

JUSTIFICATION
AN ACT OF GOD
NOT AN ACT OF FAITH

JOHN GILL, D.D.
1697–1771

A Faithful Modern-English
Edition

Edited and Modernised by
DAVID CLARKE

THE JOHN GILL LIBRARY

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Publisher's Page

Justification: An Act of God—Not an Act of Faith

by John Gill, D.D. (1697–1771)

This modern-English edition has been prepared to make John Gill's teaching accessible to contemporary readers while preserving his theology, argument, Scripture references, doctrinal language, and intended meaning.

This is not an abridgement. Gill's work has been carefully expressed in clear modern English, with no attempt to alter or soften his teaching concerning God's eternal purpose, the righteousness of Christ, imputation, faith, and justification.

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Dedication

This volume is dedicated to the students, pastors, teachers, and churches of Christ-Centered Church Inc. Ministries, Philippines.

With gratitude for the ministry of Bishop William Ola Poloc Sr., and in prayer that the doctrine of God's free and sovereign grace may continue to be faithfully taught, believed, and proclaimed.

Publisher's Note

John Gill's central argument in this work is clear: justification is an act of God, founded wholly upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not an act performed by the sinner, nor is it brought about by faith.

Gill does not deny the necessity or importance of faith. Faith receives Christ, rests in him, and gives the believer assurance and peace before God. But faith is not the cause or ground of justification. The sole ground is the obedience, death, and righteousness of Christ, freely imputed by God to those whom he has chosen in him.

The questions addressed here have long been debated among Christians: When are God's people justified? Is justification dependent upon faith? What place does Christ's resurrection hold in the justification of his people? And how should we understand God as both "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26)?

Gill writes as a firm defender of the doctrines of sovereign grace. His concern is to preserve the truth that salvation, from beginning to end, is of the Lord.

About John Gill

John Gill (1697–1771) was an English Baptist pastor, biblical scholar, and theologian. He served for fifty-one years as pastor of the Baptist church at Horsleydown, Southwark, London—a congregation later associated with Benjamin Keach and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Gill was an exceptionally gifted scholar, with a lifelong knowledge of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, logic, and theology. In 1748, the University of Aberdeen awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

His major works include *The Cause of God and Truth*, his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, and *A Body of Practical Divinity*. He also edited and republished works by Tobias Crisp.

Gill remains one of the clearest and most substantial exponents of Particular Baptist and Reformed theology.

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Chapter 1

Of Justification

Adapted from John Gill's *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Book VI, Chapter 8.

Pardon of sin and justification are closely connected. In some passages of Scripture, pardon is mentioned first and justification afterwards (Acts 13:38–39; 26:18). Yet neither is, in reality, before the other. Both exist together in the mind of God and are applied together to the conscience of the believer.

However, when considering cause and effect, justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ may be regarded as prior to pardon. God forgives sin for Christ's sake—that is, because Christ's righteousness is imputed to his people. The cause must come before its effect.

Some have treated pardon and justification as the same thing, making justification simply the forgiveness of sins. Others have more rightly understood them as involving both the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Others have viewed them as one act with two results: by the same act, guilt is removed and the sinner is declared righteous, just as darkness is removed and light enters at the same moment.

There is truth in this. When God forgives sin, he declares the sinner righteous through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. When he declares the sinner righteous, he forgives the sinner's sins. Forgiveness presupposes the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness necessarily brings forgiveness of sin.

Nevertheless, although pardon and justification must never be separated, they should be distinguished. They are best understood, not as two separate parts of one blessing, but as two distinct blessings of grace. They agree in several important respects.

1. God Is the Author of Both

God alone forgives sin; this is his prerogative. In the same way, God alone justifies the sinner. “There is one God, who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Romans 3:30). He justifies both Jew and Gentile who believe in Christ (Mark 2:7).

2. Both Flow from God's Free Grace

The forgiveness of sin arises from the riches of God's grace and the multitude of his tender mercies. Justification is likewise attributed to God's grace: believers are "justified freely by his grace" (Ephesians 1:7; Psalm 51:1; Titus 3:7; Romans 3:24).

3. Both Were Obtained by Christ's Blood

The blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins, and through that same blood believers are justified. Christ himself said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Believers are also "justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9).

4. The Same People Are Pardoned and Justified

All whom God pardons are justified, and all whom he justifies are pardoned. To those to whom God imputes the righteousness of Christ, he gives the remission of sins. And to those whose sins he does not impute, he imputes righteousness without works (Romans 4:6–8).

5. Pardon and Justification Begin and Are Completed Together

Pardon and justification begin together and are completed at once. They are not gradual blessings, as sanctification is. Scripture speaks of believers as forgiven and justified in a complete sense (Colossians 2:13; Acts 13:39).

6. Both Are Received and Enjoyed by Faith

Believers receive the forgiveness of sins by faith. By faith they also receive "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness" unto justification of life. This is what the Scriptures mean when they speak of justification by faith (Acts 26:18; Romans 5:1, 17–18).

Yet, although pardon and justification agree in these respects, they differ in other important ways.

Pardon and Justification Are Not the Same

Although pardon and justification agree in the ways already stated, they differ in several important respects.

1. Pardon Forgives the Sinner; Justification Declares Him Righteous

Pardon is granted to sinners, who may still rightly be called pardoned sinners. Justification, however, is God's declaration that a person is righteous.

There is a difference between a criminal who is tried, found guilty, condemned, and then pardoned, and a person who is tried and declared righteous by the law, as though he had never broken it. Justification is that judicial declaration of righteousness.

2. Pardon Removes Sin; Justification Provides Righteousness

Pardon takes sin away from the sinner, but it does not give him a righteousness. Justification does.

Pardon removes the filthy garments; justification clothes the believer with a change of raiment—with the robe of Christ's righteousness (Zechariah 3:4). These are distinct blessings.

3. Pardon Frees from Punishment; Justification Gives a Title to Life

Pardon removes guilt and frees the sinner from the punishment due to sin. "The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Yet pardon, considered by itself, does not give a title to everlasting life, happiness, and glory. Justification does. For this reason it is called "justification of life," and those who are justified become "heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Romans 5:18; Titus 3:7).

When a king pardons a criminal, he does not thereby give him an estate, much less his crown and kingdom. If he chooses to receive that man into his household as a son and heir, this must be done by another distinct act of royal favour.

4. Justification Requires More Than Pardon

The blood of Christ was sufficient to obtain pardon, and did obtain it. But the justification of a sinner requires the imputation of the whole righteousness of Christ: the holiness of his human nature, the perfect obedience of his life, and his sufferings and death.

5. Justification Is Founded upon Christ's Fulfilment of the Law

The righteousness by which sinners are justified is Christ's fulfilment of the law on behalf of his people. He is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

Pardon does not fulfil the law or provide righteousness. Christ's

righteousness does. It belongs to him as its author and fulfiller: “Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength” (Isaiah 45:24).

6. Pardon Concerns Sin; Justification Concerns Righteousness

Pardon consists in God’s not imputing sin. Justification consists in God’s imputing righteousness. Righteousness is imputed; pardon is not (Romans 4:6–7).

7. Christ Was Justified, but Not Pardoned

Justification passed upon Christ as the Head and Representative of his people. Their sins were imputed to him, and he made full satisfaction to the justice of God for them. Therefore, he was acquitted, discharged, and justified.

Scripture allows us to say that Christ was justified, for it says so. But we must not say that Christ was pardoned. Pardon would imply personal guilt needing forgiveness, whereas Christ bore the sins of his people as their Surety (Isaiah 50:8–9; 1 Timothy 3:16).

8. An Innocent Person May Be Justified without Being Pardoned

An innocent person who has been falsely accused may be acquitted and justified, though he cannot be said to be pardoned. Adam, in his state of innocence, needed no pardon. Neither do the elect angels in heaven. Yet both may rightly be described as just, or righteous.

In the same way, if anyone could perfectly fulfil the law—which no fallen person can—he would be justified by it. “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Romans 2:13). “The man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Romans 10:5).

Therefore, if pardon and justification are viewed as cause and effect, they must be distinguished and must not be confused.

The Importance of Christ’s Imputed Righteousness

The doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ is of the greatest importance. The apostle speaks of it as lying at the heart of the gospel, and he describes the opposite teaching—justification by the works of the law—as another gospel (Galatians 1:6–7; 3:8).

It is a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. The Reformers made it a chief subject of their study and preaching, opposing the Roman doctrines of penance, purgatory, indulgences, and the merit of human works. Martin Luther called it the article by which the church stands or falls. Where this doctrine is maintained, the church is established and prospers; where it is abandoned, the church is brought into serious decline.

This doctrine is the foundation of solid joy, peace, and comfort in this life, and of the hope of eternal glory in the life to come.

Gill has already considered justification as an eternal and immanent act in God—an act present in the divine purpose before faith. He has also considered the objections to that truth. Here he turns to justification as it is made known in the conscience of the believer, which Scripture calls justification by faith.

I. The Act of Justification

We must first consider what is meant by the word justification.

1. Justification Is Not Merely Instruction about the Way of Salvation

Justification does not mean instructing people about the method of justification, whether by the law or by the gospel (Acts 15:1; 1 Timothy 1:7; Daniel 12:3).

2. Justification Is Not an Inward Change of Nature

Neither does justification mean making people righteous by putting righteousness or holiness within them. To understand it in this way is to confuse justification with sanctification. These are distinct blessings (1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11).

The righteousness by which believers are justified is imputed to them. The righteousness of sanctification is worked within them. Justification rests upon the obedience and blood of Christ; inward holiness, necessary and precious as it is, is not the righteousness by which a sinner is justified before God.

