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JUSTIFICATION





Founders Ministries is committed to encouraging the recovery of the gospel and the biblical reformation of local churches. We believe that the biblical faith is inherently doctrinal, and are therefore confessional in our approach. We recognize the time-tested *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689) as a faithful summary of important biblical teachings.

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Tom Nettles

Introduction

Justification

This is the article of faith by which the church stands when it is held clearly and preached truly, or by which it falls if it is corrupted in form and ignored in proclamation. Luther came to experience it prior to his clear affirmation of it. He was driven to a mature statement of it by continued invocation of Scripture and consultation with a conscience informed by the biblical view of humanity's lapse into sin.

Luther, throughout his preaching and teaching ministry, maintained a deep sense of the internal operations of righteousness for renewal. As he came to articulate imputed righteousness more clearly, he did not lose the concept that the true Christian wants internal righteousness also. This too comes under the umbrella of faith. In his preface to Romans, written around 1516, he wrote, "Faith, however, is a divine work in us. It changes us and makes us to be born anew of God (John 1); it kills the old Adam and makes altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers, and it brings with it the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly" [*Romans*, Preface, Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976 reprint of Zondervan, 1954), xvii].

His understanding of faith alone at this time maintained some ambiguities. "Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous," he observed, "and fulfills the law." But in what sense does faith fulfill the law? "For out of Christ's merit, it brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that it shall be. Thus good works come out of faith." In this way, said Luther, by faith we establish the law rather than abolish it [xv].

He also wrote, virtually identifying faith with righteousness, but clearly connected to Christ's work as mediator, "Righteousness, then, is such a faith and is called 'God's righteousness,' or the 'righteousness that avails before God,' because God gives it and counts it as righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator, and makes a man give to every man what he owes him. For through faith a man becomes sinless and comes to take pleasure in God's commandments" [xvii].

At the same time, Luther taught that believers always "acknowledge themselves to be sinners," and that we have not true and perfect inward righteousness. We must, therefore, be righteous "from without;" that is, "we are righteous 'outside ourselves' when our righteousness does not flow from our works; but is ours alone by divine imputation. Such imputation, however, is not merited by us, nor does it lie within our power" [*Romans*, 83].

In his discussion of Romans 5, Luther argued that the true energy of faith is that it yearns for and desires to know "Christ and His favor which gives us His righteousness" [*Romans*, 90]. The Christian, therefore, while being sanctified as a true outcome of real faith, is at the same justified. As he becomes righteous, he is looked upon as already righteous. "He is always in sin and always in justification," Luther wrote. "He is always a sinner, but also always repentant and so always righteous" [*Romans*, 168]. Repentance shows the reality of the new birth, that we put no confidence in our works, have a proper evaluation of the pervasive requirements of the law, and look to Christ for righteousness.

In 1519 when he wrote on *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, he rightly spoke of our being justified by an "alien righteousness," and in affirming that "through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours." This righteousness is an "infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ" [Timothy Lull, ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 156].

Also, encouragingly, he wrote, "He who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he." So far, so good. The difficulty comes when Luther explained how the alien righteousness that is in Christ alone does its full work in us. "Alien righteousness is not instilled all at once," Luther explained, "but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death" [156, 157].

Though righteousness was by faith alone—trust in Christ— and was "alien" to humanity—not generated internally by human effort but given from the outside—Luther did not perceive it exclusively in terms of imputation (though he mentioned it in Romans) but as

instilled in us. Christ's instillation of righteousness was set in opposition to original sin, rather than condemnation. Christ "drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow" [157]. He even nurtured the same concept in his commentary on Galatians in 1519 when he said, "Every one who believes in Christ is righteous; not yet fully in point of fact, but in hope. For he has begun to be justified and healed."

By 1520, however, Luther had begun to write in terms of imputation, and our being reckoned righteous for the sake of Christ's righteousness. In *The Freedom of the Christian Man* he said that we are "justified by the merits of another, namely of Christ alone." With those merits of Christ, the bride's sins cannot destroy her "since they are laid on Christ and swallowed up in him. And she has that righteousness in Christ her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins." Even as He took our place in death as if He Himself had sinned, so the church is "endowed with the eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom."

In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), Melancthon argues with clarity and thoroughness for the centrality of faith in the justification of sinners as opposed to works. He dissects with skill the various ideas of merit contained in the scholastic theology, denies their validity, and says in scores of ways, "By faith, therefore, for Christ's sake we receive the forgiveness of sin" [118]. Or again, "We accept his blessings and receive them because of his mercy rather than because of our own merits" [115]. "It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works" [122].

Within these statements, however, remnants of confusion remain, which were clarified later in the confessional progress of Protestantism. For example, Melancthon wrote, "Therefore we are justified by faith alone, justification being understood as making an unrighteous man righteous or effecting his regeneration" [117]. At another place he states, on the basis of drawing conclusions from Scripture, "By faith alone we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and by faith alone we are justified, that is, out of unrighteous we are made righteous and regenerated men" [123]. Though he is clear on faith, and clear that justification is not from our works, or from any mere mental assent to historical propositions, and though he uses the language at times of being "accounted righteous before God" [119], the distinction between regeneration and justification has not been solidified, and the distinction between being made righteous and being declared righteous still is murky.

In 1534, preaching on the second Sunday after Trinity, Luther reflected on the words of Jesus that one must eat His flesh to have eternal life. “In Christ there is pure righteousness and no sin,” Luther reminded his people; “sin has no dominion over him.” On that basis, “Whoever, therefore, possesses Christ and eats of this food, which is pure righteousness and undefiled by sin, is by his eating also righteous.” No longer can he be accused by sin, no longer does God’s wrath abide on him, because Christ, who is “pure righteousness” is his food. If we truly eat Christ, therefore, that is, “hold firmly to the word of the gospel,” sin’s accusations can ultimately accomplish nothing, “for Christ, our food, is greater than our sin. By the same token, our righteousness is not ours (even though it becomes ours through faith) but Christ’s” [Klug, *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 6:245].

In his *Disputation Concerning Justification* of 1536, Luther had seen with greater clarity the relation between our proper righteousness generated internally by the grace of regeneration, and the perfect alien righteousness of Christ’s perfect obedience declared to be ours by the grace of imputation. On the one hand, “a man who is justified is not yet a righteous man, but is in the very movement or journey toward righteousness.” So, the one who is “justified is still a sinner; and yet he is considered fully and perfectly righteous by God who pardons and is merciful.” The relation of the one righteousness to the other finds coherence in the righteousness of Christ, “since it is without defect and serves us like an umbrella against the heat of God’s wrath, [and] does not allow our beginning righteousness to be condemned.” So it is that works do not produce our own righteousness but faith (“which is poured into us from hearing about Christ by the Holy Spirit”) confesses that we are justified, that is, “considered righteous on account of Christ.” Luther had gained clarity, but about twenty years of oscillating development had sown seeds of doctrinal ambivalence in the broad “Lutheran” community.

These sometimes murky relations between regeneration and imputation brought about controversy which resulted, forty years later in the *Formula of Concord* (1576). Its composers recognized that language had been used in a variety, and sometimes confusing, ways in the earliest days of reform and correction. Their attempt was to explain the variety of meanings in single terms, consolidate and streamline the doctrine, and to distinguish between doctrines so that no confusion of substance would remain in the pure evangelical expression of the gospel. About righteousness gained through faith they said, “that a poor sinner is justified before God ... without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness” [*The Book of Concord*, trans. & ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 541].

Further along in the discussion, they gave an even more distinct and detailed clarification: “Therefore, his obedience consists not only in his suffering and dying, but also in his spontaneous subjection to the law in our stead and his keeping of the law in so perfect a fashion that, reckoning it to us as righteousness, God forgives us our sins, accounts us holy and righteous, and saves us forever on account of this entire obedience which, by doing and suffering, in life and in death, Christ rendered for us to his heavenly Father” [541].

For further clarification, they dealt with the concepts of conversion, regeneration, and renewal in their relation to justification. They introduced the discussion with this explanation: “Since the word ‘regeneration’ is sometimes used in place of ‘justification,’ it is necessary to explain the term strictly so that the renewal which follows justification by faith will not be confused with justification and so that in their strict senses the two will be differentiated from one another” [542].

A part of the clarifying explanation concerned the relation of sanctification in light of indwelling sin to justification in light of Christ’s perfect obedience: “But because the inchoate renewal remains imperfect in this life and because sin still dwells in the flesh even in the case of the regenerated, the righteousness of faith before God consists solely in the gracious reckoning of Christ’s righteousness to us, without the addition of our works, so that our sins are forgiven and covered up and are not reckoned to our account” [543]. Just for good measure, in another statement of distinction, the Formula stated:

Here, too, if the article of justification is to remain pure, we must give especially diligent heed that we do not mingle or insert that which precedes faith or follows faith into the article of justification, as if it were a necessary or component part of this article, since we cannot talk in one and the same way about conversion and about justification. For not everything that belongs to conversion is simultaneously also a part of justification. The only essential and necessary elements of justification are the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith which accepts these in the promise of the Gospel, whereby the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to us and by which we obtain the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, adoption, and the inheritance of eternal life [543].

