

## Of Justification by Christ

By George Whitefield

Sermon 46

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Cor 6:11

It has been objected by some, who dissent from, nay, I may add, by others also, who actually are friends to the present ecclesiastical establishment, that the ministers of the Church of England preach themselves, and not Christ Jesus the Lord; that they entertain their people with lectures of mere morality, without declaring to them the glad tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ. How well grounded such an objection may be, is not my business to inquire. All I shall say at present to the point is, that whenever such a grand objection is urged against the whole body of the clergy in general, every honest minister of Jesus Christ should do his utmost to cut off all manner of occasion, from those who desire an occasion to take offense at us; that so by hearing us continually sounding forth the word of truth, and declaring with all boldness and assurance of faith, “that there is no other name given under heaven, whereby they can be saved, but that of Jesus Christ,” they may be ashamed of this their same confident boasting against us.

It was an eye to this objection, joined with the agreeableness and delightfulness of the subject (for who can but delight to talk of that which the blessed angels desire to look into?) that induces me to discourse a little on that great and fundamental article of our faith; namely, our being freely justified by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.”

The words beginning with the particle but, have plainly a reference to something before; it may not therefore be improper, before I descend to particulars, to

consider the words as they stand in relation to the context. The apostle, in the verses immediately foregoing, had been reckoning up many notorious sins, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, and such like, the commission of which, without a true and hearty repentance, he tells the Corinthians, would entirely shut them out of the kingdom of God. But then, lest they should, on the one hand, grow spiritually proud by seeing themselves differ from their unconverted brethren, and therefore be tempted to set them at nought, and say with the self-conceited hypocrite in the prophet, “Come not nigh me, for I am holier than thou;” or, on the other hand, by looking back on the multitude of their past offenses, should be apt to think their sins were too many and grievous to be forgiven. He first, in order to keep them humble, reminds them of their sad state before conversion, telling them in plain terms, “such (or as it might be read, these things) were some of you;” not only one, but all that sad catalogue of vices I have been drawing up, some of you were once guilty of; but then, at the same time, to preserve them from despair, behold he brings them glad tidings of great joy: “But ye are washed; but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

The former part of this text, our being sanctified, I have in some measure treated of already; I would now enlarge on our being freely justified by the precious obedience and death of Jesus Christ: “But ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

From which words I shall consider three things:

First, what is meant by the word justified.

Secondly, I shall endeavor to prove that all mankind in general, and every individual person in particular, stands in need of being justified.

Thirdly, that there is no possibility of obtaining this justification, which we so much want, but by the all-perfect obedience, and precious death of Jesus Christ.

First, I am to consider what is meant by the word justified.

“But ye are justified,” says the apostle; which is, as though he had said, you have your sins forgiven, and are looked upon by God as though you never had offended him at all. For that is the meaning of the word justified, in almost all the passages of holy scripture where this word is mentioned. Thus, when this same apostle writes to the Romans, he tells them, that “whom God called, those he also justified.” And that this word justified, implies a blotting out of all our transgressions, is manifest from what follows, “them he also glorified,” which could not be if a justified person was not looked upon by God, as though he never had offended him at all. And again, speaking of Abraham's faith, he tells them, that “Abraham believed on Him that justifies the ungodly,” who acquits and clears the ungodly man; for it is a law-term, and alludes to a judge acquitting an accused criminal of the thing laid to his charge. Which expression the apostle himself explains by a quotation out of the Psalms: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth no sin.” From all which proofs, and many others that might be urged, it is evident, that by being justified, we are to understand, being so acquitted in the sight of God as to be looked upon as though we never had offended him at all. And in this sense we are to understand that article, which we profess to believe in our creed, when each of us declare in his own person, I believe the forgiveness of sins. This leads me to the

Second thing proposed, to prove that all mankind in general, and every individual person in particular, stands in need of being justified.

And indeed the apostle supposes this in the words of the text: “But ye are justified,” thereby implying that the Corinthians (and consequently all mankind, there being no difference, as will be shown hereafter) stood in need of being justified.

But not to rest in bare suppositions, in my farther enlargement on this head, I shall endeavor to prove, that we all stand in need of being justified on account of the sin of our natures, and the sin of our lives.