Justification Is a Judicial Act

The word justify is not used to describe an inward, physical, or moral change in a person. It is a judicial term. It belongs to the language of a court of law, where justification is the opposite of condemnation (Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15; Isaiah 5:22; 13

Matthew 12:37).

This is the sense intended in the doctrine of justification. Men stand before God as sinners, charged with sin, found guilty, and liable to condemnation and death. But through the obedience and blood of Christ they are cleared of every charge, acquitted, absolved, freed from condemnation and death, and given a title to eternal life (Romans 3:9, 19; 5:9, 16, 18–19; 8:1, 33–34; Galatians 2:16–17; Titus 3:7).

3. Justification Before God, Not Before Men

The justification considered here is not justification before men. A person may appear righteous in the sight of others while not being righteous before God (Matthew 23:28). Nor does it mean the vindication of a person's cause against false accusations (1 Samuel 12:5–6; Psalm 7:8; Job 13:18).

Neither does it mean the justification of faith by works. Abraham's faith and Rahab's faith were shown to be genuine by their works: Abraham offered up his son, and Rahab received and protected the spies (James 2:21–25).

Rather, this is the justification of the person before God.

There is a legal justification, which would require perfect obedience to the whole law. In fallen humanity, this is impossible (Romans 2:13; 10:5; 8:3–4).

There is also gospel justification. This is an act of God's grace by which he counts and declares a person righteous through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him and received by faith. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Christ Jesus is "made unto us . . . righteousness" (1 Corinthians 1:30), and believers are "made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

They are therefore counted perfectly righteous in Christ, justified and accepted before God.

II. The Cause of Justification

The moving cause of justification is the free grace of God. It was God's sovereign favour and goodwill that moved him to establish the way of justification, to appoint and send his Son to provide righteousness for his people, to accept that righteousness on their

behalf, and to impute it to them freely, without works.

The meritorious cause of justification is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. Gill will consider this more fully later. Here, he focuses on the efficient cause—that is, the One who performs the act of justification.

“It is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33; see also Romans 3:26, 30; Galatians 3:8). This is marvellous for several reasons.

1. God Justifies the Ungodly

God is “the Judge of all the earth,” who always does right and who will by no means clear the guilty. Human judges are forbidden to justify the wicked. Yet God himself “justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5).

He does not justify them without righteousness, nor does he justify them while viewing them merely as ungodly. He justifies them upon the ground of Christ’s righteousness. They stand before him as righteous in his Son.

Therefore, those who are justified may come “to God the Judge of all” without fear, appearing before him perfectly righteous in Christ the Mediator (Hebrews 12:23–24).

2. God Justifies Those Who Have Broken His Holy Law

God judges according to his own holy, just, and good law. That law requires perfect and sinless obedience. Yet every person has broken it repeatedly. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

The law pronounces the sinner guilty, brings him under its curse, and condemns him. Yet God justifies his people because Christ has fulfilled the law in their place. The righteousness required by the law is fulfilled in them through their Representative. Its demands, both its precepts and its penalty, have been fully satisfied by Christ.

3. God Justifies Those Who Have Sinned against Him

Sin is the transgression of God’s law. It is committed against God, the Lawgiver, and is hateful to him. Therefore Bildad’s question is entirely understandable: “How then can man be justified with God?” (Job 25:4).

Yet this is precisely what God does. He justifies sinners through the righteousness of his Son.

4. God Accepts No Imperfect Righteousness

God will not accept an imperfect righteousness in place of a perfect one. Human righteousness is defective and cannot stand before him in judgment. It cannot answer for the sinner at God's bar or justify anyone in his sight.

Yet God does justify his people through the perfect righteousness of Christ, who is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4).

The Work of the Triune God in Justification

Justification is the act of God, and all three Persons of the Godhead are concerned in it: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father's Part in Justification

The Father is frequently distinguished from Christ when Scripture speaks of justification. "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died" (Romans 8:33–34). God is also "just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

The Father who justified Christ, the Head of his people, also justifies those who belong to him.

1. The Father Planned the Way of Justification

The question, "How should man be just with God?" could never have been answered by angels or men unless God himself had revealed the answer.

In his infinite wisdom, God "found a ransom" for his people: a Redeemer who would bring in everlasting righteousness, acquit them from guilt, and "deliver him from going down to the pit" (Job 33:24).

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). In Christ, the Father planned the redemption, reconciliation, justification, and salvation of his people.

2. The Father Sent His Son to Accomplish It

At the appointed time, the Father sent his Son in human nature, "made under the law," to obey it in the place of his people (Galatians 4:4).

He sent him “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” with the sins of his people imputed to him. Through his sufferings and death as a sacrifice for sin, Christ bore the law’s penalty. Thus, all that the law required—both its command and its punishment—was fulfilled in those whom Christ represented (Romans 8:3–4).

3. The Father Accepted Christ’s Righteousness

Christ accomplished a perfect righteousness, fully satisfying the demands of law and justice. The Father approves of that righteousness, is well pleased with it, and accepts it as the justifying righteousness of all who believe in Christ.

4. The Father Imputes Christ’s Righteousness to Believers

The Father imputes Christ’s righteousness to believers as their own. This is an act of his free grace.

“Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). By the Father’s gracious act, believers are in Christ, and Christ is made their righteousness.

The Son’s Part in Justification

The Son of God is also concerned in the justification of sinners. The Father says of him, “By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” (Isaiah 53:11).

1. Christ Has Authority to Forgive and Justify

As a divine Person, Christ has authority not only to forgive sin but also to absolve and justify sinners.

While on earth, he said to the man sick of the palsy, “Thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matthew 9:2). To the woman taken in adultery he said, “Neither do I condemn thee” (John 8:11). To his disciples he said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

These were declarations of acquittal. Through his blood and righteousness, Christ pronounced the sentence of justification upon his people.

2. Christ, as Mediator, Obtained the Righteousness by Which Sinners Are Justified

Christ came to bring in everlasting righteousness, and he has done so. Therefore, he is called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” “the Sun of righteousness,” and “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Jeremiah 23:6; Malachi 4:2; Romans 10:4).

By his obedience, many are made righteous; by his blood, they are justified (Romans 5:9, 19).

3. Believers Are Justified in Christ Their Representative

As Adam represented his natural descendants, so Christ represents his spiritual seed. Through Adam’s sin, judgment came upon his descendants unto condemnation. In the same way, all who belong to Christ are justified in him.

“In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isaiah 45:25). Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

When Christ rose from the dead, he was acquitted and discharged from the sins of his people which had been imputed to him. Having made full satisfaction for them, he was justified as their Head and Representative; therefore, they were justified in him (1 Timothy 3:16).

4. Christ Clothes His People with His Righteousness

Christ has not only obtained righteousness for his people; he also clothes them with it. The church says, “He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10).

He is the Angel of the LORD before whom Joshua stood when accused by Satan, and who said, “I will clothe thee with change of raiment” (Zechariah 3:4).

5. Christ Is Both the Object and Author of Faith

The righteousness of Christ is revealed to faith and received by faith. This is why believers are said to be justified by faith.

But faith itself, no less than righteousness, is Christ’s gift. He is its object: “Ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1). He is also “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2).

The Holy Spirit’s Part in Justification

The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is likewise

concerned in the justification of sinners.

1. The Spirit Convicts Sinners of Their Need for Righteousness

The Holy Spirit convinces sinners of their lack of righteousness. He shows them the weakness, imperfection, and insufficiency of their own righteousness. He teaches them that, unless they have a better righteousness than their own, they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (John 16:8).

2. The Spirit Reveals Christ's Righteousness

The Spirit brings the righteousness of Christ near to the sinner. He does this not merely outwardly through the preaching of the Word, but inwardly through the light of his grace.

He reveals the fullness, glory, perfection, and suitability of Christ's righteousness. He shows that it fully answers every demand of God's law and justice; that it covers the sinner's nakedness; delivers from condemnation and death; makes the believer acceptable before God; and gives a title to eternal life.

3. The Spirit Works Faith

The Holy Spirit works faith in those whom he has convinced and enlightened. He enables them to look to Christ's righteousness, see its excellence, approve of it, desire it, lay hold of it, and receive it as their justifying righteousness.

This faith is the work of God. The Holy Spirit is therefore called "the spirit of faith" (Colossians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 4:13).

4. The Spirit Gives Assurance of Justification

The Holy Spirit bears witness to the spirits of believers that they have an interest in the righteousness of Christ and are justified by it.

He declares the sentence of justification in their consciences, in the name of Christ and on account of his righteousness. This is the meaning of being "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

III. The Objects of Justification

The objects of justification are God's elect. "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33).

1. The Elect Are the Objects of Justification

Gill is speaking here of elect men, not elect angels. The angels who remained holy may be declared just and righteous, but they have never been charged with sin. Therefore, in the strict sense, they do not need justification.

God's elect, however, are sinners in Adam. Yet, as chosen in Christ their Head, they are counted righteous through his righteousness. Justification is therefore closely connected with election.

This shows:

its eternity, because election was before the foundation of the world;

its particularity, because the elect are God's own chosen people;

its certainty, because those whom God predestinates, he also calls and justifies; and

its security, because those whom he justifies, he will also glorify (Romans 8:30).

2. The Redeemed Are the Objects of Justification

All whom God has chosen are redeemed, and all whom Christ has redeemed are justified. Justification proceeds upon redemption.

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Through Christ's redemption, his people are delivered from all their iniquities and from the curse of the law which they deserved. Therefore, they are acquitted and discharged.

3. The Pardoned Are the Objects of Justification

All who are chosen and redeemed are pardoned, and all who are pardoned are justified.

The Lord says, “I will pardon them whom I reserve” (Jeremiah 50:20). Those whom he has reserved for himself in election are pardoned. Forgiveness is also a blessing of redemption: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:7).

Those whose sins are forgiven are justified (Romans 4:6–7).