Forty years before the *Formula of Concord*, five years after the *Apology for the Augsburg Confession*, and in the same year as Luther’s *Disputation Concerning Justification*, John Calvin (1509–1564) published his first edition of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In the first chapter, a discussion of the Law, Calvin inserted his explanation of justification. After showing how present day Roman Catholicism, based on the doctrinal reasoning of the scholastic theologians, had grievously misunderstood and perverted the intention

of the moral law, Calvin concluded, that because of our sin and corruption and our consequent unrighteousness and inability to keep the law, “the promises also that are offered us in the law are all ineffectual and void” [33]. At this point we must realize that eternal life must come now, not by personal works of righteousness which are morally impossible, but by salvation. That salvation “consists in God’s mercy alone,” not in any worth, works, or merit of ours. In some manner we must be freed from the law’s curse. Here we find the infinite benefit of Christ in that we put on “Christ’s righteousness ... as our own, and surely God accepts it as ours, reckoning us holy, pure, and innocent” [34]. Although God chooses us unto holiness and will teach us to hate all the filth of the flesh, still we stand in need of forgiveness each moment. Even our best works done under the guidance and in the energy of faith cannot render us acceptable and pleasing to God. “But Christ’s righteousness, which alone can bear the sight of God because it alone is perfect, must appear in court on our behalf, and stand surety for us in judgment.” This righteousness, Calvin continued “is brought to us and imputed to us, just as if it were ours.” On the other hand, “none of the filth or uncleanness of our imperfection is imputed to us, but is covered over by that purity and perfection of Christ as if it were buried that it may not come into God’s judgment.”

We see therefore, that the way to reformation is one of progress and openness to further light, further clarification, further precision, further insight from Scripture. Luther began with contrasting biblical repentance with the Roman Catholic system of indulgences. The battle that ensued drove him to clarify biblical authority, highlight the centrality of Christ, argue for faith as fundamental to justification, not works of congruent or condign merit. The declaration of being just was not, however, devoid of merit but depended on it entirely; the merit granted us came from the perfect human obedience of Jesus Christ. Luther reestablished calling as a reality in every Christian’s life, he rescued the rightness and goodness of marriage for all. From our standpoint he fell short on issues of church and state, his attitude toward certain segments of society, and the theology of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The wonder is, not that he fell short in some ways, or seemed boisterous, brutal, unrefined, and given to eruptions of outrage, but that he corrected so much that had the pedigree of many centuries and powerful centers of authority.

Not only as a clever and earnest critic, but as a true builder, Luther left succeeding generations in his debt. Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger, Beza, Bucer, Cranmer, though differing on certain points in important ways and establishing their own spheres of original contribution, nevertheless found a starting point in Luther. Philip Jacob Spener was greatly moved by Luther’s printed sermons, found inspiration for his advocacy of genuine piety as the true test of Christian faith, set in motion standards of piety that greatly influenced the

leading preachers of the great evangelical awakening in England and America in the 18th century. Luther, thus, refined through other developing points of insight, stood behind all the subsequent awakenings.

One hundred years after his death, Protestant theology had been discussed and debated in many venues and had become the dominant expression of Christianity in several countries. England had been among the most fertile grounds for doctrinal advance and maturity. In 1646, *The Westminster Confession of Faith* was written. This confession, arising from vigorous theological debates and constructive discussion among those looking for further reformation of the church in England, presented one of the most clear, articulate, well synthesized confessions emerging from the development of Protestant theology. Its article on justification, given its relative brevity, expresses forcefully every idea essential to the biblical teaching.

This issue of the *Founders Journal* is devoted to an exposition of this sink-or-swim doctrine. From Benjamin Keach himself, one of the signatories of the 1689 presentation of the *Second London Confession*, we have printed an article that summarized his argument from a small book *The True Marrow of Justification*, reprinted by Solid Ground Christian Books. For Keach, this doctrine held a place of special importance. Not only was the contest with Roman Catholicism still energetically pursued by Protestant and Catholic alike, he found within church of England and the very Puritan movement itself just cause for concern. Aaron Matherly has given us a sensitively constructed exposition of paragraph one of this chapter bringing in both Luther and Keach to show the centrality of this article in the confession as a mature expression of the key to Protestant exposition. Roger Duke, reiterating the pivotal emphases of paragraph one, leads us to consider the importance of paragraphs 2 and 6 both for doctrinal and biblical symmetry. The editor has written the exposition of paragraph 3.

No lack of importance, but lack of space, time, and energy have resulted in an omission of any separate exposition of paragraphs 4 and 5. I will only remark that these important issues help define the precise place of justification in the *ordo salutis* and preserve our understanding of its nature.

In short, paragraph 4 rejects both eternal justification and “cross-consummated” [my term] justification. Justification is not to be identified either with the decree to justify, or the punctiliar historical event that determines the material aspects of justification. As a Trinitarian reality, justification depends not only on the decree of the Father, the obedience of the Son, but also on the Spirit’s fitting of the sinner’s mind and heart for the

exhibition of faith. The soul commitment of the sinner to trust only in Christ because of His righteousness, death, and resurrection, through the Spirit's work of giving union with Christ, consummates the transaction of justification. Thus, justification is determined by decree, morally assured by full righteousness and satisfaction, and experientially granted. So finally, the triune God grants the sinner the status of a justified person before the judgment bar of God: "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4–7 ESV). God the Father is our Savior, God the Son is our Savior, God the Holy Spirit is our Savior with the partitive aspects of each person of the Trinity constituting one glorious outflow of divine grace preparing, constituting, and effecting or justification unto life.

Paragraph 5 emphasizes the irreversible status of justification as remedying our susceptibility to condemnation for sin and bestowing the righteousness that merits eternal life. At the same time it shows that indwelling sin and corruption will continue to be dealt with by God. He solves the sin problem, not only through removing condemnation, but through removing, step-by-step according to the existential manifestation of it, our corruption. "If they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes, but I will not remove from him my steadfast love or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips" (Psalm 89:31–34).

As we consider the great feast that is overflowing in the righteousness of Christ let us take Luther's advice and not get caught up in "beetles, grubs, and vermin." Instead we must recognize that "in Christ there is pure joy, yes, everlasting joy; he is no longer sorrowful or fainthearted; he no longer sweats drops of blood as he did in the Garden; but in him there is true joy and gladness. And the same Christ, in whom comfort and joy are to be found, has become our food, served up in the Word and eaten by faith. For this reason, if we are forsaken, cast down, oppressed, and assailed, we should hasten to Christ, and there revive and strengthen ourselves."

—Tom J. Nettles



Aaron Matherly

The Second London Confession and Justification From Wittenburg to London

How can an unrighteous sinner stand before a Holy God? The doctrine of justification was at the center of debates during the Reformation, with Martin Luther himself writing that, “If it is lost and perishes, the whole knowledge of truth, life, and salvation is lost and perishes at the same time.”¹ Stronger yet, noted Luther, “If the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost.”² As the quincentennial anniversary of the Protestant Reformation approaches, a proper understanding of justification is no less important now than in Luther’s day. This essay will investigate the writings of two notable theologians that will serve as spokespersons for their respective periods. Naturally, one cannot overlook the influence Luther had on the development of the doctrine of justification in the early decades of the Reformation. Similarly, using seventeenth-century theologian Benjamin Keach as a guide to chapter XI of the *Second London Confession*, this essay will reveal that the early Particular Baptists embraced the Reformation understanding of justification. In particular, we will see that the *Second London Confession* faithfully captures heart of the Reformation teaching on justification. More importantly, the confession remains true to the biblical testimony.

The Journey from Stotternheim to London

Traveling from his parent's home in Erfurt in 1505, Martin Luther neared the small village of Stotternheim when he found himself caught in a middle of a sudden thunderstorm. As the story goes, a lightning bolt struck nearby as he travelled along the road and in desperation Luther cried out to St. Anne: "Help me, St. Anne; I will become a monk."³ Surviving the storm and making good on his vow, Luther joined the monastery that same year.