1. First, I affirm that we all stand in need of being justified, on account of the sin of our natures: for we are all chargeable with original sin, or the sin of our first parents. Which, though a proposition that may be denied by a self-justifying infidel, who “will not come to Christ that he may have life;” yet can never be denied by any one who believes that St. Paul's epistles were written by divine inspiration; where we are told, that “in Adam all died;” that is, Adam's sin was imputed to all; and lest we should forget to make a particular application, it is added in another place, “that there is none that doeth good (that is, by nature) no, not one: That we are all gone out of the way, (of original righteousness) and are by nature the children of wrath.” And even David, who was a man after God's own heart, and, if any one could, might surely plead an exemption from this universal corruption, yet he confesses, that “he was shapen in iniquity, and that in sin did his mother conceive him.” And, to mention but one text more, as immediately applicable to the present purpose, St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, says, that “Death came upon all men, for the disobedience of one, namely, of Adam, even upon those, (that is, little children) who had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression;” who had not been guilty of actual sin, and therefore could not be punished with temporal death (which came into the world, as this same apostle elsewhere informs us, only by sin) had not the disobedience of our first parents been imputed to them. So that what has been said in this point seems to be excellently summed up in that article of our church, where she declares that “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, but it is the fault and corruption of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and

therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.”

I have been more particular in treating of this point, because it is the very foundation of the Christian religion. For I am verily persuaded, that it is nothing but a want of being well grounded in the doctrine of original sin, and of the helpless, nay, I may say, damnable condition, each of us comes into the world in, that makes so many infidels oppose, and so many who call themselves Christians, so very lukewarm in their love and affections to Jesus Christ. It is this, and I could almost say, this only, that makes infidelity abound among us so much as it does. For, alas! we are mistaken if we imagine that men now commence or continue infidels, and set up corrupted reason in opposition to divine revelation merely for want of evidence, (for I believe it might easily be proved, that a modern unbeliever is the most credulous creature living;) no, it is only for want of an humble mind, of a sense of their original depravity, and a willingness to own themselves so depraved, that makes them so obstinately shut their eyes against the light of the glorious gospel of Christ. Whereas, on the contrary, were they but once pricked to the heart with a due and lively sense of their natural corruption and liableness to condemnation, we should have them no more scoffing at divine revelation, and looking on it as an idle tale; but they would cry out with the trembling jailer, “What shall I do to be saved?” It was an error in this fundamental point, that made so many resist the evidence the Son of God himself gave of his divine mission, when he tabernacled amongst us. Every word he spake, every action he did, every miracle he wrought, proved that he came from God. And why then did so many harden their hearts, and would not believe his report? Why, he himself informs us, “They will not come unto me that they may have life.” They will obstinately stand out against those means God had appointed for their salvation. And St. Paul tells us, “that if the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the

glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine upon them.” 2 Cor. 4:3–4.

If it be asked, how it suits with the divine goodness, to impute the guilt of one man's sin, to an innocent posterity? I should think it sufficient to make use of the apostle's words: “Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?” But to come to a more direct reply: Persons would do well to consider that in the first covenant God made with man, Adam acted as a public person, as the common representative of all mankind, and consequently we must stand or fall with him. Had he continued in his obedience, and not eaten the forbidden fruit, the benefits of that obedience would doubtless have been imputed to us. But since he did not persist in it, but broke the covenant made with him, and us in him; who dares charge the righteous Judge of all the earth with injustice for imputing that to us also? I proceed,

Secondly, to prove that we stand in need of being justified, on account of the sin of our lives.

That God, as he made man, has a right to demand his obedience, I suppose is a truth no one will deny: that he hath also given us both a natural and a written law, whereby we are to be judged, cannot be questioned by any one who believes St. Paul's epistle to the Romans to be of divine authority. For in it we are told of a law written in the heart, and a law given by Moses; and that each of us hath broken these laws, is too evident from our sad and frequent experience. Accordingly the holy scriptures inform us that “there is no man which liveth and sinneth not;” that “in many things we offend all;” that “if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves,” and such like. And if we are thus offenders against God, it follows, that we stand in need of forgiveness for thus offending Him; unless we suppose God to enact laws, and at the same time not care whether they are obeyed or no;

which is as absurd as to suppose that a prince should establish laws for the proper government of his country, and yet let every violator of them come off with impunity. But God has not dealt so foolishly with his creatures. No, as he gave us a law, he demands our obedience to that law, and has obliged us universally and perseveringly to obey it, under no less a penalty than incurring his curse and eternal death for every breach of it. For thus speaks the scripture; "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them;" as the scripture also speaketh in another place, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Now it has already been proved, that we have all of us sinned; and therefore, unless some means can be found to satisfy God's justice, we must perish eternally.