4. Not Every Person Is Justified

It follows that the objects of justification are not all people without exception. Not all are chosen; there is a remnant according to the
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election of grace. Not all are redeemed, pardoned, given faith, or saved from wrath.

If all people had been justified by the blood of Christ, all would be saved from wrath. Yet Scripture teaches that some will go away into everlasting punishment, while the righteous enter everlasting life.

Nevertheless, all who are justified are indeed justified. They are the seed and offspring of Christ: “In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isaiah 45:25). Upon them comes the gift of righteousness unto justification of life (Romans 5:18).

5. The Justified Are Many

Though justification does not belong to all people universally, the justified are many. Christ gave his life a ransom for many, and his blood was shed for the remission of sins of many (Isaiah 53:11; Romans 5:19; Matthew 20:28; 26:28).

6. The Justified Are Sinners and, in Experience, Believers

The objects of justification are described as sinners and ungodly (Galatians 2:17; Romans 4:5). This is their condition by nature, before conversion.

When converted, they are described as believers in Christ. The righteousness of Christ is “unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:22). It is applied to them, and they receive a gracious awareness and comfort of their justification through it.

They “believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ” (Galatians 2:16). Through believing in Christ, the object of faith, they receive a clear and comforting view of their justification and acceptance with God.

“By him all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). Such believers have the inward testimony and comfort of this truth. They are justified by faith: by Christ and his righteousness, received through faith.

This is not merely a nominal, historical, or professed faith, such as Simon Magus had. It is faith from the heart. “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:10). Those who truly believe in Christ’s righteousness for their justification “shall not come into condemnation” (John 5:24).

IV. The Charges from Which the Justified Are Freed

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33).

Those whom God justifies are freed from every criminal charge that may truly be brought against them.

1. They Are Justified from Original Sin

God’s elect are chargeable with the original sin of Adam. They were represented in him as their covenant head, and when he sinned they sinned in him. Thus, judgment came upon them unto condemnation and death.

Yet God justifies them from that offence through the gift of his Son’s righteousness, which comes upon them unto justification of life. By the imputation of Christ’s obedience, they are freed from the charge arising from Adam’s disobedience (Romans 5:12, 18–19).

2. They Are Justified from Their Corrupt Nature

They are also chargeable with impurity of nature and with the lack of original righteousness. Adam lost that righteousness through sin, and all his descendants enter the world with a corrupt nature. This is true even of God’s elect.

The law requires purity and holiness of nature and charges sinners with the absence of them. Yet God justifies his people from this charge through the imputation to them of the holiness of Christ’s human nature. Christ is made unto his people both sanctification and righteousness. He was foreshadowed by the high priest, who bore the inscription, “HOLINESS TO THE LORD” upon his forehead (Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Exodus 28:36).

3. They Are Justified from Actual Sins Committed before Conversion

The elect are chargeable with many actual sins committed before conversion, including sins of a very serious nature. Yet God justifies them from them all.

Saul of Tarsus had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. Yet he obtained mercy. The Corinthians had been guilty of grievous sins, yet they were “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” The apostles and others had once been disobedient and enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, yet they were justified by God’s grace and made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (1

Timothy 1:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9–11; Titus 3:3, 7).

4. They Are Justified from Sins Committed after Conversion

Believers are also chargeable with many sins after conversion. They have failures, infirmities, errors, mistakes, backslidings, and sins too numerous to count. Yet they are forgiven, cleansed, and justified from them all (James 3:2; Psalm 19:12; Hosea 14:4).

5. They Are Justified from Every Kind of Sin

Those who believe in Christ “are justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). God forgives all their trespasses for Christ’s sake, and “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (Colossians 2:13; 1 John 1:7).

No class or degree of sin lies beyond the sufficiency of Christ’s righteousness and blood.

6. They Are Justified from Sins for Which the Law of Moses Offered No Sacrifice

The law of Moses made no sacrificial provision for certain wilful and serious sins, such as adultery and murder. Those who despised that law in such matters died without mercy.

Yet God justifies from such sins, as well as from all others, through the righteousness of Christ. His redemption reaches sins from which the Mosaic law could not justify (Acts 13:39; Hebrews 9:15, 26; 10:28).

7. They Are Justified from Every Charge

God justifies his elect from every charge, whatever its source, whether the charge is true or false.

They may accuse themselves. Their consciences may condemn them, and rightly show them much sin. Yet “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things” (1 John 3:20). He knows the provision he has made for them in the covenant of grace and the righteousness his Son has obtained for their justification.

Other believers may bring charges against them, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. The world may speak falsely against them for Christ’s sake. Satan, “the accuser of our brethren,” may gather accusations and bring them before God.

But every accusation is answered by the righteousness of Christ.

“Their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 54:17). The Lord rebukes Satan, as seen in the vision of Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:1–4).

The law’s demands have been honoured by Christ, and the justice of God has been fully satisfied by him. Therefore, a complete justification takes place. God remains just while he is “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

V. The Ground and Manner of Justification: Christ’s Righteousness Imputed

The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ. The manner in which that righteousness becomes the believer’s is by imputation.

In other words, Christ’s righteousness is the reason why the sinner is justified, and God freely reckons that righteousness to the believer as his own.

Everything else must therefore be excluded as the ground of justification.

1. A Person’s Own Obedience to the Law Cannot Justify

A person’s own righteousness, or obedience to the law, is expressly excluded as the basis of justification. “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Romans 3:20).

Gill understands this to refer especially to obedience to the moral law—the law by which sin is known, guilt is established, and every mouth is stopped before God. Therefore, “we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28). That is, he is justified through Christ and his righteousness, received by faith, and not through his own works.

There are several reasons why a person’s own righteousness cannot justify him before God.

It Is Imperfect

The law requires perfect and sinless obedience. Moses wrote, “It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us” (Deuteronomy 6:25).

One failure in either the matter or manner of obedience means that the law’s standard has not been met. Since the fall, no one has

been able to render such perfect obedience.

Israel sought after a law of righteousness but did not attain it because they sought it “as it were by the works of the law,” rather than by faith in Christ. Even the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees fell short of what God requires. Indeed, “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

For this reason, even godly people who know the insufficiency of their own righteousness do not seek to stand before God upon that ground. They acknowledge the imperfection of their obedience and know that they cannot be just with God by it (Job 9:2–3, 20, 32; Psalm 143:2; Isaiah 64:6).

It Would Overthrow Grace

If justification were by human works, it could not be by grace. Grace and works are opposed in the matter of justification.

But believers are “justified freely by his grace” (Romans 3:24). Justification is not merely by grace; it is freely by grace. As Augustine observed, it would not be grace if it were mixed with, or made dependent upon, the works of men.

It Would Not Be a Righteousness without Works

If justification came by a person’s own obedience, it could not be by a righteousness without works, nor could it be by imputation.

Yet the blessedness of justification lies in God’s imputing righteousness without works (Romans 4:6). The righteousness that justifies is not the believer’s own work but the righteousness of another—Christ himself.

It Would Make Christ’s Work Unnecessary

If people could be justified by their own obedience to the law, there would have been no need for Christ to come into the world and provide righteousness for them.

His perfect obedience and his death would both be unnecessary. As the apostle says, “If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

It Would Give Room for Boasting

If justification were by human works, boasting would be encouraged. But God’s purpose in salvation is to exclude all boasting.

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Romans 3:27).

The doctrine of justification by faith in Christ’s righteousness gives no place to human boasting. All glory belongs to God alone.

2. The Gospel Is Not a New and Milder Law

Gill also rejects the idea that Christ relaxed the demands of the law and introduced the gospel as a new law with easier terms.

According to this view, faith, repentance, and new obedience are required as conditions of acceptance with God. Although these are imperfect, it is said that God accepts them because they are sincere, in place of perfect righteousness.

Gill argues that this whole scheme is mistaken.

The Law Has Not Been Relaxed

The law has not been altered, either in its commands or in its penalty. It still requires the same holy, just, and good obedience that it always required. Christ did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.

The law does not condemn a righteous person, but it still lies against every sinner and transgressor. It continues to accuse, pronounce guilt, condemn, and curse all who do not continue in everything it requires.

The Gospel Is Not a Covenant of Easier Works

Gill does not treat the gospel as a remedial law by which sinners may gain acceptance through reduced conditions. Considered as the good news of salvation, the gospel is the declaration of God’s grace and salvation through Christ. It is therefore called “the gospel of the grace of God” and “the gospel of your salvation.”

Faith, repentance, and new obedience are indeed taught in the gospel. But they are not works which sinners can perform by their own strength in order to earn acceptance with God. They are blessings of grace and gifts bestowed by God.

Faith is the gift of God. Repentance is granted by God. Both faith and repentance, together with new and spiritual obedience, are provided for in the covenant of grace (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Fallen Man Cannot Meet These Conditions by Himself

If faith, repentance, and new obedience were conditions to be met by sinners in order to be accepted by God, they would not be easier terms than the original law.

Gill argues that it was easier for Adam, while still innocent, to keep the whole law than it is for fallen man, by his own power, to repent, believe in Christ, and render spiritual obedience.

Until God removes the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh, granting both grace and repentance, sinners neither will nor can truly repent. No one can come to Christ unless it is given to him by the Father; and without Christ, his Spirit, and his grace, no one can do any truly good thing.

God Does Not Accept an Imperfect Righteousness as Perfect

God does not accept an imperfect righteousness in place of a perfect one. To say otherwise would compromise the justice and truth of God, whose judgment is according to truth. He cannot regard as a perfect righteousness that which is not perfect.

3. A Profession of Religion Cannot Justify

A profession of religion, even the Christian religion, is not the ground of justification before God.

A person may have “a form of godliness” without its power. He may be baptised, attend the Lord’s Supper, take part in every outward duty of religion, and yet remain without true righteousness.