More than a sudden outburst, Luther's decision to become a monk demonstrates something of the nature of medieval piety: becoming a monk offered some degree of certainty that one could escape judgement in the afterlife. While there were several understandings of justification in the late-Middle Ages, Scholastic theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel understood justification in terms of God infusing grace into sinners by which they are then able to perform meritorious acts.⁴ Although the laity had access to the sacraments and other forms of medieval piety in which they could amass merit, taking the monastic vows was tantamount to a "second baptism," even replacing martyrdom as the "badge of Christian perfection."⁵ Heiko Oberman described Luther's decision to enter the monastery:

Luther was not tormented by doubts about God's existence and he was an obedient son of the church. It was fear for his salvation that had driven him. He wanted to achieve eternal life and was filled with "fear and trembling." ... Luther did not seek the monastery as a place of meditation and study to exercise a faith he had once lacked. Nor was he looking for a sanctuary of strict morals to protect him from the immorality of the world outside. He was driven by his desire to find the merciful God.⁶

Despite the allure of the monastery, the tonsure and habit did not afford Luther any more certainty concerning his eternal destiny. Luther himself often spent hours at a time in the confession booth, fasted for days on end so that he could perform more pious acts to "obtain merit before God, repulse sin, and gain grace and heaven." Likewise, incessant prayer resulted in "severe exhaustion with sleeplessness and disturbances of vision."⁷ Although he had hoped that the monastic forms of piety would lead to blessedness, Luther's zeal as a monk and concern for his salvation only led him into further despair.⁸ Luther knew Christ only as the judge whose holiness demanded perfect obedience to the law. Near the end of his life, Luther reflected on his time as a young monk wrestling with the words of Paul in Romans 1:17:

I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active

righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.⁹

Luther simply followed common medieval understanding of the righteousness of God as “the eternal law according to which He who is unattainably holy will judge all men on doomsday.”¹⁰ For Luther, no amount of monkery afforded him the assurance that he could stand on his own righteousness before a Holy God in judgment.

Despite Luther’s initial struggles with Romans 1, the same passage would eventually aid him in his “rediscovery” of the gospel. Luther described his breakthrough:

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”¹¹

Righteousness that justifies, therefore, is a gift of God obtained through faith. With this new understanding, Luther recounted that “I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”¹² Oberman summed up the significance of Luther’s discovery:

Luther’s discovery was not only new, it was unheard of; it rent the very fabric of Christian ethics. Reward and merit, so long undisputed as the basic motivation for all human action, were robbed of their efficacy. Good works, which Church doctrine maintained as indispensable, were deprived of their basis in Scripture.¹³

Luther further developed his new understanding of righteousness in several of his writings. As he progressed in his own thinking and interacted with Roman objections to the direction of his thought, he had to learn to distinguish carefully between human right-living and the righteousness that is consistent with divine expectation. In an earlier work,

Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519), Luther distinguished between “alien righteousness” and “proper righteousness.” This was a clear step in the right direction that led to rapid advance. Whereas proper righteousness concerns our good works, alien righteousness is that which meets the divine standard. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 1:30, Luther stated, “Alien righteousness is the righteousness of another, instilled from without. This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith.”¹⁴ Instillation was not imputation, but the concept of alien righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, prepared for the next step. Bordering on the next development, Luther continued, “Everything which Christ has is ours, graciously bestowed on us unworthy men out of God’s sheer mercy, although we have rather deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also.”¹⁵

By the next year, 1520, Luther had gained more substantial ground in his journey in conceiving the character of justification. Appealing to Romans 10:10, Luther declared in *The Freedom of a Christian*:

Since we are justified by faith alone it is clear that the inner person cannot be justified, freed, or saved by any external work or act, and such works, whatever they may be, have nothing to do with the inner person. ... It follows that it ought to be the primary goal of every Christian to put aside confidence in works and grow stronger in the belief that we are saved by faith alone.¹⁶

When Luther wrote of “faith alone” he always had in mind the inwrought reliance on an external mercy, namely the righteousness God granted through Christ. Later in this same work he made this clear in saying that the Christian ought to think, “Although I am an unworthy and condemned person, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part. God has done this in an act of free and pure mercy so that I now need nothing except faith that trusts that it is true.”¹⁷

In his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), Luther termed this righteousness “the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness.”¹⁸ While political righteousness, ceremonial righteousness, and righteousness from the law have their proper place, only Christian righteousness concerns the forgiveness of sins. For Luther, Christian righteousness therefore surpasses all others:

But this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteousness but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness, while all the others, listed above, are active. For here we work nothing, render nothing to God; we only receive and permit someone else to work in us, namely, God.¹⁹

That which he works “in us” is faith, on the basis of which he imputes to us the alien righteousness through Christ. Thus, the distinguishing mark of Christian righteousness is its passive nature. Whereas the other forms mentioned follow from some active obedience, one obtains Christian righteousness only through the “free imputation and indescribable gift of God.”²⁰ Sinners do not earn Christian righteousness, nor can they add to it by works of the law; it is a gift received through faith.

Herein lies the heart of Luther’s understanding of justification: sinners are justified on the basis of Christ’s perfect righteousness. “Without any merit or work of our own,” argued Luther, “we must first be justified by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness of the law or with earthly and active righteousness.”²¹

For Luther, from Christ’s righteousness pour forth both good works and true worship: “If [justification by faith] flourishes, everything good flourishes—religion, true worship, the glory of God, and the right knowledge of all things and of all social conditions.”²² No longer the young monk angry with God, because of the merits of Christ Luther could love the God who saved him.

Heir of the Reformation: The *Second London Confession*

Over a century after Luther, the seventeenth-century Particular Baptists shared the Reformer’s understanding of justification. Chapter XI, paragraph 1 in the *Second London Confession* states:

Those whom God Effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing Righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting, and accepting their Persons as Righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone, not by imputing faith it self, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their Righteousness; but by imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death, for their whole and sole Righteousness, they receiving, and resting on him, and his Righteousness, by Faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.²³

The confession highlights several interrelated aspects of the doctrine of justification, and the similarities to Luther are apparent. First, the confession denies that pardon for sin comes through good works or obedience to the law. In his work *The Marrow of True Justification* (1692), Benjamin Keach, a signee of the confession, drew from Romans 3:27 and 4:2 to disprove works as contributing to justification:

Where is boasting them? It is excluded. By what Law? Of Works? Nay, but by the Law of Faith. This Text almost in so many Words confirms this Proposition; if all boasting is excluded, all Works are excluded ... *If Abraham were justified by Works, he had whereof to glory, but not before God.* If he had been justified by Works, he had whereof he might glory; but he had nothing to glory in before God. Therefore he was not justified by Works.”²⁴

Additionally, Keach pointed to Philippians 3:8–9 to show that even Paul’s good works amounted to rubbish. What was needed is the perfect righteousness of the Son:

What was it *Paul* accounted but Dung, and gave up for Loss? ... all his own Righteousness, while he was a *Pharisee*, and all his other external and legal Privileges, which in times past he gloried in; but now they were nothing to Him: He saw no Worth or excellency in them; but wholly threw himself on Christ, and on His Righteousness for Justification.”²⁵

Paul’s words were clear: the gospel excludes all boasting. Like Luther, Keach sought to separate grace and works as they pertain to justification: “Grace and works are directly contrary; the one to the other ... There is no mixing Works and Free grace together, but one of these doth and will destroy the Nature of the other.”²⁶ For Keach, grace no longer remained grace when coupled with good works.

If not by good works, how then is the sinner justified? As with Luther, the confession further affirms that sinners receive pardon only through Christ’s active and passive obedience imputed to them. Keach affirmed this point: “Nothing renders a Man righteous to Justification in God’s sight, but the Imputation of the perfect Personal Righteousness of Christ.”²⁷ As the confession states, imputation includes both Christ’s *active* obedience in keeping the Law, as well as His *passive* obedience—bearing the penalty of sin in place of the sinner. According to Keach, both aspects of Christ’s obedience are at work in justification: “the Law of Works, which we had broken and by his Death made a full compensation to the Justice of God for our breach of it, whose Actual and Passive Obedience, or Righteousness, is imputed to all who believe in him.”²⁸ Furthermore, noted Keach: “Consider the Purity of [God’s] Nature and Rectitude of his Will: His justice must be satisfied, his Law fulfilled by us, or by our Surety for us, and will not abate a tittle of that Righteousness it doth require.”²⁹ No person can keep the law perfectly, but God is also good and merciful, continued Keach: “What we could not do in keeping perfectly the Law, he sent his Son in our Nature, as our Surety and Representative, to do it for us.”³⁰

Not only was man unable to keep the whole law, but the penalty of sin required an infinite sacrifice:

Nothing more frequently doth the Scripture testify than that the Passion and Death of Christ was a full and perfect Satisfaction for Sins ... God doth indeed not accept, as a true Satisfaction for Sin, any Justice but that which is infinite, because sin is an infinite Offence.³¹

Satisfaction, therefore, must come from “the Sufferings of Christ and his Righteousness only.”³² Only Christ’s death, blood and merits, emphasized Keach, can “discharge us from Sin and Condemnation.”³³

Finally, the confession affirms that sinners obtain Christ’s righteousness through faith. Keach criticized his Arminian opponents who “exalt Man’s Works, and therefore affirm, that he is Justified, not by Christ’s righteousness, but by his own Faith ... *Faith* is that righteousness for which we are justified before God.”³⁴ The Arminians, noted Keach, “do not own Faith to be the Gift of God, or a Grace of the Holy Spirit,” and as such they make their own faith into a justifying work. For Keach, the Arminian view shifts the basis of justification from its proper object, Christ, and places it on the work of the Creature. Justification by faith alone stands in contrast to Man’s natural reason, for it desires to couple faith with obedience and holiness.³⁵ Keach stressed that this doctrine, though not in contradiction to reason, does stand above it: “Certainly the Justification of a Sinner in the sight of God by Faith only, or to believe on him that justifies the Ungodly, is one of the chief Mysteries of the Gospel”³⁶ To secure justification by works, argued Keach, would strip salvation of its mystery. Keach continued:

