

THE
SPRUCE STREET LECTURES,

DELIVERED

BY SEVERAL CLERGYMEN, DURING THE AUTUMN AND
WINTER OF 1831-32.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LECTURE

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS : WITH
AN APPENDIX,

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SPRUCE STREET LECTURES.

LECTURE IX.

*Delivered on the Evening of the 6th November, 1832, by the
Rev. William Neill, D. D. of Germantown.*

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.—*Rom. iii. 28.*

THIS conclusion is the result of argument. The question is, concerning the ground, on which a sinner is acquitted, accepted, and saved. A momentous question, indeed. It is shown, in the preceding context, that all mankind, Jews and Gentiles, have sinned, and failed to promote the glory of God; and, of course, are liable to be punished. The law, under which they are placed is holy, just, and good; every way suited to secure the honour of the Lawgiver, and the happiness of the subject. It cannot, therefore, be mitigated in its rigour, without a reflection on the wisdom and goodness of the Creator; and to give up its claims to obedience, altogether, would be to open the flood-gates of profligacy, and encourage universal anarchy and confusion. To expect a *perfect* obedience from a creature who has, even *in a single instance*, violated the rule of duty, would

be to expect an impossibility; and to talk of God's accepting *sincere* endeavours to honour him and do his will, instead of *entire* conformity to his law, as the ground of acceptance with him, is to talk at random,—darkening counsel by words without knowledge. If then the sinner is to be justified at all, it seems plain, that it must be by virtue of something done for him by another, whose interposition is recognized by the law, and accepted by the Lawgiver, as answering all the purposes contemplated in the administration of a holy and righteous government. The apostle's doctrine, therefore, "That a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law," is, from the nature of the case, at least plausible.

The text might be rendered rather more literally, thus: We conclude, then, that man is justified by faith without works of law. That is, mankind are justified by faith, without regard to works, performed by them in obedience to any law, natural, ritual, or moral; which, though of vast importance in other respects, are of no account whatever in the matter of justification. This doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, stands out, in bold relief, in the Gospel plan of salvation. It occupied a high and warm place, in the estimation of Paul the apostle; as is evident from the pains which he has taken, particularly in his epistle to the Romans, to state and defend it: Luther pronounced it, emphatically "The article of a standing or a falling church." And all the reformed churches, of Protestant Christendom, regard it as a fundamental and essential article of religious belief, as appears in their respective creeds.

To exhibit and illustrate the doctrine by a series of remarks, and by the induction of several passages of sacred Scripture, bearing on the subject, is the simple and sole de-

sign of this lecture. And as the discussion is to be mainly doctrinal, it may be proper to advert, here, to what is taught on the subject in the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church. See "Confession of Faith;" chap. XI. sections 1, 2, 3. "Those whom God effectually call-eth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone: not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other act of evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith; but worketh by love. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for any thing in them, their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God, might be glorified in the justification of sinners."

See also, "Larger Catechism," answers to questions 70, 71, 72, and 73.

"Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sin, accepteth and account-

eth their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone. Although Christ by his obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified: yet, inasmuch as God accepteth the satisfaction of a surety, which he might have demanded of them; and did provide this surety, his only Son, imputing his righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is his gift, their justification is to them of free grace. Justifying faith is a saving grace wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God; whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assenteth to the truth of the promise of the Gospel, but receiveth and resteth upon Christ, and his righteousness therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of the other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it; nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument, by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness."

These views, it will be seen by a reference to the proof texts, are well supported by Holy Scripture; and, while we claim for them, no inspired authority, and are far from placing them on a footing with the "lively oracles," we must, as consistent Presbyterians, be allowed to regard

them, as of weighty import, and in good keeping with the whole analogy of the Christian religion.

I. On the negative branch of the apostle's general conclusion, we need spend but little time: "Without works of law." The holiest and best meant works of righteousness, that can be performed by a frail, fallen creature, must be but as filthy rags, in the eye of that rule of moral rectitude which detects and denounces the thefts, the adulteries, the murders of the heart, before they are disclosed to human view. "The commandment is exceeding broad," covering the whole system of man's motives, ends and aims, no less than his overt acts and professed principles. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, that are written in the book of the law to do them." "He that faileth in one point is guilty of all." Of what avail, then, can our best works be, in procuring, for us, forgiveness of sins and a title to eternal life? All that the law can do for us, in our present ruined condition, is to show us the extent of our malady, the malignity of sin, the justice of our condemnation, and thus act upon us, "as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." It is true, that the Christian delights in the law of the Lord, after the inner man, regarding it, as forever the rule of duty, the high and holy standard of moral rectitude, in heaven and earth, to which it would be his glory and his happiness to be perfectly conformed. But with the holy apostle, he finds another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, aiming continually, to bring him into captivity to the law of sin. Good works, *i. e.* works, good as to the matter of them, *are, and ought to be* maintained, "for necessary uses." They are useful to our fellow-sinners; and they are important, too, as evi-