Even where a person’s profession is sincerely begun, soundly founded, honourably maintained, and outwardly consistent, that profession is not the righteousness by which he is justified.

4. Sincerity Cannot Justify

Sincerity, even in the best religion, is not a justifying righteousness.

A person may be sincerely wrong as well as sincerely right. One may be sincere in a false religion, or even sincere while opposing Christ and persecuting his people. Saul of Tarsus did this before his conversion (Acts 26:9; John 16:2).

Sincerity in its best sense is a grace of the Holy Spirit. It accompanies genuine faith, hope without hypocrisy, and love without dissimulation. Yet it belongs to sanctification, not justification. It is neither the whole nor any part of the righteousness by which a sinner is justified before God.

5. Faith, Considered as the Act of Believing, Is Not the Righteousness That Justifies

Some have said that faith itself is imputed for righteousness. Gill rejects this. Faith is essential in receiving Christ and his righteousness, but the act of believing is not itself the righteousness by which a sinner is justified before God.

Faith Is the Believer's Own Act

Faith is called “his faith,” “thy faith,” and “my faith” (Habakkuk 2:4; Matthew 9:22; 15:28; James 2:18). It is exercised by the believer.

But the righteousness by which a sinner is justified is not his own; it belongs to another—Christ. Therefore, faith itself cannot be that justifying righteousness.

Faith Is Imperfect

Faith is imperfect, even in the strongest believers. The disciples themselves prayed, “Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

But the righteousness that justifies must be perfect. Nothing imperfect can meet the demands of God's law or stand before him as a sufficient righteousness.

Faith Does Not Continue in Its Present Form for Ever

Faith belongs to the present life. In glory, faith will give way to sight.

The righteousness by which sinners are justified, however, is “everlasting righteousness” (Daniel 9:24). Therefore, faith and justifying righteousness cannot be the same thing.

Faith and Righteousness Are Distinguished in Scripture

“The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). Faith cannot be the righteousness which is revealed.

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:10). Faith is exercised unto righteousness; it is therefore distinct from that righteousness.

Likewise, the righteousness of God is “unto all and upon all them that believe” (Romans 3:22). It comes upon believers and is therefore distinct from the faith by which they receive it.

Scripture Identifies Christ's Obedience and Blood as the Ground of Justification

Scripture teaches that many are made righteous by the obedience of Christ and are justified by his blood (Romans 5:9, 19).

Faith is neither Christ's obedience nor his blood. When believers are said to be justified by faith, they are not justified by faith as a human work. Nor are they justified by faith merely as a gracious quality worked within them, for that would confuse justification with sanctification.

Rather, they are justified by Christ, the object of faith, and by his righteousness, which faith receives and embraces. Faith does not justify as the ground or cause of justification; it receives the righteousness by which God justifies.

“Faith Is Counted for Righteousness”

Paul writes, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3). He also says, “His faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:5), and, “Faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness” (Romans 4:9).

Gill understands these words not to mean that Abraham's act of believing was itself his justifying righteousness. Rather, he understands “faith” here to refer to the object of Abraham's faith: the righteousness of Christ, which God imputes without works.

The same righteousness that was imputed to Abraham is imputed to all who believe in God, “that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:22–24). Therefore, the righteousness imputed to Abraham is not his personal act of faith, but Christ's righteousness received by faith.

6. Sanctification Is Not the Ground of Justification

The whole work of sanctification is not the righteousness by which a sinner is justified.

Justification and sanctification must not be confused. Sanctification is a work of God's grace within the believer. Justification is an act of God's grace toward the believer.

Sanctification is imperfect in this present life and progresses gradually. Justification is perfect, complete, and done at once.

The sole ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ.

What Is Meant by the Righteousness of Christ?

It Is Not Christ's Essential Righteousness as God

The righteousness by which believers are justified is called the righteousness of God because it was accomplished by Christ, who is truly God as well as truly man.

But it is not the essential righteousness that belongs to Christ simply as God. Christ is Jehovah, and he is the righteousness of his people; yet the righteousness that belongs to him as God is not itself imputed to them. If it were, believers would be made divine.

It Is Not Merely Christ's Faithfulness in His Mediatorial Office

Christ was perfectly faithful, upright, and righteous in carrying out his office as Mediator. He is God's "righteous servant" (Isaiah 53:11).

Yet Gill distinguishes this personal faithfulness in fulfilling his office from the righteousness imputed to believers for their justification. The righteousness by which they are justified is not merely the righteousness that showed Christ to be faithful in his office; it is the righteousness he accomplished in their place.

It Does Not Include Every Work Christ Performed

The righteousness imputed to believers does not consist of every action Christ performed on earth, nor of his present work in heaven.

His miracles proved his deity and Messiahship, and were recorded so that people might believe in him. But they were not part of the righteousness by which sinners are justified.

Likewise, Christ's present heavenly ministry—his appearing before the Father for his people, his intercession for them, and his preparation of heavenly dwellings—is not part of the righteousness accomplished on earth and imputed to them.

It Is What Christ Did and Suffered for His People

The righteousness by which sinners are justified consists in what Christ did and suffered in their human nature, on earth, in the place of his people, and as their Substitute and Representative.

This is commonly called his active and passive obedience. It includes:

- the purity and holiness of his human nature;
- the perfect obedience of his life; and
- his voluntary sufferings and death.

Together these fulfilled all that the law required for the justification

of sinners. “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4).

The law required more of fallen sinners than it required of Adam before the fall. Adam was created with a pure and holy nature and was required to continue in perfect obedience. If he failed, he came under the penalty of death.

Fallen humanity lacks that original purity, renders imperfect obedience, and has incurred the law’s penalty. Therefore, complete justification requires purity of nature, perfect obedience, and the bearing of death’s penalty. All three are found in Christ, the Representative of his people.

The Holiness of Christ’s Human Nature

Some consider the holiness of Christ’s human nature merely as the qualification that made him fit to be Mediator, able to render sinless obedience, offer himself as a spotless sacrifice, and act as the righteous Advocate of sinners.

But it was more than a qualification. It was also necessary for his people. “Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled” (Hebrews 7:26).

The law requires a holy nature. This is lacking in us, but it is found in Christ, who “of God is made unto us . . . sanctification” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The Perfect Obedience of Christ’s Life

Christ’s perfect obedience throughout his earthly life is commonly called his active obedience. His whole life was sinless and perfectly conformed to the law of God.

From his birth until his death, every action displayed the holiness of his nature and complete obedience to the will of God. As the Representative of his people, what he did was done in their place and on their behalf. Therefore, his obedience is reckoned to them as their righteousness.

Some have accepted that Christ’s perfect obedience qualified him to be Mediator, while denying that it forms part of the righteousness imputed to believers. Gill rejects that view.

1. Christ’s Submission to the Law Was for His People

Christ’s human nature, considered as a created nature, was subject

to the law. Yet he was not required to live in the lowly and suffering condition he willingly assumed.

From the moment his human nature was united to the Son of God, he had a rightful claim to glory and blessedness. His humble obedience under the law was voluntary.

Christ, as the eternal Son, is Lord of the law and above it. His submission to it was an act of remarkable condescension. He became man for his people: “For unto us a child is born” (Isaiah 9:6). He was “made under the law” for them, so that he might obey it in their place and redeem them from its curse (Galatians 4:4).

The Father sent him in the likeness of sinful flesh so that, through both his obedience and sufferings, “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:3–4).

2. The Law Required Both Obedience and the Bearing of Its Penalty

The law says, in effect, “Do, and live.” Its commands must be obeyed as well as its penalty endured.

Christ, as the Surety of his people, had to satisfy both. His bearing the penalty did not remove the need for perfect obedience; nor did his perfect obedience remove the need to bear the penalty due to sin.

One debt cannot be paid by another. By his sufferings and death, Christ answered the law’s threatening and penal demands. By his active obedience, he answered its commands. Together, these satisfied the whole law and made it honourable.

3. Strictly Speaking, Righteousness Consists in Obedience

In the strict sense, righteousness consists in doing what God commands. Moses wrote, “It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God” (Deuteronomy 6:25).

Suffering punishment does not, by itself, make someone righteous. If it did, then those suffering the greatest punishment would possess the greatest righteousness. Punishment may display the righteousness of the Judge who inflicts it, but it does not make the person punished righteous.

Therefore, if sinners are justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, this must include his active obedience. His

sufferings and death free them from the penalty of sin, but his perfect obedience constitutes their positive righteousness before God.

4. Scripture Attributes Righteousness to Christ's Obedience

Scripture says, "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Gill argues that this refers to Christ's actual obedience, not merely to his sufferings and death. The comparison is with Adam's actual disobedience: as Adam's disobedience made many sinners, so Christ's obedience makes many righteous.

5. Eternal Life Is Promised to Obedience

The law promises life to obedience: "Do this, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:28).

It does not promise life merely to one who has endured punishment. Christ's sufferings and death are reckoned to believers so that they may be delivered from the law's curse, from death, hell, and the wrath to come.

But Christ's active obedience, imputed to them, is "unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18). It gives them a rightful title to eternal life.

The Sufferings and Death of Christ

Christ's sufferings and death are commonly called his passive obedience. The expression may seem imperfect, since suffering and obedience are not identical. Suffering belongs to what is endured; obedience belongs to what is done.

Nevertheless, the phrase is useful if it is rightly understood. Christ's sufferings flowed from his obedience to the Father's will. In Gethsemane he said, "Not my will, but thine, be done." Throughout his life, and especially in his death, he willingly submitted to his Father.

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). He laid down his life willingly, poured out his soul unto death, and gave himself as an offering and sacrifice for sin. Therefore, his voluntary sufferings and death are an essential part of the justification of sinners.

