

Justification

by H. A. Ironside

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39).

JUSTIFICATION! It is a big word, and very often people miss its true meaning. What is it to be justified? It is to be cleared of all blame, to be freed from every charge. It is the sentence of the court in favor of the prisoner. The prisoner stands there, charged with certain things; the evidence is all heard, and the jury brings in a verdict of "Not guilty." The man is justified.

Notice a most remarkable thing in these two verses. We have two things here which God does for the believing sinner that no man could do for anyone else. You could not both forgive a man and justify him at the same time. If you forgive him, he cannot be justified. He must be guilty, and therefore there is something to forgive. On the other hand, if you justify him, then you do not need to forgive him. Suppose, for instance, one had been charged with a certain crime, and after everything had been heard, the jury says, "Not guilty," and the judge pronounces him free. As that man comes out of the courtroom, a friend says to him, "It was kind of the judge to forgive you, wasn't it?" The man replies, "He did not forgive me; I did not require his forgiveness. I was justified; I was proven not guilty and did not need to be forgiven."

Of course, human judges may sometimes make a mistake. You have heard the story of the colored brother who was arrested, charged with stealing a gold watch and chain. After all the evidence of the complaining witness had been heard, the judge looked down at the prisoner and announced, "The sentence of this court is acquittal." The man leaned forward and said, "What was that you said, judge?"

"I said, the sentence of the court is acquittal."

The man looked puzzled, and said to the judge, "Judge, ah don' jist undahstan' what dat means."

"Well," the judge explained, "I mean you are acquitted."

"Well, judge, does that mean I gotta give the watch back?"

You see, the man was guilty, and the judge himself had been deceived.

But God will never be deceived. Nobody can ever put anything over on Him. He knows every sin that you and I have ever been guilty of—sins in thought, sins in word, and sins in deed; and then in addition to all of these, sins of omission. Failure to do the things that we know we ought to do is just as truly sin as to commit overt acts of evil. And God knows all about it, and "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

But God undertakes both to forgive the sin and to justify the sinner; to clear him of every charge, when he puts his trust in His blessed Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. You could not do that for anyone, but God can and He does it because the Lord Jesus Christ in infinite grace condescended to take our place, to bear the judgment that our sins deserved, so that when we come to God confessing our sins, over against all that sin and over against all that wickedness stands the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And on the basis of that, God says, "I forgive this man, and accept him before my presence as though he had never sinned at all. I count him as righteous, and justify him fully and completely." That is the meaning of justification.

You who have just recently come to trust the Saviour, I wonder if you have entered into that. I wonder if you realize that the moment you trusted the Saviour, that instant God gave you a new standing before Him. You stand before Him now as if you had never sinned at all. You say, "Well, I can't forget my sins. They come up before me when I lie down at night; they come before me when I kneel to pray; and they are before me even in the daytime. There are so many things that I wish had never happened, and I sometimes wonder, since they come crowding in upon my mind as they do, whether they are really forgiven."

Let me assure you, if you have really trusted Christ, they are not only forgiven, but forgotten. God says, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more," and if God has forgotten them, then you and I may well say, "I too will seek to forget, and say with Paul, 'Forgetting those things which are behind,...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'."

God Himself is the author of our justification. We read in the Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8, and really in one sense I am beginning at the wrong end; I am beginning where God leaves off here in the Epistle to the Romans, but I am beginning where I think you and I as sinners need to begin. In Romans 8 we read that it is God Himself who justifies. Take verse 33:

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that

justifieth.

We are justified by God, the source of it. It is He who has taken up this question, who has gone into it fully and completely, and He says, "Now I am satisfied to acknowledge as righteous the man who trusts My blessed Son."

Some years ago a friend of mine, a French evangelist, Paul J. Loizeaux, was preaching in a certain place, and somebody came to him one day and said, "Could you come and see a woman who is very sick? We are afraid she is dying. She is troubled about her soul and doesn't seem to understand the way." Of course he gladly went, as any of us would under such circumstances. As he entered the room and sat down beside the bed, the woman said, "Tell me what is necessary in order that my soul may be saved and my sins forgiven." He told her the old, old story, the story of the Cross. He told her how God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. He told her how, hanging on that cross in those awful hours of darkness, our blessed Lord Jesus as the substitute for sinners, drank the cup of wrath that we deserved, and made full satisfaction for iniquity; and now God can justify everyone that believes in Him, whom He raised from the dead.

When he finished, she said, "Oh yes, I know, I understand all that, but I don't see how I can know that my sins are forgiven." So again, very patiently, he went over the same story, but tried to present it in a little different light. He told her that the Lord Jesus was the one great sacrifice for sin, that He offered Himself for our sins; that He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. And when he finished, she said, "Yes, I understand that, but is that all that is required?"