dences of a divine principle in the heart, that works by love; but as to their constituting, either in whole or in part, the ground of our acquittal before God, or of our hope of everlasting life, it is a thing not named or known, in the revealed plan of redeeming love. In regard to what the apostle James says of works, in the business of justification, we have only to observe, that the scope of his epistle; the examples he adduces; the illustrations he employs, when expounded by the application of the acknowledged principles of sound biblical interpretation, make it evident to our minds, that his design is to show that good works, where opportunity offers, are necessary to satisfy ourselves and others, that we really possess that faith, by which it is affirmed, in the text, that man is justified, in the sight of God. Let those who put a different meaning on his language, reconcile him if they can, to the apostle of the Gentiles.

II. To justify, in its primary import, is to acquit; to absolve from a charge of criminality; to declare one, who has been put on trial, righteous, according to law, and entitled to all the privileges of that community to which he belongs.

It is a term taken from the practice of courts of justice, expressive of an official act of a judge, quite different from, and indeed inconsistent with, the idea of pardon. If a man is arraigned before a human tribunal, he is, upon due investigation, either acquitted or condemned. If *condemned*, he may be *pardoned*, on certain conditions; but if *acquitted*, he cannot be pardoned; in this case he needs no pardon; the law has nothing against him; the charge has not been substantiated; and he is therefore pronounced *legally just*, or *justified*. When applied to religious sub-

jects, these terms, *justify* and *justification*, are commonly used with some variation of meaning from their original import; though we do not see the *necessity*, and have some *doubts* as to the wisdom and expediency of the change. It is true that every one who is justified, in a theological sense, is also pardoned. But is he not likewise regenerated, adopted, and invested with the privileges of the sons of God? These acts of Divine favour take place, we suppose, simultaneously; but they are *distinct acts*; and, in our apprehension, the terms that denote them, ought not to be used interchangeably, as if nearly or quite synonymous. Those who are in the habit of regarding *justification*, and the *forgiveness of sin*, as one and the same thing substantially, will be very likely to overlook the ground, the reason, or the meritorious cause of the sinner's acquittal and warranted hope of Heaven. This thought is respectfully submitted to those beloved fellow-servants, whose official duty and business it is, to preach the Gospel and expound the Scriptures, "*rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

III. The *faith* by which it is said in our text, that man is justified, is evangelical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That faith which credits the divine testimony, concerning the Son of God, the only Redeemer; which apprehends him, and confides in him, as "the Lord our righteousness, and the propitiation for our sins;" as, by divine constitution, possessed of all fulness, and "able to save, to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him." This is so obviously involved in the whole process of the apostle's reasoning, in the context, that any attempt on the present occasion, to make it more plain, would be deemed an ill-judged use of our limited time.

But how does faith justify? Wherein consists its peculiar efficacy, in the article of a sinner's justification? To believe, considered merely as a mental exercise, is the creature's own act; and does not seem to require more self-denial, or to possess more merit than many other intellectual operations. Nay; the human mind is so constituted, that it believes truth, which is accompanied by sufficient evidence, and which does not interfere with predominant passions, very readily; and in some cases, instinctively, or by a kind of qualified necessity; so that, in *this* species of faith, there would seem to be no special merit. And as to saving faith, as it is sometimes and very fitly denominated, it is the gift of God; *i. e.* it is the result of a divine influence on the heart; and how can any credit be due to us, for the possession of *that* which we cannot originate or command, and for which we are indebted to the special grace of God? How, then,—the question returns upon us—does faith justify a sinful man?

The solution of this problem is the main point in this discussion. And we solve it by saying, in the spirit, if not in the very words of the Holy Scripture,—That saving faith has for its object, the merits, or, which is the same thing, the righteousness of Christ; an object of infinite value in itself, and intimately related to the law of God; an object, in which the law finds its uncompromising claims answered; its majesty maintained; its authority vindicated, and its great end and design accomplished. Hence Christ is said to be “the end of the law, for righteousness, to every one that believeth.” *Rom. x. 4.* The *righteousness of Christ*, then, and *not the sinner's act of believing*, is the ground,—the reason,—or the meritorious cause of justification. By the Redeemer's righteousness, we mean his ac-

tive and passive obedience; or that perfect obedience which he rendered to the moral law, as well in its penalty, as in its precepts, in the room and stead of his people. And, thus, by his voluntary and wonderful mediation, *grace reigns through* righteousness, unto eternal life, in all them that are saved, of our fallen race, from the beginning to the end of the world.