Why Christ's Sufferings Were Necessary

It may be asked: if Christ's active obedience gives his people a title to life, why were his sufferings and death also necessary?

Christ, as the Surety and Representative of his people, had to satisfy everything the law required of them.

As creatures, the law required purity of nature and perfect obedience. These had been possessed by Adam, but were lost through his sin. Christ represented his people as creatures in the holiness of his nature and the perfection of his life.

As sinners, they had also incurred the penalty of the law. Christ represented them in his sufferings and death. He bore the curse due to sin in their place.

Thus, by his active obedience, his people are entitled to life; by his sufferings and death, they are freed from the penalty of death. In both, Christ fulfilled the law for righteousness on their behalf.

Christ's Death Was Necessary for Complete Justification

Christ's sufferings and death were necessary to complete the justification of sinners for several reasons.

1. The Law's Penalty Had to Be Endured

The law could not be fully satisfied unless its penalty was borne. Without satisfaction of its demands, there could be no justification according to its justice.

2. Sin Deserved Death

The law threatened death for disobedience, and death is the just wages and deserved punishment of sin. Therefore, either the sinner or a Surety on his behalf had to bear that penalty.

3. Justification Is Ascribed to Christ's Blood

Scripture says that believers are "justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9). The blood of Christ stands for the whole of his sufferings and death.

4. Justification Proceeds upon Redemption

Believers are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

Redemption is obtained through the blood, sufferings, and death of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 3:18; Revelation 5:9).

5. Justification Rests upon Christ's Satisfaction

Justification rests upon Christ's satisfaction of all that the law required. By his obedience and death, he made peace through his blood, reconciliation through his death, and atonement through his sacrifice (Colossians 1:20; Romans 5:10; Hebrews 9:26; Ephesians 5:2).

6. Christ Rose for the Justification of His People

The work of justification is not presented as complete until Christ's resurrection, following his obedience and death. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

The righteousness by which believers are justified is therefore found in Christ's whole obedience—both active and passive. It is fully satisfactory to God's justice and worthy of eternal life. It frees believers from condemnation and death, and gives them a rightful title to everlasting life.

The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

The righteousness of Christ becomes the believer's by imputation. This is the manner in which God makes Christ's righteousness over to the sinner and counts it as his own.

David describes "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Romans 4:6).

To impute means to reckon, account, credit, or place something to another person's account. Paul uses this language when writing to Philemon about Onesimus: "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account" (Philemon 18).

In the same way, when God imputes Christ's righteousness to believers, he reckons it as theirs. It was accomplished for them, and God counts them righteous by it, as though they had fulfilled it themselves.

1. God Justifies the Ungodly

Those whom God justifies are, in themselves, ungodly. God "justifieth the ungodly" (Romans 4:5).

If they are ungodly, they possess no righteousness of their own that can justify them. Therefore, if they are justified, it must be through a righteousness placed to their account. That righteousness can only be the righteousness of Christ.

2. The Justified Are Not Justified by Inward Righteousness

A person is justified either by an inherent righteousness or by an imputed righteousness.

But no one is justified by inherent righteousness, because the righteousness found within believers is imperfect in this life. Therefore, the righteousness by which they are justified must be imputed to them.

3. The Justifying Righteousness Is Another's Righteousness

The righteousness by which believers are justified is not their own, but Christ's. Paul speaks of being found in Christ, "not having mine own righteousness" (Philippians 3:9).

Since it is the righteousness of another, it can become theirs only through imputation.

4. Christ's Righteousness Is Imputed as Adam's Sin Was Imputed

Adam's sin became the sin of his descendants by imputation. In the same way, Christ's righteousness becomes the righteousness of his people by imputation.

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

As Adam's disobedience was reckoned to those whom he represented, so Christ's obedience is reckoned to those whom he represents.

5. Christ Took His People's Sins by Imputation

The sins of Christ's people became his by imputation. The Father laid them upon him, placed them to his account, and Christ willingly accepted responsibility to answer for them before divine justice.

In the same way, Christ's righteousness is made over to his people. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ was made sin for his people, not by becoming personally sinful, but by having their sins imputed to him. They are made the righteousness of God in him, not by becoming personally perfect in themselves, but by being accounted righteous through his righteousness imputed to them.

The Excellence of Christ's Imputed Righteousness

Several descriptions of Christ's righteousness in Scripture show its glory, sufficiency, and freeness.

1. It Is "the Righteousness of God"

It is called "the righteousness of God" (Romans 1:17; 3:22).

It is the righteousness of God because it was accomplished by Christ, who is truly God as well as man. It is approved and accepted by God, and it is freely imputed by him to believers as their justifying righteousness.

2. It Is "the Righteousness of One"

It is called "the righteousness of one" (Romans 5:18), and "the obedience of one" (Romans 5:19).

That one is the Son of God, one Person in whom two natures are united, and the one common Head of all his people.

His righteousness serves for many, but it remains the obedience of one. Therefore, believers are not justified partly by their own obedience and partly by Christ's. They are justified by Christ's righteousness alone.

3. It Is "the Righteousness of the Law"

It is called "the righteousness of the law" (Romans 8:4), because Christ accomplished it in perfect conformity to the law of God.

It is a legal righteousness in that it fully meets every demand of the law. Yet it is gospel righteousness in the way it is freely given to believers and revealed in the gospel. It is "manifested without the law," though witnessed by the law and the prophets.

4. It Is "the Righteousness of Faith"

It is called "the righteousness of faith" (Romans 4:13), not because faith is righteousness, nor because faith is imputed as righteousness.

It bears this name because Christ's righteousness is revealed to faith. Faith lays hold of it, receives it, rejoices in it, and glories in it.

5. It Is a Free Gift

It is called "the gift of righteousness," "the free gift," and "the gift by grace" (Romans 5:15–17).

Christ freely accomplished this righteousness. The Father freely

imputes it. Faith is also freely given, so that the believer may receive and embrace this gift.

6. It Is the Robe of Righteousness

Christ's righteousness is called "the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). It is pictured as a garment reaching to the feet, covering the whole mystical body of Christ (Revelation 1:13).

Scripture also compares it to "gold of Ophir," "raiment of needlework," a change of raiment, and a wedding garment (Psalm 45:9, 13–14; Zechariah 3:4; Matthew 22:12). It is the "best robe" (Luke 15:22).

This robe is better than the righteousness Adam possessed in Eden or that of the holy angels. Their righteousness was creaturely and, in Adam's case, liable to be lost. Christ's righteousness is the righteousness of God and is everlasting.

It may also be called the first robe, since it was first appointed and provided in the covenant of grace, though Adam's righteousness was first in actual possession and use.

VI. The Effects of Justification

Justification through the righteousness of Christ produces several blessed effects.

1. Freedom from Penal Punishment

Those who are justified are completely freed from every penal evil, both in this life and in the life to come.

This does not mean that believers are free from all suffering. They may endure afflictions, griefs, losses, and death itself. Yet these do not come upon them as punishment for sin or as expressions of God's vindictive wrath.

For the justified, afflictions are fatherly chastisements—evidences of God's love and means of correction (Revelation 3:19; 1 Corinthians 11:32).

Death was originally threatened as the penalty of sin. Yet, for those justified in Christ, death is no longer penal. It is their privilege, not their punishment: "All are yours . . . whether . . . life, or death" (1 Corinthians 3:21–22). "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

After death, no penal evil awaits them. "Much more then, being

now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9).

To punish those whose sins Christ has already borne would be to punish the same offences twice: first in the Surety and then in those for whom he stood. This would deny the completeness of Christ’s satisfaction and contradict the gospel promise that those who believe in Christ shall not enter into condemnation.

2. Peace with God

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Peace with God has been made through the blood of Christ, and reconciliation through his death. Justification also brings peace of conscience as the believer comes to know and rest in Christ’s righteousness.

“The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever” (Isaiah 32:17).

3. Access to God

Through Christ, the justified have access to God. “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:2).

They may come to God as the God of grace and to his throne of grace with freedom, boldness, and confidence. They bring their requests, not trusting in their own righteousness, but pleading only the worth and virtue of Christ’s righteousness.

4. Acceptance with God

Justification brings acceptance with God through Christ.

No person can be accepted by God upon the ground of his own righteousness. But through Christ’s righteousness, both the person and his service are accepted.

God first accepted Abel and then his offering. In the same way, God accepts his justified people as they are considered in Christ. He is well pleased with Christ and with all who are in him.

They are accepted in the Beloved, clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness and the garments of salvation. Their works, performed in Christ’s strength, through faith in him, and offered through him as their great High Priest, become acceptable to God.

5. The Lasting Well-Being of God's People

The well-being of God's people in this life, at death, at judgment, and throughout eternity follows from their justification.

"Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him" (Isaiah 3:10).

It is well with the justified in life. Whether they experience prosperity or adversity, all things work together for their good. Even where they possess little of this world's goods, what they have is a blessing from God (Psalm 37:16; Proverbs 15:16–17).

It is well with them in death. They have hope and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. It will be well with them at the final judgment, for they possess a righteousness that will answer for them before God. They will receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it will be well with them for ever. Those who are righteous in Christ shall remain righteous and shall enter into everlasting life.

6. Glorifying in Christ

Justification leads believers to glory, not in themselves, but in Christ.

All boasting in personal righteousness, duties, services, attainments, or merit is excluded by the doctrine of justification through Christ's righteousness. No one may claim heaven or happiness as something earned by his own efforts.

But those who are justified in Christ rightly glory in him. "In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory" (Isaiah 45:25). They rejoice that Christ Jesus is "of God . . . made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

7. A Sure Title to Eternal Life

Those who are justified have an unquestionable title to eternal life.

For this reason, justification through Christ's righteousness is called "justification of life" (Romans 5:18). The justified are "made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

They are heirs of an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and reserved in heaven for them. They shall certainly possess it.