Justification is a great Mystery. Tis an act of God’s Sovereign Grace and Wisdom: Herein his Justice and Mercy equally shine forth, and the one doth not eclipse the Glory of the other; Sin is punished, and the Sinner acquitted.³⁷

Keach aptly concludes with an appeal to all trusting in their own righteousness:

Is there any Sinner here? Are you *ungodly*, and in a wretched Condition (in your own eyes)? Are you *weary and heavy Laden*? Come to Christ, lift up your Heads: *For him that worketh not; but believeth on him that justifies the Ungodly, his Faith is counted for Righteousness.*³⁸

Conclusion: Beyond the 500th Anniversary

As the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation looms, there remains a pressing need for sound teaching on the doctrine of justification. Luther himself warned about abandoning the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith alone: “There is a clear and

present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions.”³⁹ Contemporary challenges to the doctrine of justification underscore the perpetual need for clear, evangelical statements like that found in the *Second London Confession*. A recent Pew Research study indicates that, even its most charitable interpretation of the data, confusion exists among many Protestants on this most-important doctrine.⁴⁰ Additionally, attempts to reconcile remaining differences between Catholics and Protestants such as the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) come at the expense of the Reformers’ teaching on the issue.⁴¹ Echoing Luther, Keach evaluated the dire situation of his own day: “The Times are perilous, the Devil is endeavoring to strike at the Root, even at the Foundation itself, beware lest you are deceived and carried away by the poisonous and abominable Doctrines.”⁴² Looking beyond the 500th anniversary, may we also take heed of Keach’s words:

Let me exhort you all to stand fast in that precious Faith you have received; particularly about this great Doctrine of Justification, give your selves to Prayer, and to the due and careful study of God’s Word.⁴³

NOTES:

¹ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 86.

² Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 90.

³ See Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 92.

⁴ Though not without differences amongst the Scholastics themselves. For a more extensive analysis, see Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Press, 2013), 63–74. See also Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250–1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 22–42.

⁵ See Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform (1250–1550): An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 85.

⁶ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 127.

⁷ See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 1st English Language ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1985), 65–67.

⁸ Brecht, *Martin Luther*, 70.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 496–497.

¹⁰ Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 152.

¹¹ Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings*, 497.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 154.

¹⁴ Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 119.

¹⁵ Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, 120.

¹⁶ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., ed. Timothy Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 406.

¹⁷ Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 420.

¹⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 87.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 88.

²¹ Ibid., 89.

²² Ibid., 86.

²³ William L. Lumpkin and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd revised ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 255.

²⁴ Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 54.

²⁵ Ibid., 55.

²⁶ Ibid., 58.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁹ Ibid., 67.

³⁰ Ibid., 67; c.f. Romans 8:3.

³¹ Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification*, 81.

³² Ibid., 81.

³³ Ibid., 81.

³⁴ Ibid., 35.

³⁵ Ibid., 68–69.

³⁶ Ibid., 70.

³⁷ Ibid., 70.

³⁸ Ibid., 95; c.f. Romans 4:5.

³⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 86.

⁴⁰ See: <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/31/u-s-protestants-are-not-defined-by-reformation-era-controversies-500-years-later/>.

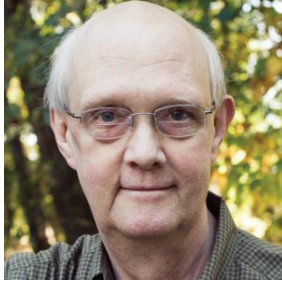
⁴¹ For the statement, see: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html. For a helpful critique of the declaration, see Gerald Bray and Paul Gardner, “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” *The Churchman* 115 (Summer 2001): 110–127.

⁴² Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 18.

⁴³ Ibid. Justification, 51.

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Roger Duke

The Most Important Question One Can Ask!

“Of Justification”^{1 2}

There are many important questions that should be asked concerning the possible paths one’s life should take. These questions must be considered, especially in the light of “characteristic ... key events ... which compose the essential[s] of human existence, such as birth, growth, emotionality, aspiration, conflict, ... morality”³ and even death. No one single question is more important than: How can a sinful person be in right standing with a Holy God? This “must ever be a question of intense interest.”⁴ It is fundamental to any contemplative and sober-minded person—especially one concerned with their soul’s ultimate destination. It can be asked in theological parlance; “How can [a righteous] God justly account an ungodly [hu]man righteous[?]”⁵ It is profoundly, pointedly personal; “How can I be right with or just before God?”⁶ *The Baptist Catechism* simply asks: “What is justification.”⁷ This article will seek to shed light on this Bible truth from *The Baptist Confession of Faith*,⁸ and hopefully, the reader can acquire a satisfactory answer.

Infusion or Imputation?

The chapter “Of Justification” begins: “Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, *not by infusing righteousness into them*, but by pardoning their sins and by *accounting* and *accepting* their person’s as righteous”⁹ (italics added). Straightaway the *Confession* declares what justification is not. This is the one great concept that brought

about the rift with the Roman Church—and Luther’s evangelical salvation. In addition, the doctrine of effectual calling is connected paving the way for the integrative involvement of these doctrines and for the discussion of the distinct quality of the faith through which we are justified.

When the Reformation is considered, invariably it focuses on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. On this teaching, “the entire Reformation and the protest the Reformers launched against the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) would well be summed up in this one word: *imputation*.”¹⁰ This “teaches that our sin, which cuts us off and alienates us from a holy God, gets imputed to Christ” for He “paid the penalty for our sin, and so our sins are forgiven.”¹¹ This is foreign, however, to Roman Catholicism’s teaching of *infused* righteousness.

Church Historian Timothy George argues, “Luther considered justification by faith ‘the summary of all Christian doctrine’ and ‘the article by which the church stands or falls.’”¹² It was the medieval theological understanding of justification ... that a person gradually receives divine grace, eventually healing wounds caused by sin.¹³ “But in his mature doctrine ... [Luther] abandoned the ... [concept] of *impartation* [or infusion] for the legal language of *imputation*.”¹⁴ Theologian Charles Hodge sums up the position of Rome:

For Christ’s sake, and only through his merits, as a matter of grace, this new life is imparted to the soul in regeneration (i.e., as Romanists teach, in baptism)... Works done after regeneration have real merit ... and are the ground of the second justification; the first justification consisting in making the soul inherently just by the *infusion of righteousness*. According to this view, we are justified by works done before regeneration, but we are not justified for gracious works, i.e., for works which spring in principle of divine life *infused into the heart*. The whole ground of our acceptance with God is thus made to be what we are *and* what we do¹⁵ (italics added).

As a contrast, and a necessary corrective, imputation involves a “pardoning [of] their sins,” and an “accounting¹⁶ and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone.”¹⁷ “In classical Reformed theology ... justification is the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer.”¹⁸ James White contrasts infusion with imputation well: “It should be noted that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is taken in the same sense as it is in the New Testament—as a legal imputation, not a subjective one.”¹⁹ Justification “means to declare or pronounce to be righteous.”²⁰ Hodge wants it clear that imputation goes beyond the mere pardon of sins, is not to be identified with sanctification, but involves a positive imputation, a forensic declaration, of righteousness.²¹

George Eldon Ladd, clearly harmonious with Hodge, observes how, “Justification is the pronouncement of a righteous judge that the person in Christ is righteous; but this righteousness is a matter of relationship and not of ethical character.”²² It denotes the idea of a forensic or a new legal status. “Forensic means that God is conceived as the ruler, lawgiver, and judge, and justification is the [legal] declaration of the judge that the person is righteous.”²³ Reformation scholars have long “recognize[d] ... the basic idea in justification ... [to be] forensic.”²⁴ Hence, “By justification God in Christ ‘does for us what we cannot do for ourselves and thus creates in us a righteous mind for which we can claim no credit.’”²⁵ A homespun analogy,²⁶ showing the difference between the Catholic *infusion* and Reformation *imputation*, will serve well here. The physician does something *in the patient* for him; touches, examines, prescribes, operates, et al. This is infusion. Please consider the contrast with that of the judge; who issues a forensic judgment, a binding legally pronouncement based on the court’s justice accounting the malefactor not guilty. This is done *outside the condemned* but on their behalf. This is imputation.

What Then is the Basis of This Imputation?

How are the guilty declared righteous? How can God demand the condemnation due all, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God[;]”²⁷ and at the same time declare the guilty pardoned? And much more than pardoned²⁸ —righteous before the bar of Heavenly justice! The *Second London Confession* declares the essence of imputation; “by [God’s] imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on Him and his righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves: it is the gift of God.”²⁹ ³⁰ Paul confesses, “To declare, I say, at this time his [Christ’s] righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”³¹

Christ’s death and resurrection were to take away our condemnation so we could go to Heaven—which is true. But this falls short in itself! The teaching of both an *active* and *passive* obedience³² of Christ is required for our salvation. He died to take our punishment. This speaks of His passive obedience to His Father as he took our just condemnation. He also lived perfectly fulfilling all the Law. This speaks of His perfect righteous obedience to His Father’s will. So Jesus death, burial, and resurrection alone were not enough to gain us entrance into Glory. We must also have perfectly keep the whole law and not offend in one point—in deed or precept. Jesus provided both. This double obedience of Christ is what is imputed to us. Our lawlessness is accounted to Him in His death on the Cross. This is referred to by theologians as double imputation.³³

Then What Part Does Faith Play?