The righteousness of Christ having been wrought out expressly for his people, is imputable, or capable of being accounted to them, and is actually imputed to them, or set to their account, in the divine act of justification. It is represented, in the chapter from which our text is taken, as a robe, that is put on believers: what else does Paul mean when he says: “But now the righteousness of God, without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus, *unto* and *upon* all them that believe.”

Rom. iii. 21, 22.

This righteousness, moreover, is available, for the justification of as many as the Lord our God sees fit to call to a participation in its merits, because of the glorious excellency of the Redeemer’s person; Immanuel, God-with-us, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, and, yet, God over all, and blessed forever; wearing our nature, and embodying the fulness of the Godhead; angels, and principalities, and powers being subject unto him.

It is very properly said, in our Shorter Catechism, that, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”

On this part of the subject we would remark very briefly:

1/ That *this*, like all God's acts, is without repentance, and must take full effect: "Whom he calls, them he also justifies; and whom he justifies, them he also *glorifies*." Those who are justified, are not furnished with their title to heaven, and left to themselves. They are sanctified progressively, in soul, body, and spirit; and "kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation." 2/ It is "an act of God's free grace" undoubtedly to *the redeemed sinner*, as are all the expressions of divine favour, which he receives; while to the redeeming Substitute, it is an *act of justice*. He has a fair claim to "see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." 3/ "Our sins are pardoned" too; *i. e.* they are remitted to us; but the penalty of the violated law, due to us, on account of our transgressions, was exacted at the hands of Christ, when he "bore our sins in his own body on the tree:" and when "by his stripes we were healed." Sin is never connived at, or allowed to pass unpunished, in the kingdom of Jehovah. "God is love;" but he is, also, "a consuming fire," "a just God, and a Saviour." Let all the earth fear before him.

Having thus presented the subject in a summary, but, we trust, in an intelligible form, we have only further to invite your attention, for a few moments, to a few passages of Scripture, confirmatory of the doctrine, that "man is justified by faith, without works of law."

The first is, Isaiah liii. 11, latter clause: "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." Christ is the righteous servant here spoken of, in the capacity of Mediator. It is said he shall justify many by his knowledge, *i. e.* by the knowledge of himself, with which he acquaints them by his word and Spirit: "for," or because "he shall bear their iniquities."

Now, how shall he justify them, or declare them *legally righteous*, in consequence of bearing their iniquities, except by giving them an interest in that righteousness, which the law demands, and which he alone fulfilled? “Who, of God is made unto us righteousness.” Another passage is, *Jeremiah xxiii. 5, 6.* “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous BRANCH, and a KING shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days, Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name, whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” This is a prophecy concerning Christ. And to represent the intimate relation between his righteousness and his people’s salvation, and, as it would seem, to perpetuate the knowledge and secure the acknowledgment of the precious doctrine, that all who shall cordially receive and own him, as their Lord, are authorized to regard his perfect obedience as theirs, for justification, it is declared that he shall be *called*, and *known*, and *honoured* by this singularly compounded title, THE LORD,—OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

A third passage is, *2 Cor. v. 21*: “For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Now, how can we be made, or constituted so righteous that God can look upon us with approbation? or, in other words, how can we, in any intelligible sense, be said to be righteousness of God *in Christ*, except by his obedience being reckoned, or placed to our account, in the eye of the divine law, upon our faith in him, and acceptance of him, as “THE LORD—OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS?”

The last text that we adduce, is in the epistle to the

Phillippians, iii. 8, 9: where the apostle tells us that he had suffered the loss of all things, and accounted them but dung that he might win Christ, “and be found in him,” says he, “not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” There is an allusion in this passage to a mariner, when shipwrecked. He would cast away, and disencumber himself of any thing, and every thing, that might interfere with his rescue from a watery grave: So, Paul would renounce, utterly abandon, as, not only useless, but detrimental to his own safety, and derogatory to his Saviour’s honour, all his self-righteousness, and cling to that which is by faith in Jesus Christ, as the only plank on which he could float safely, amid the wreck of fallen nature, into the haven of eternal bliss.

If these passages, taken, as they are, from both Testaments, (and many others might be cited, of like import) do not tend, strongly, to confirm the conclusion, in our text, “That man is justified by faith without works of law,” then, we have yet to learn how to interpret and apply the holy oracles, by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES.