8. The Certainty of Salvation

From justification, the certainty of salvation follows.

Those who are justified “shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9). Justification and glorification are inseparably joined: “Whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

Therefore, all whom God justifies through the righteousness of Christ will certainly be saved and glorified.

VII. The Properties of Justification

1. Justification Is an Act of Pure Grace

Justification is an act of God’s pure grace. It does not arise from human merit, worthiness, or works.

Grace is its moving cause. According to his own purpose and grace, God determined to justify sinners. Scripture foresaw and declared “that God would justify the heathen through faith” (Galatians 3:8), because God had graciously purposed to do so.

By grace, God’s wisdom provided the way in which sinners could be just with him—a way that neither men nor angels could have discovered. He purposed to impute their sins to Christ, rather than to them, and to impute Christ’s righteousness to them.

He was gracious and said, “Deliver him from going down to the pit” (Job 33:24).

Grace appointed Christ to be the Surety of his people and moved him willingly to undertake that work: “Lo, I come to do thy will” (Hebrews 10:7). Grace sent the Son to obey, suffer, and die in the nature of his people. Grace accepts his righteousness as theirs, imputes it freely without works, and gives them faith to receive it.

The freeness of justification is especially evident because God justifies the ungodly—even sinners, and some who have been chief among sinners (Romans 4:5; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

2. Justification Is an Act of Justice as Well as Grace

Justification is not only gracious; it is also just.

God is righteous in all his ways and works, including his justification of sinners. Christ, their Surety, has perfectly fulfilled the law in both its commands and its penalty. Divine justice is therefore fully satisfied.

Thus God is “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

3. Justification Is Complete in Its Scope

Justification is universal with respect to every person justified, every sin from which they are justified, and every punishment from which they are delivered.

All the seed of Israel—that is, all God’s elect and the seed of Christ—are justified. As judgment came upon all Adam’s natural descendants unto condemnation, so the free gift of Christ’s righteousness comes upon all his spiritual descendants unto justification of life. His righteousness is “unto all and upon all them that believe” (Isaiah 45:25; Romans 3:22; 5:18).

They are justified from all their sins. Christ has redeemed them from all their iniquities; their sins are forgiven for his sake; his blood cleanses them from all sin; and his righteousness clears them from every charge.

They are also completely secure from punishment. They are saved from wrath, free from all condemnation, delivered from the curse of the law, and shall not be harmed by the second death.

The whole righteousness of Christ is imputed to them. Christ himself, in all the sufficiency of his righteousness, is made unto them righteousness. They are made the righteousness of God in him, complete in him, and perfectly beautiful through his beauty placed upon them.

4. Justification Is a Single and Complete Act

Justification is done at once. It does not admit of degrees and is not carried forward gradually, as sanctification is.

The sins of God’s elect were laid upon Christ at once, and he made satisfaction for them at once. By his one sacrifice, he put away sin for ever. Christ’s righteousness was accepted by God and imputed to his people as a complete righteousness.

The believer’s sense and assurance of justification may grow. “The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). Faith may increase from a weaker to a stronger assurance, and the Spirit’s manifestations of God’s favour may vary at different times.

But the act of justification itself is always one, perfect, and

complete act in God.

The sentence of justification was conceived in the divine mind from eternity; it was declared in Christ, the Representative of his people, at his resurrection; it is declared afresh in the believer's conscience by the Holy Spirit; and it will be openly declared at the final judgment before angels and men.

Yet these are not separate justifications. They are renewed declarations of the one eternal and complete act of God.

5. Every Believer Is Equally Justified

All who are justified are equally justified.

The price of redemption is the same for every believer: the precious blood of Christ. The righteousness imputed to one believer is the same righteousness imputed to another. It covers the whole mystical body of Christ, including its weakest and least visible members.

There is no difference in the righteousness received by believers. They may differ in the strength of their faith, in their growth in grace, and in the number or seriousness of sins committed before conversion. Yet the weakest believer is as fully justified as the strongest.

One person may be justified from more sins than another, because he has committed more. But no one is more justified than another. No believer possesses a greater justifying righteousness than the righteousness of Christ.

6. Justification Is Irreversible

Justification is an unchangeable act of God. It rests upon his immutable purpose and grace, which cannot fail.

The righteousness by which believers are justified is everlasting righteousness. The faith by which they receive it will not ultimately fail, for Christ is its Author and Finisher.

A person who is only outwardly or apparently righteous may turn away from his own profession and fall into sin. But one who is truly righteous through the righteousness of Christ can never fall from that righteousness. He shall never enter into condemnation but will be eternally saved and glorified.

7. Justification Does Not Remove Sin from the Believer's Nature

By justification, believers are freed from sin's guilt and from any

obligation to bear its penal punishment. Yet justification does not remove sin completely from within them.

God sees no iniquity in his justified people in the matter of their acceptance and condemnation before him. They are acquitted, discharged, and justified from all sin through the righteousness of Christ.

Yet sin still dwells within them in this present life, as it did in the apostle Paul. “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

God sees and deals with the sins of his people in his fatherly providence. He may correct and chastise them. But in the matter of justification, he does not see their sin so as to condemn them. Christ has answered for it, and they stand righteous in him.

8. Justification Does Not Make the Law Void or Discourage Good Works

The doctrine of justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ does not make the law void.

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

The law is established because Christ has provided a righteousness fully equal to all its demands. In him, the law is magnified and made honourable.

Neither does this doctrine discourage the performance of good works. Rather, it encourages and strengthens believers to pursue them. The gospel of free justification is to be constantly preached so “that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8).

This completes Chapter 1: Of Justification.

Chapter 2

Of Other Eternal and Immanent Acts in God

Adapted from John Gill's *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, Book II, Chapter 5.

Gill now considers several blessings of grace, not chiefly as they are experienced by believers in time, but as eternal acts in the mind and will of God.

These are called immanent acts because they remain within God's own eternal purpose. They do not begin when believers first experience them, though they are later revealed, applied, and enjoyed in their lives.

Like election, these blessings have their complete being in the eternal will of God and are closely connected with it (Ephesians 1:4–6).

1. Adoption Is an Eternal Act of Grace

Predestination to adoption stands alongside election (Ephesians 1:5). God's will to adopt his chosen people is itself his adoption of them. As God's will to elect is election, so his will to adopt is adoption.

Adoption is therefore God's choice to make certain persons his children. The New Testament word for adoption means a placing among the children: bringing one who is not a child by natural birth into the position, relation, and privilege of a son.

God says, "How shall I put thee among the children?" (Jeremiah 3:19).

Divine adoption is an act of God's sovereign grace and good pleasure. It is not prompted by anything attractive, worthy, or deserving in those adopted. Nor does God adopt because he lacks a Son.

Human adoption may arise from the excellence of the person adopted, as Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, or from natural affection and family connection, as Mordecai adopted Esther. Divine adoption is altogether different. Those whom God adopts are unworthy and undeserving. By nature, they are strangers and "children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2:3).

Adoption is an act of distinguishing grace. It concerns people, not angels. Angels are servants, not sons by adoption. It also concerns some people rather than all people, though all are alike fallen by

nature.

“What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).

Adoption Did Not Begin in Time

Adoption is an eternal act of grace. It did not begin in time, because it is an act of God’s will, and God’s will is eternal and unchangeable. No new purpose or act of will arises in God in time.

Adoption Does Not Begin When a Person Believes

Believers are openly known as God’s children through faith in Christ: “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26).

But faith does not make them children of God. Rather, it reveals and receives the blessing of adoption. Adoption is God’s act: “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Christ’s redemption makes it possible for believers to receive, in their own experience, “the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:5). Faith receives Christ and all the blessings of grace found in him, including adoption. But it does not create the adoption it receives.

“To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). This means that believers receive the recognised privilege and assurance of sonship. It does not mean that faith itself first makes them sons.

The following verse describes such believers as those “which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Their new birth is evidence of their sonship; it is not the original cause of it.

Adoption Is Distinct from Regeneration

Adoption does not begin with regeneration. Adoption and regeneration are distinct blessings, and adoption is prior to regeneration.

People are not adopted because they have first been regenerated. Rather, they are regenerated because they have been adopted.

By adoption, they are brought into the relation of God’s children. By regeneration, they are given a nature suited to that relation. They are made partakers of the divine nature and prepared as heirs for the

inheritance to which they have been adopted.

Adoption Is Prior to the Spirit's Work in the Heart

The act of adoption is prior to every work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people.

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6). They are already sons by God's adopting grace; therefore, God sends his Spirit into their hearts.

The Spirit convinces, converts, regenerates, effectually calls, sanctifies, comforts, and enables believers to cry, "Abba, Father." For this reason he is called "the Spirit of adoption."

His work, teaching, influence, and leading do not make people sons of God. They reveal and give evidence that they are sons. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14–16).

Adoption Was Before Christ's Work in Time

Divine adoption, or sonship, existed before Christ became incarnate and accomplished redemption.

"Because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Hebrews 2:14). Christ took human nature with a particular regard to the children of God, the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Though the human nature he assumed was common to all humanity, his incarnation and redeeming work had a special reference to God's adopted children. He was the child born and the Son given for them (Isaiah 9:6; Hebrews 2:14, 16).

They must therefore have been the children of God by adoption before Christ suffered and died. He died for them under that character. He died not only for elect Jews, "but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:51–52).

In the eternal purpose of God, all the elect were gathered together in Christ, whether in heaven or on earth, and whether among Jews or Gentiles (Ephesians 1:10).

Christ, as their Surety, Head, and Representative, suffered to bring these many sons to glory. Through his redemption, they come personally and openly to receive the adoption that had already been

provided for them (Hebrews 2:10; Galatians 4:5).

