regarding the truth of the death of Christ.

The Lord willing we will look at some more passages regarding the righteousness of God imputed to the account of the people of God in our next podcast. However, our time is up for today. Farewell.