I. Salvation is of God. The method of saving sinners, by the merits of Christ, is a matter of divine and eternal purpose; and this purpose is carried into effect, by a gracious influence on the hearts of men, through the efficient agency of the Holy Spirit, and, ordinarily, by the instrumentality of revealed truth. The entire scheme, in its origin, its progress, and its consummation, is such as to secure the glory of God, and the most perfect safety and happiness.

to his people. The Lord Jesus, our legal Substitute and redeeming Saviour, is the gift of God; the Holy Spirit, in a way suited to our moral and accountable character, makes us willing in a day of his power, to be saved by grace; and the sacred Scriptures give us all needful instruction in righteousness, and all desirable encouragement, in the good word of promise, while we pursue the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Let there, therefore, be no attempt to divide the honours of eternal redemption between works of law, done by fallen, guilty man, and the *perfect, finished, and accepted* work of *Him*, “Who, of God, is made unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, *He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.*”

2/ Those who believe this doctrine of justification, by faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, should be very careful to demonstrate the holy tendency of the doctrine, by a life of piety, charity, and active benevolence. The most plausible objection to it is, its supposed liableness to abuse, as if it superseded the necessity of personal holiness, or that love of righteousness, which is, confessedly, the basis of moral virtue. This cavil ought to be refuted and put to silence by the holy temper and upright deportment of professing Christians; and the doctrine should be so exhibited by preachers and writers, as to show that, while justification takes place *solely on the ground of Christ's righteousness* accepted by faith, the believer's personal righteousness, or sanctification, is secured by the bestowment of a new heart and right spirit, and by the Lord's blessing on Gospel truth, Gospel ordinances, and all instituted means of perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

3/ Let Christians act up to their professed belief, that Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer. Vast multitudes of mankind are setting in heathenish darkness, living and dying, and passing to the final judgment, ignorant of the true God, and his published way of saving lost men. We profess to believe that no human being can be saved, but through the merits of the Son of God; who teaches us, that his Gospel is the chosen instrument for the illumination and recovery of mankind from the ruins of the common apostacy. We know, too, that it is a part of his redeeming plan, to employ the efforts of those whom he has called and justified, in making known to the world the riches and efficacy of his truth and grace; and we hear him, in tones of commingling authority and mercy, saying: "Go, preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." How can we, dear Christian brethren, in the honest and cordial belief of these truths be lukewarm, inactive, or indifferent in the cause of God, and the millions of souls, that are perishing for lack of vision? Oh, when will Christendom feel her responsibility in this matter, and, awakening to righteousness, pour forth her joint supplications, and make exertions proportionate to the sublime magnitude and benevolence of the object, for the conversion of the world to the faith and fellowship of the Gospel! Come, thou blessed Spirit of Missions; warm the hearts, increase and crown the efforts of thy people, with divine favour, till it shall be *felt* on earth, and *celebrated* in heaven, that the prophecy is fulfilled, that the kingdom of God is fully come, that truth and grace have gloriously triumphed over ignorance and sin, and that Jesus, the Christ, is acknowledged as LORD,

to the glory of God, the father, “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth!!”

4/ There is an obvious use, which every reader should make of this subject for himself. If you are a believer, you have been justified, graciously, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and justification is, in God’s unchanging purpose, connected with holiness and heavenly bliss. Surely, then, you will feel that you are not your own; but that you are the Lord’s, and that he has an indubitable right to assign you any service, or subject you to any tribulation, in this life, which he shall see fit and proper. See to it, that you resign yourself wholly to God, actively and passively, living and dying. You can afford to deny yourself, and be reproached, if need be, for your firm adherence to Christ; for you are interested in his victory, and intercession. Because *he* lives you shall live also: your life is hid with Christ, in God. Death is yours. Heaven and eternal life are yours. But if you are yet in your sins, not having believed on the Son of God, you are in a state of condemnation, with the wrath of God abiding on you; and, in this state, you cannot see life. Should this be your case, be entreated to lay hold, straightway, on the hope set before you in the Gospel. Your works of law will never justify you. God has revealed but one method of saving sinners, of our guilty race; and that is by the blood and righteousness of his only begotten Son. If you reject this, you embrace death. In any other way, all your best works, seconded by the deepest repentance, and the most painful self-imposed penances will not—cannot save you, “Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you, by us; we pray you, in Christ’s stead, be reconciled to God: for

he hath made *him* who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." In the religion of a sinner, "CHRIST IS ALL." "Neither is there salvation in any other."