Adoption Is an Eternal Act of Free Grace

Gill gives several further reasons why adoption must be understood as an eternal act of God's free grace.

1. The Elect Were Given to Christ Before They Believed

Scripture speaks of the elect as a distinct people given by the Father to Christ before they come to him in faith. Their coming to Christ is the certain fruit of that prior gift (John 6:37; 17:2, 6, 9, 24).

Grace was given to them in Christ "before the world began" (2 Timothy 1:9). Therefore, they themselves must have been given to Christ and been in him before the world began.

They were given to Christ as children. "Behold I and the children which God hath given me" (Hebrews 2:13). If they were given to him as children, then they were God's children by adoption from eternity.

2. The Elect Were Espoused to Christ in Eternity

Gill also argues from the eternal union of Christ and his church.

In human relationships, a man who marries a king's daughter becomes the king's son-in-law; a woman who marries a king's son becomes the king's daughter. In the same way, the church, being espoused to the Son of God, becomes the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

The church is called "the king's daughter" (Psalm 45:13). Since the elect were eternally betrothed to Christ, the Son of God, they must be regarded as the sons and daughters of God from eternity.

3. The Elect Entered the Covenant of Grace as Children

The elect were taken into the covenant of grace as children. Its central promise is: "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18).

This covenant is eternal. Christ, its Mediator, was appointed from eternity; its promises and blessings were made and provided before the world began.

In that covenant, the elect were given to Christ as his seed, offspring, and children. In this sense, Christ is their "everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6; 53:10).

4. Adoption and Election Belong to the Same Eternal Purpose

Predestination to adoption is mentioned with election as belonging to the same eternal purpose of God: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . . Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Ephesians 1:4–5).

Those chosen by God are chosen not only to holiness, but also to adoption and to the inheritance that belongs to God’s children.

Adoption is therefore a gracious sentence conceived in the divine mind, established by the divine will, and pronounced in God’s eternal predestination.

That sentence is later declared in Christ’s redemption, revealed to believers by the Spirit, and openly displayed in glory. Yet all these later declarations only unfold the original act of God’s will by which he appointed and constituted his people as his children from eternity.

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be” (1 John 3:2).

Chapter 3

Justification: An Act of God's Free Grace

Justification is an act of God's grace, flowing from his sovereign goodwill and pleasure. Believers are "justified by his grace" and "justified freely by his grace" (Titus 3:7; Romans 3:24).

Gill distinguishes between:

God's act of justifying, which he calls active justification; and the declaration and experience of justification in the conscience of the believer.

Here he is concerned with the first: God's own eternal act of grace. It is an act within the divine mind and will, by which God counts and declares his people righteous through the righteousness of his Son.

As God's will to elect is the election of his people, so his will to justify them is their justification. In this sense, justification does not begin in time but belongs to God's eternal purpose.

Justification Is Before Faith

1. Faith Is the Effect of Justification, Not Its Cause

Faith is not the cause of justification in any sense.

It is not the moving cause, for that is God's free grace: "Being justified freely by his grace" (Romans 3:24).

It is not the efficient cause, for "It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33).

It is not the meritorious cause or the ground of justification. The ground is the obedience, blood, and righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:9, 19).

Nor, Gill argues, is faith an instrument that causes God to justify. Justification is God's act, not man's. A person does not justify himself, and God does not believe on behalf of the sinner.

Faith is not even an indispensable condition of justification in every case, as shown by the case of elect infants. Rather, faith is the effect of justification.

Not all people receive faith. Those who do not believe are not Christ's sheep, were not chosen in him, and are left in their sins. Those who do believe do so because they have been appointed to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them, and shall never enter into condemnation.

Therefore, people are not justified because they have faith. They have faith because Christ's justifying righteousness has been provided for them. "The like precious faith" of believers is obtained "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1).

If there were no justification of life in Christ, there could be no saving faith in him. Faith follows justification; it does not cause it.

2. Faith Is the Evidence and Manifestation of Justification

Faith is "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It does not provide evidence of something that has no existence. What faith reveals and receives must already exist.

"The righteousness of God" is "revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17). Therefore, that righteousness existed before it was revealed to faith.

By faith, a sinner who has seen his guilt and his lack of righteousness beholds, through the light of the Holy Spirit, the complete righteousness of Christ. He renounces his own righteousness, lays hold of Christ's, puts it on as a garment, rejoices in it, and glories in it.

The Spirit then bears witness to his spirit that he is justified. Thus he is openly and consciously "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

3. Faith Adds Nothing to the Reality of Justification

Faith adds nothing to the reality or existence of justification itself. It is not a part or ingredient of it.

Justification is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, apart from faith, the consideration of faith, or the foresight of faith. In God's account, a person is as fully justified before faith as after faith.

After a believer comes to faith, his justification does not depend upon the strength or constancy of his own acts of faith. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful" (2 Timothy 2:13). God remains faithful to his covenant engagements with Christ, the Surety whose righteousness justifies his people.

Faith does, however, give believers a comfortable sense and assurance of their justification. Under the testimony of the Holy Spirit, they come to know their interest in Christ's righteousness, claim its promises, and enjoy the peace that flows from it.

4. Faith Receives Justification; It Does Not Create It

Justification is the object with which faith is concerned. Faith is the act by which the soul receives and rests in that justification.

An object must exist before it can be seen, received, or acted upon. Faith does not give existence to justification, because faith is neither its cause nor its ground.

Gill compares faith to the eye. The eye sees visible objects but does not create them. The sun exists before the eye sees it. In the same way, Christ's righteousness and the blessing of justification exist before faith beholds them.

He also compares faith to the hand. The hand receives what is given to it, but the gift must exist before it can be received. Faith receives "righteousness and salvation" from the Lord (Psalm 24:5), but the righteousness it receives must already have been provided.

Christ's righteousness is like a robe or garment. A garment must first be made before it can be put on. In the same way, Christ's justifying righteousness had to be accomplished and made ready before faith could receive it.

5. The Elect Were Justified in Christ at His Resurrection

All God's elect were justified in Christ, their Head and Representative, when he rose from the dead.

From eternity, Christ undertook to be the Surety of his people. Their sins were imputed to him, and he accepted responsibility to answer for them. In the fullness of time, he made satisfaction for those sins through his sufferings and death.

When Christ rose from the dead, he was acquitted and discharged. He did not suffer, die, or rise as a private person, but as the public Representative of his people.

Therefore, when he rose, they rose in him; and when he was justified, they were justified in him. He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Christ was "justified in the Spirit" (1 Timothy 3:16).

For Gill, Christ's resurrection is therefore a public declaration that the sins laid upon him had been fully answered for and that all whom he represented stood justified in him.

Justification from Eternity

Gill argues that justification is not only before faith but is also an eternal act in the mind of God.

1. Justification Follows from Eternal Election

The objects of justification are God's elect: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Romans 8:33).

If God's elect can have no charge laid against them because God justifies them, and if they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, then Gill argues that they were regarded as acquitted and justified in God's eternal purpose.

By electing grace, they were placed in Christ and considered in him before the world began. They could not be considered in Christ as under condemnation, because "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

Therefore, Gill concludes that they were considered righteous and justified in Christ, their Head, from eternity. They were not then justified in their own personal experience, but in their Representative, to whom their persons had been given.

2. Justification Is a Branch of Election

Justification may be viewed as a branch of election: God sets apart the elect to share in Christ's righteousness and sets apart Christ's righteousness for them.

Paul says that God "hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Gill understands this acceptance in Christ as justification in him.

The language is presented as a completed act, alongside God having blessed, chosen, and predestinated his people. Since Christ has always been the Beloved of the Father, all who were given to him and considered in him were also loved, accepted, and justified in him from eternity.

3. Justification Is One of the Spiritual Blessings Given in Christ

Justification is a spiritual blessing. Scripture teaches that God has blessed his elect "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ," according as he chose them in Christ before the foundation

of the world (Ephesians 1:3–4).

If the elect were blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the world began, then justification must be included among them.

This is part of the grace “which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9). In Christ, Gill argues, God’s people were blessed from everlasting with every spiritual blessing, including justification.

4. Christ Was Surety for His People from Eternity

From eternity, Christ undertook to be Surety for his people. He engaged to pay their debt, bear their sins, and make full satisfaction for them.

The Father accepted him in this role. Therefore, in God’s eternal purpose, the debt of his people was looked for from Christ, their Surety, rather than from them, who could never pay it.

Gill’s reasoning is that when a sufficient surety is accepted, the principal debtor is regarded as discharged in relation to that surety. In the eternal transaction between the Father and the Son, Christ was accepted as the One who would provide complete satisfaction. Therefore, God regarded his people as free from their debt in him.

5. God Purposed Not to Impute Their Sins to Them

Gill understands the eternal purpose of reconciliation in these words: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

God determined not to charge the sins of his elect to them, but to Christ, their Surety. If their sins were imputed to Christ rather than to them, then they were discharged from those sins and, in that sense, justified.

The non-imputation of sin to the elect is therefore inseparable from their justification. It is joined with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, which is the manner in which God justifies them (Romans 4:6–8).

6. God Eternally Willed to Punish Sin in Christ

From eternity, God purposed not to punish the sins of his elect in their own persons, but in the person of Christ.

He set Christ forth to be the propitiation for sin. He sent him in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh. Christ was

made sin and made a curse so that his people might be made the righteousness of God in him.

God's will does not arise newly in time. What God wills in time, he has willed from eternity. Therefore, if he eternally willed to punish sin in Christ rather than in his people, Gill concludes that they were eternally secured from punishment, wrath, and destruction in the divine purpose.

7. Old Testament Saints Were Justified before Christ's Sacrifice Was Offered

The saints of the Old Testament were justified by the same righteousness of Christ as believers under the New Testament. Yet they were justified before Christ's sacrifice had been historically offered, before satisfaction had been made in time, and before he had brought in everlasting righteousness through his earthly work.