Let us then stand a while, and see in what a deplorable condition each of us comes into the world, and still continues, till we are translated into a state of grace. For surely nothing can well be supposed more deplorable, than to be born under the curse of God; to be charged with original guilt; and not only so, but to be convicted as actual breakers of God's law, the least breach of which justly deserves eternal damnation. Surely this can be but a melancholy prospect to view ourselves in, and must put us upon contriving some means whereby we may satisfy and appease our offended judge. But what must those means be? Shall we repent? Alas! there is not one word of repentance mentioned in the first covenant: "The day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." So that, if God be true, unless there be some way found out to satisfy divine justice, we must perish; and there is no room left for us to expect a change of mind in God, though we should seek it with tears. Well then, if repentance will not do, shall we plead the law of works? Alas! "By the law shall no man living be justified: for by the law comes the knowledge of sin." It is that which convicts and condemns, and therefore can by no means justify us; and "all our righteousnesses (says the prophet) are but as filthy rags." Wherewith then shall we come before the Lord, and bow down before the most high God? Shall we come before Him with calves of a year old, with

thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Alas! God has showed thee, O man, that this will not avail. For he hath declared, "I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goat out of thy fold: for all the beasts of the forests are mine, and so are the cattle upon a thousand hills." Will the Lord then be pleased to accept our first-born for our transgression, the fruit of our bodies for the sin of our souls? Even this will not purchase our pardon: for he hath declared that "the children shall not bear the iniquities of their parents." Besides, they are sinners, and therefore, being under the same condemnation, equally stand in need of forgiveness with ourselves. They are impure, and will the Lord accept the blind and lame for sacrifice? Shall some angel then, or archangel, undertake to fulfill the covenant which we have broken, and make atonement for us? Alas! they are only creatures, though creatures of the highest order; and therefore are obliged to obey God as well as we; and after they have done all, must say they have done no more than what was their duty to do. And supposing it was possible for them to die, yet how could the death of a finite creature satisfy an infinitely offended justice? O wretched men that we are! Who shall deliver us? I thank God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Which naturally leads me to the

Third thing proposed, which was to endeavor to prove, that there is no possibility of obtaining this justification, which we so much want, but by the all-perfect obedience and precious death of Jesus Christ, "But ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But this having been in some measure proved by what has been said under the foregoing head, wherein I have shown that neither our repentance, righteousness, nor sacrifice, no not the obedience and death of angels, themselves, could possibly procure justification for us, nothing remains for me to do under this head, but to show that Jesus Christ has procured it for us.



And here I shall still have recourse “to the law and to the testimony.” For after all the most subtle disputations on either side, nothing but the lively oracles of God can give us any satisfaction in this momentous point: it being such an inconceivable mystery, that the eternal only-begotten Son of God should die for sinful man, that we durst not have presumed so much as to have thought of it, had not God revealed it in his holy word. It is true, reason may show us the wound, but revelation only can lead us to the means of our cure. And though the method God has been pleased to make us happy, may be to the infidel a stumbling-block, and to the wise opiniator and disputer of this world, foolishness; yet wisdom, that is, the dispensation of our redemption, will be justified, approved of, and submitted to, by all her truly wise and holy children, by every sincere and upright Christian.

But to come more directly to the point before us. Two things, as was before observed, we wanted, in order to be at peace with God.

1. To be freed from the guilt of the sin of our nature.
2. From the sin of our lives.

And both these (thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift) are secured to believers by the obedience and death of Jesus Christ. For what says the scripture?