Faith has always been the empty hand that receives the imputed declaration of righteousness,³⁴ the essence of the Gospel. Hebrews 4:2 declares, “unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them” in the Old Testament. Father Abraham believed this Gospel: “[H]e believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him³⁵ for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, KJV). King David rejoiced in this Gospel: “Blessed is *he whose* transgression is forgiven, *whose sin is covered*. Blessed *is* the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity³⁶ and in whose spirit *there is* no guile” (Psalm 32, KJV, italics in original).³⁷

[Ed. The fact that the New Testament illustrates the doctrine of justification and argues for its nature in terms of Old Testament saints clearly indicates that justification is the same in both cases. Paragraph six of the confessions states, “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was in all these respects one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.” David rejoiced in the non-imputation of sin in Psalm 32. He used language clearly evocative of forgiveness because of covering. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity” (Psalm 32:1, 2 NKJV). Paul used David’s confidence expressed here to defend the doctrine of imputation in Romans 4. If non-imputation releases from sin, then imputation confers righteousness. He cited that passage in defense of this fundamental proposition, “David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputed righteousness apart from works” (Romans 4:6). After a finely-tuned theological discussion of Abraham’s faith demonstrated while he was uncircumcised and before the formal giving of the Law to Israel, he reiterates that forgiveness comes to those who have faith, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. Paul speaks of the uncircumcised, based on the example of Abraham, as “those who believe ... that righteousness might be imputed to them also” (Romans 4:11).

Abraham’s belief of the promise of a child was accounted to him for righteousness. Paul sees all of this in the context of Abraham’s and Sarah’s deadness giving way to life through the invincible promise of God. He concludes the discussion with the locus classicus affirming justification through the dying and rising of Christ, not only for Abraham, but for all those of the faith of Abraham: “Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:23–25 NKJV).

The writer of Hebrews looks to the types and symbols of the Old Testament to tease out a full theology of substitutionary atonement and salvation apart from works. Noah by faith was an “heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:7). The faith of the Old Testament believers was of a piece with that of New Testament believers. He wrote to those who would look by faith unwavering to Christ who died for the forgiveness of sinners, and has been perfected forever that He might intercede effectually for them that they would receive an eternal inheritance though their works are dead (Hebrews 4:15; 5:9; 7:25, 28; 9:11–15).]

Faith Alone, but Not Alone

Paragraph 2 of the confession continues: “Faith receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.”³⁸ Faith is but the *instrument* and not the *basis* of justification.³⁹ “We are not justified because we believe, but we are justified *through* faith, faith being the ‘appropriating organ’ by which justification comes.”⁴⁰ Even the faith with which we believe is a grace gift from God.⁴¹ “Why is it faith [then] and not some other grace which God has selected as the instrumental means of justification?”⁴²

[B]ecause faith exemplifies the fact that justification is solely by grace on the basis of someone else’s righteousness. God justifies us by faith so that we will know that salvation is for his glory alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone.⁴³ ... It is taking, receiving, looking [unto Christ]. Faith justifies, therefore, because it concentrates all the attention on Christ and looks away from itself to Christ.⁴⁴

[Ed. Why is faith “ever accompanied with all other saving graces?” If justification is by faith alone, why does it work “by love?” The very nature of faith calls for a high evaluation of the righteous demands of the law and a love for its excellence. Exegetically we would find this asserted as a matter of divine revelation in a text like 2 Peter 1:5–8. Faith has embedded in it all the virtues set forth by Peter so that our knowledge does not “turn from the holy commandment” (2:21), but flourishes, being “neither barren nor unfruitful” (1:8). Faith does not make us righteous or constitute an acceptable righteousness, but arises from the graces brought to us by the “righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). His righteousness not only clothes us, but brings the gift of the Spirit by whom we are brought to saving faith—the divine power that has given us all that pertains to life and godliness (1:3). James famously insists that the kind of faith that saves is the

kind of faith that works (James 1:21, 22; 2:19–22). In his first letter John gives several indicators by which we might know that our belief is a true and trustful acceptance of Christ as He is presented in the gospel (1 John 1:6,7; 2:9, 10, 17, 22–23, 29; 3:5, 6, 14; 4:7, 8; 5:1, 18). Confessing our sin, avoiding sin, loving the brothers, believing the Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, and loving God all indicate that we have truly believed.

Theologically as we distinguish saving belief from the dead faith of devils' belief, we find that having faith is dependent on the prior operation of the Spirit in the heart. He only shows us our sin to the point of our being willing to confess it by showing us the height and beauty of the law. Whereas in the unregenerate condition, we are not subject to the law in that our heart of flesh is of itself enmity against that law (Romans 8:7, 8). In that state we cannot please God and cannot understand savingly the gifts of God (Romans 8:8; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Holy Spirit opens our minds to understand by opening our hearts to see and taste the beauty and goodness of God's law. We see that we have broken it and can have no righteousness of our own; we approve God's condemnation of us because of our status as lawbreakers; we approve His gospel way of receiving sinners only through Christ's having taken our condemnation and achieved our righteousness. Based, therefore, on the love that has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we flee to Christ desiring acceptance before God only through Him and find the hope of eternal life that does not disappoint (Romans 5:1–5).

Faith works by love, for without the affection of our hearts being changed none of the requisite conclusions of faith could ever be drawn. That is why the confession introduces this entire discussion with the emphasis, "Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth." Paul can write with confidence on that basis that we who are justified by grace through a faith that is not of ourselves, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, faith is "ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."]

A Final Important Question

So how do we answer our proposed question, "*How can a sinful person be in right standing with a Holy God?*" Answer: "Believe [have faith in; trust] on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31, KJV). That is, "[R]epentance toward God, and faith

toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21, KJV). Dear reader, do you solely trust Christ’s righteousness for God’s glory alone—instead of any personal righteousness in which you may be trusting?

NOTES:

¹ Special thanks to Rev. Carlston “Red” Berry retired pastor and friend who lives in Oklahoma City, OK. He has served as mentor, Bible teacher, confidant, and one of my “fathers in the ministry” for many years. He contributed as editor and theological sounding board for this article. He is greatly loved and appreciated.

² Please read the entire article “Of Justification” in *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books & Carlisle, PA: Reformed Baptist Publications, 2010), 26–28. Scriptural passages are referenced for each of the doctrinal statements.

³ Wikipedia, “Human Condition,” Retrieved 8 September 2017 https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&q=define+human+condition&oq=define+human+condition&gs_l=psy-ab.3..0l2j0i22i30k1l2.1141.6584.0.7505.22.22.0.0.0.147.2030.17j5.22.0....0...1.1.64.psy-ab..0.22.2018...0i131k1.JYQt6OdIGU0

⁴ James Madison Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1878, 1906; reprint, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1980), 274 (page numbers are to the reprint edition).

⁵ John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology and Church Order* (Harrisburg, PA: Gano Books / Sprinkle Publications; reprint 1982), 267 (page numbers are to the reprint edition). The author employed literary license here and formed a question from Dagg’s assertion.

⁶ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press/Printed in Great Britain by Bath Press,, Second Printing 1995), 156.

⁷ *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books & Carlisle, PA: Reformed Baptist Publications, 2010), 102. Note from copyright page: “This is a joint venture with Solid Ground Christian Books ... and ... Reformed Baptist Publications of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America.”

⁸ “Chapter 11, Of Justification,” *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism*. This will be the basis of the article’s discussion.

⁹ *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism*, 26.

¹⁰ Stephen J. Nichols, “A Time for Confidence,” *Tabletalk* (August 2017): 73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Timothy George, "Dr. Luther's Theology," ([*Christian History* originally published this article in *Christian History* Issue 34 in 1992]) Retrieved 11 September 2017 from <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/dr-luthers-theology/>

¹³ George, "Dr. Luther's Theology."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Charles Hodge, "Justification," *Systematic Theology* Volume III, Part 3, Chapter XVII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans; reprint 1982), 136. (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁶ Reader's Note: The idea of "accounting" and "imputing" are basically synonymous. "Accounting" is defined as "a system of recording, and summarizing business and transactions and analyzing, verifying, and reporting the results." "Impute" is defined as "to lay the responsibility or blame" [on someone] or "to credit a person or a cause." *Merriam-Webster* on line dictionary, retrieved 12 September 2017 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accounting> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imputing> respectively.

¹⁷ *The Baptist Confession*, 26.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes* II, xvi, 6; quoted in George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, rev. ed., 1993), 491.

¹⁹ James R. White, *A Comprehensive Study—The God Who Justifies: The Doctrine of Justification* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 66 footnote.

²⁰ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 122.

²¹ Hodge, "Justification," 122.

²² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993 rev. ed.), 484.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ V. Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (MacMillan), 57, 58, 59, 60; quoted in George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993 rev. ed.), 485.

²⁶ This analogy of the physician who does something in the patient illustrates infused righteousness of the Roman Catholic Church and the legal court scene illustrates the judge's pronouncement of a judgment on behalf of the condemned that is outside of him. This example/analogy came up in several venues when the writer was researching for this article.

²⁷ Romans 3:23, KJV.

²⁸ Note: For a fuller discussion of the differences between Justification and Pardon see: Charles Hodge, “Justification: A Forensic Act,” *Systematic Theology* Volume III, Part 3, Chapter XVII (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans; reprint 1982), 125. (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²⁹ *The Baptist Confession*, 26.

³⁰ See: Ephesians 2:8–10.

³¹ Romans 3:36, KJV.

³² Please consult “Of Justification,” Paragraph 1 of *The Baptist Confession of Faith and The Baptist Catechism*, 26.

³³ See: R. C. Sproul, “Double Imputation,” Monergism, retrieved 13 September 2017 from <https://www.monergism.com/double-imputation-r-c-sproul>

Dr. Sproul observes, “Of course, Protestantism ... teaches a double imputation. Our sin is imputed to Jesus and his righteousness is imputed to us. In this twofold transaction, we see that God does not compromise his integrity in providing salvation for his people. Rather, he punishes sin fully after it has been imputed to Jesus. This is why he is able to be both ‘just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’ as Paul writes in Romans 3:26. So my sin goes to Jesus and his righteousness comes to me.”

³⁴ Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, 160–161.

³⁵ Note the imputation language.

³⁶ Again note the imputation language.

³⁷ The reader is invited to consult *The Baptist Confession*, p. 28, where the text of Paragraph 6 states, “The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.” Then the confession cites Biblical proof from Galatians 3:9 and Romans 4:22–24.

³⁸ *The Baptist Confession*, 26. Note: The confession employs Roman 3:28 as proof for the first part of the paragraph that says, “Faith receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification;” and Galatians 5:6, James 2:17, 22, 26 as proofs for “yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.”

³⁹ James White, *A Comprehensive Study*, 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ The idea of faith being a gift may be foreign to some. Please consider the Scriptural references: 2 Peter 1:1 “From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, have been *granted a faith* just as precious as ours” (NET); Philippians 1:29 “For it has been *granted* to you not only *to believe* in Christ but also to suffer for him (NET); and Ephesians

2:8 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God:*” 9 “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” 10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (KJV).

⁴² Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, 160–161.

⁴³ Please note the “Solas” of the Reformation.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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Tom Nettles

A Full Satisfaction The Fountain of Forgiveness

If a gift is given out of Justice, can it be Merciful?

Paragraph 3 addresses an issue that had been raised by Socinianism concerning the relation of the death of Christ to justification. Fausto Socinus (1539-1604) was a Polish theologian who denied the trinity, was Pelagian in his view of sin, rejecting the omniscience of God as to future contingencies, believed that the orthodox concepts of imputation were immoral as well as irrational, and that forgiveness only in light of the punishment of another was thus flawed. The argument contained these basic contours. Salvation for human beings is an act of divine mercy. If God will not forgive apart from the execution of justice, then mercy loses its essential aspect of freeness. Supposed orthodoxy, he would continue, teaches that God forgives only in light of the execution of justice. Forgiveness, therefore, in orthodoxy is not an act of mercy but of justice only and thus becomes a matter of debt not of a free gift. If we take seriously the reality that God shows Himself merciful and loving in the forgiveness of sinners, then we must drop the idea of a substitutionary atonement that serves the interests of unyielding justice before sinners can be forgiven.

“Freely You Have Received”

This paragraph approaches the issue by giving attention to how God maintains His standard of justice and yet acts with perfect grace, freely and abundantly, toward the offending parties. The article itself is a carefully worded one sentence paragraph that affirms the orthodox position giving special attention to the leading ideas of the objection. It carefully partitions the necessary elements of justification so that the reader will see how what is an act of God fully expressive of His justice is experienced by the sinner as unvarnished mercy. Each of these points expresses a synthesis of relevant passages of Scripture.

The article reads:

Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did by the sacrifice of himself, in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead, the penalty due unto them: make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf: yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God, might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

This paragraph begins by asserting an idea that appeared in chapter VIII “On the Mediator.” Paragraph 4 of that chapter begins, “This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the Law, and did perfectly fulfill it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have born and suffered, being made Sin and a curse for us.” Paragraph five of that chapter makes virtually the same point in saying, “The Lord Jesus by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the Eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of God, procured reconciliation, and purchased an everlasting inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”

It was Just

Since man was placed under a just law from the beginning, that law must be fulfilled. A person could argue that if the law was not just and to be enforced, it should not have been given in the first place. The imposition of an unjust law that requires an act of cruelty to enforce is an unjust imposition in itself. Even as enacting an unjust law is impossible for

God, so an enactment of justice that served to contradict mercy would argue for a division in the eternal disposition of God, which is impossible. The law was, therefore, just, not opposed to mercy, and must needs be fulfilled.

Obedience to the law, therefore, meant life; disobedience meant death. How then can mercy, consistent with justice intervene? If there were no way to enact this condition with absolute strictness apart from the eternal death of the very parties that have sinned, they would necessarily die. As a phrase of this paragraph states, this was a “penalty due unto them.” In addition, none would ever be admitted to eternal life apart from their personal absolute fulfillment of the law. Is there a mean consistent both with justice and mercy by which the transgressors may be forgiven and granted the warrant to eternal life? Both of these requirements were met by Christ: “by his obedience” refers in this case to his active obedience by which he has merited eternal life in the human nature, thus fulfilling that specific requirement of the Law. “And death” means that the requirement of death to the lawbreaker had also been met by him. In these two parts of Christ’s life of singular, perfect, and simple obedience, he has “fully discharged the debt” of all who will be justified. Nothing remains to be done. Obedience for life is complete; obedience to death is finished, and what was “due unto them” has been fully discharged.

If thou hast my discharge procured,
And fully in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine;
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.
(Augustus Toplady)

It was Merciful and Just

Note that the chapter points to the eminently biblical truth that this justification was procured, not at the expense of those to be justified, but at his own expense. He discharged the debt by the “sacrifice of himself . . . in their stead.” The text in support of this is found in the context of Hebrews 10:14. The offering that was made as a sacrifice for sin was the “body of Jesus” (verse 10); so complete was this offering that it was made “for all time” and was a “single sacrifice” (Verse 12). His doing this “perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.” The perfect requirements of the law have been met in them even while they are in the process of being sanctified.

Jesus gave Himself for our sins. So as to leave no doubt concerning the absoluteness of the fulfillment of the Law's demands, the confession states that Christ made a "proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in their behalf." It was *proper* in that the very properties of the law and the offense against the law required it. None can evacuate the law of its eternal properties for it reflects the sovereign prerogatives of God over his creatures in accord with his intrinsic holiness and goodness. To fail to fulfill what the law required would be to assault the very character of God Himself.

It was *real*, that is, not merely nominal. The law and its requirements have an absolute existence and are not mere arbitrary conditions; they are not simply sovereign expressions of an arbitrary rule-maker so that they could be dismissed by the same sovereign voluntary declaration. If God can impose rules by His sovereignty, so the Socinian would argue, He can dismiss them, or change the conditions of their fulfillment. The requirements, however, of absolute righteousness and punishment are not arbitrary or mere names, but they are realities having eternal existence as real expressions of the divine attributes.

The satisfaction made is *full*. The death of Christ was no mere symbol of devotion demonstrating the depth of conviction a truly good person has, suffering loyally for the sake of his convictions of the Father/Son relationship at the hands of bad. It is no mere impetus to repentance, shocking any moral sensitivity we might have remaining, by showing how ugly, aggressive, and arrogant sin is in dealing out such ridicule, pain, and disrespect to the only perfectly good person who lived. These may be implications that emerge in a ripple effect from the center of the power; those ideas only have meaning, however, from the reality of this death being a *full* satisfaction. God's holy justice and immutable prerogative must be satisfied if God be God. If it is done only partially, it is not done at all. Christ was set forth as a "full satisfaction.

No remnant of wrathful punishment remains for those whose sins were upon the body of Jesus when the Father made Him the propitiation. Outside of us, therefore, and in the experience of another, God's justice has been honored. One proof text points to 1 Peter 1:18, 19 in confirmation of the argument. A ransom was needed; a price for the full dismissal of those who were bound must be forthcoming. "You were ransomed," Peter wrote, "from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish." Truly it was made "to God's justice," but just as truly as a manifestation of divine mercy, "in their behalf."

“According the will of our God and Father.” Not only, however, did Christ Himself give His life, He was given by the Father for them. In His “wisdom and insight” He had established the relations of humans in light of covenants as well as organic and genetic continuity from an original couple. We are connected with Adam as a Federal and as a natural head. Adam was the entire race at his creation; Eve was made from him as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. From them as a singularity of the human race have descended all the individuals and nations of men. As in Adam’s fall, we fell, and in his death we died, so in Christ’s obedience, the last Adam, we live. He is of our race through Eve, through Mary, and stands as the second man, the last Adam, the covenant head of a redeemed community.