Christ's blood was shed for the remission of sins committed before his coming, and his death redeemed transgressions under the first covenant (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15).

If God could justify believers thousands of years before Christ's righteousness had been accomplished in history, on the certainty of Christ's suretyship and his future obedience, then Gill argues that there is no difficulty in believing that God could justify all his elect from eternity upon the same suretyship and the same certain future righteousness of Christ.

This completes Chapter 3: Justification: An Act of God's Free Grace.

Chapter 4

Objections to Justification Before Existence

Gill now answers objections to the doctrine that justification is an eternal act in the mind of God.

1. “A Person Cannot Be Justified Before He Exists”

It is objected that no one can be justified before he exists, because nothing can be said or attributed of a non-existent person.

Gill replies that the same objection would also apply to eternal election. If a person cannot be justified before he exists, neither could he be chosen before he exists. Yet Scripture plainly teaches that God chose his people in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Gill agrees that nothing can be said of something that has neither actual existence nor any certain future existence. But God's elect, though they did not yet exist personally, were certainly known and determined by God to exist. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18).

Moreover, they had a representative existence in Christ. They were represented in him before the foundation of the world, chosen in him, blessed in him, and given grace in him (Ephesians 1:3–4; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Therefore, Gill argues, if they could be chosen and blessed in Christ before they personally existed, they could also be justified in him. Justification is a moral and judicial act in God's purpose; it does not require that its object should already have personal existence.

2. “People Cannot Be Justified from Sins Not Yet Committed”

It is further objected that, if God's elect were justified from eternity, they were justified before they had committed any sin and before any charge had been brought against them.

Gill answers that this is no more difficult than saying that sins committed after Christ's death were imputed to Christ, and that he died and made satisfaction for them before those sins were actually committed.

Anyone who accepts the imputation of sin to Christ and his satisfaction for sin must acknowledge that Christ bore sins committed by people who lived after his death.

Gill also argues that the charge of sin against God's elect was not

first made when an awakened sinner became conscious of guilt. In the eternal transaction between the Father and the Son, Christ became their Bail and Surety. The charge was transferred to him so that he might answer for it.

If sin had not been chargeable to them, there could have been no gracious non-imputation of sin to them and no imputation of sin to Christ.

3. “The Decree to Justify Is Not Justification Itself”

Another objection is that God’s decree to justify is one thing and justification itself is another. In the same way, it is said, God’s will to sanctify is distinct from sanctification itself. Therefore, it is argued, the decree of justification may be eternal, but justification itself occurs only in time, after faith.

Gill replies that the cases are different.

God’s will to elect is election. His will not to impute sin is the non-imputation of sin. His will to impute Christ’s righteousness is the imputation of that righteousness. In the same way, his will to justify is justification, considered as an immanent act in God.

Justification is wholly within God’s mind and will. It does not produce an inward or physical change in the person justified, as sanctification does.

Sanctification is a work of grace within a person. It requires the person’s actual existence and the effective operation of God’s grace upon him. Justification, however, is God’s judicial act toward the person, by which he counts him righteous in Christ.

Therefore, God’s eternal will to justify is justification itself in the divine purpose.

4. “Romans 8 Places Calling before Justification”

It is objected that Paul places calling before justification in the order of salvation: “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified” (Romans 8:30).

Therefore, it is argued that calling must come before justification.

Gill replies that Scripture does not always list events in their strict order. The order of subjects may be changed without altering the actual order of God’s purpose or work.

For example, calling is sometimes mentioned before election: “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Yet no one should conclude that people are elected only after they are called.

Likewise, salvation is mentioned before calling: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling” (2 Timothy 1:9). One could argue from that wording that salvation comes before calling.

Therefore, Gill maintains that no definite conclusion about the order of time should be drawn merely from the sequence of words in Romans 8:30.

Calling does come before justification as it is declared in the believer’s conscience. But justification, considered as God’s eternal and immanent act, comes before calling.

5. “Justification by Faith Makes Faith a Prerequisite”

It is also argued that passages which speak of being justified by or through faith show that faith must come before justification.

Gill answers that justification before faith and justification by faith are different, but they are not opposed to one another.

Justification before faith is God’s eternal act in his own mind. Justification by faith is the declaration and manifestation of that blessing in the conscience of the believer.

Faith does not cause justification, add to its reality, form any part of it, or provide its ground. The ground of justification remains Christ and his righteousness alone.

Faith is, however, necessary for the knowledge, comfort, and personal assurance of justification. Until a person believes, he cannot know his interest in Christ’s righteousness, claim its comfort, or enjoy the peace that flows from it.

Faith is therefore not useless. It is not given to justify the sinner before God, for that belongs to God alone. It is given so that the sinner may receive the blessing of justification and enjoy its comfort.

6. “An Unconverted Elect Person Is Still a Child of Wrath”

It is objected that eternal justification would mean that someone who is justified, has passed from death unto life, and is an heir of eternal life could nevertheless remain unconverted, live in sin, and be described as a child of wrath.

Gill answers by distinguishing the elect person's two covenant relations.

As descendants of Adam, they are under him as their covenant head. In Adam they sinned, and judgment came upon them unto condemnation and death. In this respect, they are by nature "children of wrath, even as others."

But as they are considered in Christ, their other covenant Head, they are loved with an everlasting love, chosen in him before the world began, and accounted righteous in him. In this respect, they are secured from everlasting wrath and condemnation.

Gill therefore argues that there is no contradiction in saying that the elect are:

in Adam, under the sentence of condemnation according to the covenant of works; and

in Christ, justified and secured from condemnation according to the covenant of grace.

This is no more a contradiction than saying that they are loved with an everlasting love while, by nature, they are children of wrath.

Gill compares this with Christ himself. As the eternal Son, Christ was always the object of the Father's love. Yet, as the Surety of his people, bearing their sins and suffering in their place, he was the object of the Father's wrath (Psalm 89:38).

7. "Now Ye Are Justified"

It is urged that Paul says, "Now ye are justified" (1 Corinthians 6:11), as though believers were not justified before conversion.

Gill notes first that the word now does not appear in the text. But even if that were the intended sense, it would not prove that they had not been justified before.

They may have been justified in the court and account of God from eternity, in Christ their Head and Surety, and particularly in his resurrection. Yet they were not justified in their own consciences until the Holy Spirit declared that sentence to them.

Gill distinguishes between:

justification in the court of God;

justification declared in Christ's resurrection;

justification revealed by the Spirit in the believer's conscience;

and

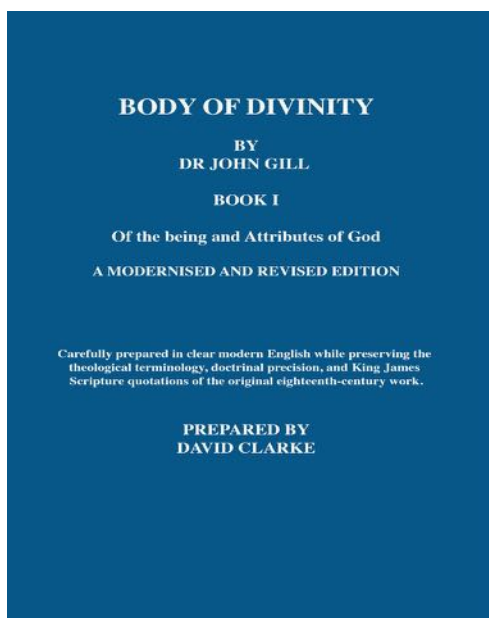
justification openly declared before angels and men at the final judgment.

These are not separate acts of justification. They are renewed declarations of the one original sentence of justification conceived in the eternal mind of God.

Gill notes that many learned theologians had maintained this doctrine when carefully explained. The point is not that believers are converted, assured, or conscious of acceptance from eternity, but that God's justifying purpose in Christ was eternally settled and is later revealed in time.

This completes Chapter 4: Objections to Justification Before Existence.

FURTHER PUBLICATIONS



A Body of Divinity by John Gill stands as one of the most substantial theological works produced within the Particular Baptist and Reformed tradition. Written with remarkable depth, reverence, and scriptural precision, Gill systematically unfolds the great doctrines of the Christian faith in a manner both intellectually

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This edition has been carefully edited and reformatted for modern readers while preserving Gill's theological terminology, doctrinal precision, and reverent style.

Edited by David Clarke.

David Clarke is a Christian editor, writer, and publisher specialising in historic Reformed and Particular Baptist theology. He has spent many years preserving, editing, and republishing doctrinal and theological works for modern readers while retaining their original theological integrity and reverent style.

This edition of *A Body of Divinity* by John Gill has been carefully reformatted and edited for readability, structure, and print presentation while preserving Gill's doctrinal terminology and theological precision.

David Clarke is also the editor and author of several Christian and theological publications relating to sovereign grace, church history, Christian experience, and Reformed doctrine.

Justification is not earned by human effort, produced by faith, or secured by religious sincerity. It is the gracious and judicial act of God, founded wholly upon the righteousness, obedience, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this concise but profound work, John Gill sets out the doctrine of justification with his characteristic biblical precision. He distinguishes justification from pardon and sanctification, explains the imputation of Christ's righteousness, considers the place of faith, and answers objections to justification as an eternal act in the purpose of God.

Gill's central argument is clear: sinners are justified by God's free grace, through the righteousness of Christ alone. Faith does not create that righteousness; it receives and rests in it.

This faithful modern-English edition preserves Gill's theology, argument, Scripture references, and doctrinal terminology while making his work clear and accessible for today's reader.

JOHN GILL, D.D. (1697–1771), was an English Baptist pastor, biblical scholar, and one of the foremost exponents of Particular Baptist and Reformed theology.

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