1. As to the first, it informs us, that “as by the disobedience of one man, (or by one transgression, namely, that of Adam) many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one, Jesus Christ (therein including his passive as well as active obedience) many were made righteous.” And again, “As by the disobedience of one man, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation;” or all men were condemned on having Adam's sin imputed to them; “so by the obedience of one, that is, Jesus Christ, the free gift of pardon and peace came upon all men, (all sorts of men) unto justification of life.” I say all sorts of men; for the apostle in this chapter is only drawing a parallel between the first and second Adam in this respect, that they acted both as representatives; and as the posterity of Adam had

his sin imputed to them, so those for whom Christ died, and whose representative he is, shall have his merits imputed to them also. Whoever run the parallel farther, in order to prove universal redemption (whatever arguments they may draw for the proof of it from other passages of scripture,) if they would draw one from this for that purpose, I think they stretch their line of interpretation beyond the limits of scripture.

2. Pardon for the sin of our lives was another thing, which we wanted to have secured to us, before we could be at peace with God.

And this the holy scriptures inform us, is abundantly done by the death of Jesus Christ. The evangelical prophet foretold that the promised Redeemer should be “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; that the chastisement of our peace should be upon him; and that by his stripes we should be healed,” Isaiah 53:6. The angels at his birth said, that he should “save his people from their sins.” And St. Paul declares, that “this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” And here in the words of the text, “Such (or, as I observed before, these things) were some of you; but ye are washed, &c.” and again, “Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” And, to show us that none but Jesus Christ can do all this, the apostle St. Peter says, “Neither is their salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.”

How God will be pleased to deal with the Gentiles, who yet sit in darkness and under the shadow of death, and upon whom the sun of righteousness never yet arose, is not for us to inquire. “What have we to do to judge those that are without?” To God's mercy let us recommend them, and wait for a solution of this and every other difficult point, till the great day of accounts, when all God's dispensations, both of providence and grace, will be fully cleared up by methods

to us, as yet unknown, because unrevealed. However, this we know, that the judge of all the earth will, most assuredly, do right.

But it is time for me to draw a conclusion.

I have now, brethren, by the blessings of God, discoursed on the words of the text in the method I proposed. Many useful inferences might be drawn from what has been delivered; but as I have detained you, I fear, too long already, permit me only to make a reflection or two on what has been said, and I have done.

If then we are freely justified by the death and obedience of Jesus Christ, let us here pause a while; and as before we have reflected on the misery of a fallen, let us now turn aside and see the happiness of the believing, soul. But alas! how am I lost to think that God the Father, when we were in a state of enmity and rebellion against Him, should notwithstanding yearn in his bowels towards us his fallen, his apostate creatures: And because nothing but an infinite ransom could satisfy an infinitely offended justice, that should send his only and dear Son Jesus Christ (who is God, blessed for ever, and who had lain in his bosom from all eternity) to fulfill the covenant of works, and die a cursed, painful, ignominious death, for us and for our salvation! Who can avoid crying out, at the consideration of his mystery of godliness. "Oh the depth of the riches of God's love" to us his wretched, miserable and undone creatures! "How unsearchable is his mercy, and his ways past finding out!" Now know we of a truth, O God, that thou hast loved us, "since thou hast not with-held thy Son, thine only Son Jesus Christ," from thus doing and dying for us.

But as we admire the Father sending, let us likewise humbly and thankfully adore the Son coming, when sent to die for man. But O! what thoughts can conceive, what words express the infinite greatness of that unparalleled love, which engaged the Son of God to come down from the mansions of his Father's glory to obey and die for sinful man! The Jews, when he only shed a tear at poor Lazarus' funeral,

said, "Behold how he loved him." How much more justly then may we cry out, Behold how he loved us! When he not only fulfilled the whole moral law, but did not spare to shed his own most precious blood for us.

And can any poor truly-convicted sinner, after this, despair of mercy? What, can they see their Savior hanging on a tree, with arms stretched out ready to embrace them, and yet, on their truly believing on him, doubt of finding acceptance with him? No, away with all such dishonorable, desponding thoughts. Look on his hands, bored with pins of iron; look on his side, pierced with a cruel spear, to let loose the sluices of his blood, and open a fountain for sin, and for all uncleanness; and then despair of mercy if you can! No, only believe in Him, and then, though you have crucified him afresh, yet will he abundantly pardon you; "though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they be as wool; though deeper than crimson, yet shall they be whiter than snow."

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.