In this way, not as an arbitrary and merely nominal choice, but as a fully warranted act of premundane mercy, Christ’s “obedience and satisfaction [were] accepted in their stead.” The Father in a mercy fully consistent with His justice appointed His Son as the one to bear the load of human guilt, both its transgressions and its damnable corruption. The acceptance of sinners as sons came, not for “anything in them” by which they have paid a price to justice, or earned the right to life and sonship by their obedience, but “freely.” The recipients of these wise and sublime redemptive works of Christ in accordance with the character as well as the eternal will of the Father, come into possession of these blessings on the basis of grace alone.

The context of Isaiah 53:5, 6 also serves as a proof text both for the justice as well as the freeness involved in the salvation of sinners.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Righteousness and Peace—Lovingkindness and Truth: The conclusion of this presentation moves to an assertion that contradicts the objection that grace and mercy are eliminated if the execution of justice is required for their application. God, so the objectors would say, does not act mercifully in the substitutionary atonement of Christ, but only justly. The theological arguments have insisted, however, that since God made a way within Himself to act justly, and all the requirements of the law have been fully met without the sinner suffering those requirements, that what is just in God is pure mercy for the sinner.

In this way “lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10).

Divine revelation serves as the foundation for this view as the context of Romans 3:26 is cited: “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” So we see verified from the pages of divine revelation the conclusion that “both the exact justice and rich grace of God, might be glorified in the justification of sinners.”

How free flowing, rich, and abundant is this grace toward us—not earned as a matter of justice through what we have done, but only on account of the Father’s gracious gift of Christ to us and Christ’s rich grace in taking our poverty—we find in Paul’s words, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” It would take something sharper even than the two-edged sword of Scripture to divide God’s justice from His grace in such a powerful revelatory proposition that the supreme act of justice on God’s part is the very fountain from which flow all the gifts of mercy and grace.

The Bible does not allow us to think otherwise. Again, we see that the Bible, in a suggested scriptural proof, acknowledges no contradiction between full payment of a debt and the full display of grace when Paul writes, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished on us in all wisdom and insight” (Ephesians 1:7, 8). That historical action of God in setting His Son forth in pursuing a necessary path of justice in the shedding of His blood floods that same path with redemptive certainty, forgiveness of sins in infinite mercy, the consequent display of the boundless and immeasurable riches of divine grace, and all of it connected inextricably through God’s own eternal “wisdom and insight.”

To those who in substance would side with the Socinian disgust at this display of justice and see it as a contradiction to God’s attribute of love by consigning the opprobrious term of child-abuse to the cross, Paul goes on to say that in this action we find God’s “kind intention” to sum up all things in Christ and that the redeemed themselves would “be,” that is, have all their subsequent existence in time and eternity “to the praise of his [Christ’s] glory.” This is reemphasized in the suggested supportive text from Ephesians 2:7: “so that

in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” If there were any inconsistency between the execution of perfect justice and the display of mercy, grace, and kindness, the biblical writers know nothing of it. Rather they see the one as manifest in the redemptive death of Christ as the most perfect and sublime display of the others.

A Word from Andrew Fuller

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) composed one of his most elegantly styled and forcefully argued polemical works against Socinianism—*The Calvinist and Socinian Systems Compared as to their Moral Tendencies* (1794, et al.). One of the superior moral traits of orthodox Calvinism as compared to Socinianism in Fuller’s argument was the tendency of its principles to produce a deep love for Christ. As an apostolic reality, one who does not love Christ does not have salvation—“If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha” (1 Corinthians 15:22 NASB). Nothing is more conducive to the love for Christ than the combined understanding of human sin, Christ’s deity, Christ’s incarnation, and Christ’s mediatorial death. One who feels no indebtedness to Christ for His vicarious sacrifice can hardly have the same love for Him as one who knows that eternal life depended on that sacrifice. Fuller asked, “Which of the two systems places the mediation of Christ in the most important light?” Clearly that system in which our salvation cost the mediator most dearly evokes the deepest sense of gratitude and love. “We do not conceive of Christ,” Fuller argued, “in his bestowment of this blessing upon us, as presenting us with that which cost him nothing.”

Socinians claim that to the degree Christ’s death endears sinners to Him, even so it must proportionately detract from love to the Father, for it exhibits Him as one who was “incapable of bestowing forgiveness, unless a price was paid for it.” This, however, does not argue for the imperfection of the Father but for a most secure and endearing perfection. He is of such purity that He cannot give forgiveness apart from a full vindication of the perfect equity of the moral law. He is so wise and so full of compassion, that He devised a way in the sending of His Son so that “while mercy triumphs, it may not be at the expense of law, of equity, and of the general good.” Those who have been forgiven most and at the greatest cost love most and also worship with greatest exuberance, singing in celebration of such condescending mercy, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9).

Another word from Benjamin Keach

A century earlier, Benjamin Keach looked at the issue of the relationship between grace and righteousness. He deduced from Scripture that justice and mercy equally shine forth in glory in our pardon. He saw the richness of the Bible's presentation of the gospel in that "God appears not only gracious, but just and holy also." In explanation of this, he settled on the Scripture principle of Romans 5:21 that "grace might reign through righteousness by Jesus Christ." This reign is an infinitely glorious reign.

O, how happy are we under this reign; let all cry, long live this sovereign, this queen, i.e., grace that reigns through righteousness by Jesus Christ, this is the best reign that ever was; no sovereign prince or princess ever reigned through such righteousness: this is a just reign, grace reigns and exalts the infinite justice, infinite righteousness by Jesus Christ; it is a God-honoring reign, a Christ-exalting reign, a law-magnifying reign; it is a sin-condemning, a sin-killing, a sin-destroying reign; it is a hell-confounding and a devil-consuming reign; it is a death-vanquishing, a death plaguing and a death-destroying reign; it is a sinner-enlightening, a sinner-quickenning, a sinner-renewing, a sinner-acquitting, a sinner-justifying, a sinner-pardoning, a sinner-comforting, a sinner enriching, a sinner exalting, a sinner sanctifying, and a sinner-glorifying reign. [Keach, *Exposition of the Parables*, 745f]

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Benjamin Keach

Benjamin Keach on Justification

From *The Marrow of True Justification*

Editor's Introduction

Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) became a Baptist at age 15, preached as a General Baptist, and suffered persecution, imprisonment, and the pillory for his convictions as a Baptist. After serving as an elder in a General Baptist congregation from 1668-1672, he became a Particular Baptist minister and founded the church at Horse-lie-Down in Southwark in London. He spent the remainder of his years as a zealous preacher of the gospel, an effective polemicist, a theoretician on principles of biblical interpretation, a poet, a hymn-writer, and a writer of allegory. His clear and bold defense of the doctrines of grace was informed by his previous years as an Arminian. He lived with sincere conviction that the doctrine of justification by faith was indeed the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. His sermons and expositional writings were filled with explanations of the centrality of this doctrine to a proper understanding of the grace of God.

In an exposition of Luke 7:42, “And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both,” Keach had an applicatory section explain how grace reigns through

righteousness. Grace is not elevated in an unjust way or unrighteous way but reigns through righteousness. It certainly does not reign through our righteousness for our very unrighteousness makes grace necessary. Rather chiefly grace reign “through the righteousness of Christ, or through His perfect and complete obedience, or that righteousness He wrought out, by doing and suffering. It was through the righteousness of Jesus Christ that grace reign; for without this righteousness, neither holiness, justice, nor the holy law would let grace reign.” Before, divine justice was on the throne pronouncing merited judgment on justly condemned sinners. Now, however, the law has been obeyed in perfection. Divine wisdom, on that basis, has devised a way for grace to adorn all the divine attributes so they shine forth in equal glory operating under the anointing of grace. The reign of grace through the righteousness of Christ finds its most gripping manifestation through “the application of what He hath done and suffered for us; His merits are applied, and His righteousness is imputed to every one that believeth in him, as an act of sovereign grace.”

The narrative below shows the intensity with which Keach proclaimed and applied the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ as the righteous propitiatory sacrifice.

Application of *The Marrow of True Justification*

This reproves all such as go about to eclipse the doctrine of free grace or of justification of Faith only and plead for sincere obedience, and mix Grace and works together. Also it may serve to convince all men, that such teachers, however cried up, are not true gospel-ministers; and therefore should be avoided, though they should speak with a tongue like angels.

1. Caution. Do not think, O Soul, that thy own righteousness doth justify thee, through Christ’s merits; or that Christ’s righteousness is thy legal righteousness, and not thy evangelical. No, no, he is thy whole Savior; it is Christ’s own arm that brought salvation, is not our own righteousness joined or coupled with the merits and righteousness of Christ; but his personal righteousness only received by faith. And,

2. Take heed you do not put Faith itself in the room (as your act, or as a divine habit, or as the product thereof) of perfect obedience; for ‘tis Christ’s righteousness that is put in the place or room of that perfect obedience which God required of us in point of justification: Faith only justifies, in respect of the object it apprehends and takes hold of.

3. Tremble, ye who trust in your moral, or gospel obedience, your acts of mercy, or good deeds, and holy lives. Tremble ye who rest on your duties, who glory in your knowledge, and outward privileges; you fast, and pray, and hear sermons, and so you may, and go to hell at last. Notwithstanding, these things you must do, but yet not seek to be justified thereby; do them as duties in point of performance; but lay them down in point of dependence.

4. Here is comfort for sinners; but if you are self-righteous persons, or go about like the Jews of old, to establish your own righteousness, down to hell you will fall, Romans 10:2. This doctrine will support you that are weak, and doubt for want of inherent righteousness, take hold of it, *a robe of righteousness*, put it on, *believe in Christ*, as poor sinners come to him, you that have *no money, no worth, no merit, no righteousness*, this wine and milk of justification and pardon is for you: cry to God to help you to believe; Christ is the *author of your faith*, 'tis the gift of God, 'tis a grace of the Spirit; do you say you were wounded? Look to Christ, *Believe, and thou shalt be saved*, Mark 16:16. John 3:15, 16. If thou can'st not come to God as a saint, come as a sinner; nay, as a sinner thou must come, and may'st come.

Obj. But this doctrine is decried for *antinomianism*.

Ans. They know not what *antinomianism* is, that they thus brand us, as here-after I shall, God assisting, prove. If this is to be an *antinomian*, we must be all such, and let them mock on; the Lord open their eyes: we are for the law as Paul was, and for holiness and sincere obedience, as any man in the world; but we would have man act from right principles, and to a right end: we would have men act in holiness, from a principle of Faith, from a principle of spiritual life, be first *married to Christ that they may bring forth fruit to God*, Romans 7:4.

We preach to you, sinners, that Jesus Christ will entertain you, if you come to him, bid you welcome, and not cast you off, because of the greatness of your sins, though you have no qualifications to recommend you to him. Would you wash your selves from your sins, and then come to the fountain of his blood to be washed; we hold forth Christ to be your whole Savior, and that he is *set forth as the propitiation through faith in his blood*; whom if you close with, and believe in, you shall be justified. We tell you God justifies the ungodly, i.e. that they are so before justified.

Nor is our doctrine any other, than what all sound Protestants have always contended for; nay, which the Church of England and her 39 articles doth assert. *Imputed righteousness*

and justification only for the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works and deservings, and that we are justified by faith only; and that works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of the Spirit, or not pleasing to God, for as much as they spring not from faith in Christ, nor do they make man meet to receive grace, &c.

Let me exhort do you not to receive for truth all things that you find asserted in some men's books, sermons, and writings, though recommended by such man you have so great a veneration for. I hope some of these ministers that have set their hands to Mr. Williams late book, will see calls to repent of their rash act, and great inadvertency; for we cannot see but that they said book brings in another gospel, or is a subversion of the gospel (though the unwary reader may not soon discover the poison that lies hid in it) and 'tis full of *hard*, and *uncouth*, or *unintelligible terms, notions, and expressions*, not formerly known to the Christian world: "Tis strange to me that he should intimate and hold forth the gospel to be a law, or command of duty, as a condition with the sanction of *threats* upon non-performance, and *promises of rewards* up on performance of *sincere obedience*; for if sincerity of grace and holiness be not the condition of that which he often calls the rule of the promise, which he nevertheless says is not the precept, I understand him not: Doth he not mean a man must be holy, sincere, or a new creature, before he ventures on the promise of the gospel, or can be justified, which is the error my text opposes; as if the free promise of the grace of God is laying hold on Christ and his righteousness justifies us not but that we must get some inherent qualifications of holiness, as a rule of the promise, before we venture up on it, or throw ourselves up on Jesus Christ, and so must receive him as *saints* and not as *sinners*; which is directly contrary to what all our true protestant writers and *modern divines* have all along asserted. *The Papists* say, a man must be inherently righteous before he can be declared just; and that Faith justifies, as it infuses such a righteousness in us: and this man says but little else, if I understand him; i.e a man must answer the rule of the Gospel-promise, asserting that the Gospel doth judicially determine a conformity to the rule thereof; and when God forgives, he judicially declares a man hath true faith, and by faith he means doubtless more than laying hold on Christ, viz. The making good *the baptismal covenant*, i.e. *to love serve, and sincerely to yield obedience to the Gospel*; so that Faith must by him be taken in a large and comprehensive manner: and that before God declares us righteous to justification, he looks whether or not we have fully answered the conditions (according to the doctrine these man preach) and finding the creature has done that, God judicially gives the promise in a way of reward; and the obedience being sincere, though imperfect, 'tis accepted as far forth as perfect obedience would have been (could it have been performed) under the law of works; so that still inherent righteousness is the condition of our justification before the holy God, and

not the righteousness of Christ: away with this error.

Brethren, this new law it seems can give life up on obedience thereto, the first being taken away; but if *by the law, any law, a man might be justified, Christ is dead in vain*: for as one law, so all laws of works since man hath sinned, utterly fail, and are unable to justify us in God's sight. For as some learned men have observed, the Greek word is not *the* law but *a* law. Let it be what law or rule of righteousness it will, that requires perfect or imperfect obedience, it will not do, Galatians 3. 11. *For the just shall live by faith*: justification and life comes only that way, and not by works of obedience we have done.

And truly to talk of sincere Obedience, when performed by an unregenerate Person, 'tis strange Doctrine. Sincerity must only be look'd for in him, who is renewed by the grace of God: 'Tis as impossible for an unregenerate person to perform sincere obedience (if we speak of Gospel-Sincerity) as it is for a believer to perform perfect obedience to the law of works.

Therefore Sinners, though 'tis your duty to reform your lives, and leave your abominable sins, which often bring heavy judgments upon you in this world, and expose you to eternal wrath in the world to come; yet know that all that you can do, will fail in point of your acceptation and justification in God's sight, or to save your Souls: Your present work and business is to believe in Jesus Christ, to look to him, who only can renew his sacred image in your souls, and make you new creatures, which must be done or you perish. O cry that he would help your unbelief: Come, venture your souls on Christ's righteousness; Christ is able to save you, though you are never so great sinners. Come to him, throw yourselves at the feet of Jesus: *Look to Jesus*, who came to see and save them that were lost; *If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink*, John 7:37, 38. You may have water of life freely. Do not say I want qualifications or a meetness to come to Christ. Sinner, dost thou thirst? Dost thou see a want of righteousness? 'Tis not a righteousness; but 'tis a sense of the want of righteousness, which is rather the qualification, thou shouldst look at: Christ hath righteousness sufficient to clothe you; Bread of life to feed you, grace to adorn you; or whatsoever you want, it is to be had in him. We tell you there is help in him, salvation in him, *through the propitiation in his blood* you must be justified, which is by faith alone.

Know that *God justifies the ungodly*; not by making them first inherently righteous, nor are they ungodly any more after justified: *The faith of the operation of God will soon purify your hearts*, and cleanse your lives; this grace will teach you *to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world*. We do not tell you, you must be holy, and then believe in Jesus Christ; but that you must believe in him,

that you may be holy. You must first have union with him, before you can bring forth fruit to God; you must act from life, and not for life.

Obj. *But O 'tis hard thus to believe; to be ungodly, and yet to believe; to see no holiness of our own, no divine habits planted in us; Had we some degree of sanctification, or righteousness of our own, we could then believe.*

Answ. Is not Christ able to save you, or is he not willing to save you, unless you be co-workers and co-partners with him in your salvation? Or are you unwilling to be saved, unless you might share with him in the glory of your salvation? Is it hard for you to believe the highest testimony and witness that ever was born to any truth? Can't you believe the report of the gospel, or receive the record of his Son? Is resting on Christ hard? Can't you beg for bread rather than perish? Can't you drink when thirsty, when you are bid to do it freely?

We say the gospel is not a conditional covenant of obedience; or that faith, and holiness, or faith, and good works, are the condition of it, denying we are justified by any works of ours, as a subordinate righteousness to the righteousness of Christ, or that we are justified for Christ's sake only, but not that his righteousness is imputed to us also, as our sins were imputed or laid upon him. We say that faith doth not justify as an act, nor as a habit, or from any worth there is in that, *it being only a hand to apply the remedy*, we say, faith is a fruit of Christ's purchase; and that *He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, will much more give us all things*, that is, grace here, and glory hereafter. He that gave us the greatest gift, will not deny to his elect ones the lesser gift.

And now know all you Pharisaical persons, this doctrine will pull down your high thoughts and imaginations, and abase your pride.

To you that are believers, Oh! Admire free grace; lift up Christ who died for you, *the Just for the unjust*, who bore your sins, *who was made sin for us that knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*. He gave himself for you, and has given grace, the fruit of his death, and himself to you. O labour to be a holy people; live to him that died for you, and rose again.

To conclude. Is there any sinner here? Are you ungodly, and in a wretched condition (in your own eyes)? Are you *weary and heavy laden*? Come the Christ, lift up your heads: *For to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*