The evangelist sprang from his seat. He was a very fiery man by nature, and sometimes the fire came out even after he became a Christian. He said in a tone that shook the room, "You wicked woman!"

And she, lying there so sick, was almost terrified, and said to him, "Oh, sir, why do you talk to me like that?"

"You wicked woman, you vile woman! You ask me what is necessary in order that you may be saved. I tell you how God has bankrupted heaven to save your guilty soul. I tell you how He has sent His own blessed Son to give His life for you. I tell you how He was forsaken of God upon that Tree, and you have the insolence to look up into the very face of God and say, 'Is that all?' What more would you want? It is all that God Himself could do."

She burst into tears and exclaimed, "Oh, sir, I understand. I did not realize what I was saying. Oh, I thank God for what He has done. It is enough! If it is enough for God, it surely is enough for me!"

Oh, that is it! The Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." God sent Him. God saw you and me in our deep, deep need, and He sent Him to die for us, and now it is God that justifies the ungodly. God justifies the whom? The ungodly. Oh, I thought He justifies the godly, the good, the pure, the true, and the noble! No, God justifies poor, lost, guilty sinners when they "believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). It is our faith in the Word of God and the work of Christ that is counted for righteousness. Read Romans 4:5, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." The basis of it all is given in Romans 5:9, where we read, beginning with verse 8:

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Notice three things here. First, we who believe are now justified. It is not that we may, as some people put it, have a good hope of salvation, that we may hope that we shall be justified at last, that we may hope that in the day of judgment everything will be all right; but we are *now* justified—every believer in Christ. Oh, so many of our hymns were written by people who hadn't full assurance of salvation, and they express so often the desire that they may be cleansed and justified. How many real believers sing, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow!" And yet everyone who has truly trusted the Lord Jesus Christ is already washed, made white by the blood of the Lord Jesus, justified by God.

What is the basis of justification? His blood! It is because of what He did. It is because of the blood He shed—the shedding of His precious blood; it is the giving up of His life. It is His life for ours; His holy, spotless life over against our sinful, wicked lives. The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me.

Somebody might say, "Well, I just do not understand what you mean. You talk about being justified by blood. In what sense could one be justified or cleansed by blood?" Let me give you an illustration. Out in the state of Washington, at the time of the first World War, four or five convicts in some way or another got over the wall of the penitentiary and escaped. After several weeks they were all captured, except one who was never located, at least not until the circumstances

which I am going to mention. He was able to get away, and eventually under an assumed name he joined the army. After a period of training he was sent across to France. One day, however, some other soldiers were added to the number, and one of them looked at this man and said, "I remember him. I knew him back in the state of Washington years ago. That's so-and-so. He is not going by his right name. I remember when he was condemned to the penitentiary for burglary." He went to the officer in charge and told him what he knew about the man. The officer in turn wrote to the War department and asked, "What am I to do with this man? He is an escaped convict." Washington sent word back to arrest him and return him to America as a prisoner. But in the meantime something had happened which made that impossible.

One night a number of men were wanted for a very, very dangerous duty, and the Captain said, "I am not going to ask any man to do the thing that I am going to tell you about, but I hope that some of you will volunteer. I want some men to crawl out in the dark across No Man's Land and find out what the foe is planning to do. It is a very dangerous undertaking—you may not get back—so I am not going to appoint anyone, but will ask for volunteers." Four men stepped right out, and among them was this convict. Under cover of darkness they crawled out over No Man's Land. There were shells falling all around them, but three of them got through safely. The fourth man, the convict, apparently had got clear through to the enemy and secured the information and was coming back, when a shell fell and burst so near him that he was killed. They brought his mangled body in and when the officer received the word from Washington to return that man a prisoner to this country, the officer wrote back, "He has washed out his crimes in his own blood." He had given himself, he had given his life, and the giving of his life had washed out his crime against the government, though of course this did not touch the question of his sin against God.

The Lord Jesus Christ was absolutely without offence. He was the holy Son of God, but He looked upon us poor sinners in our deep need and He took our place in judgment. He went to the Cross and He bore what our sins deserved. He poured out His life in the shedding of His precious blood, and when we receive Him we can say that He has washed out our sins in His precious blood. He had no sins of His own for which to die. He was there for our sins.

Oh, why was He there as the Bearer of sin,
If on Jesus thy guilt was not laid?
Oh, why from His side flowed the sin-cleansing blood,
If His dying thy debt has not paid?

He took your place. Have you trusted Him? Do you believe God's sure promise? If you have, you are justified by His blood.

"Well," you say, "on what principle does God thus justify? The Epistle to the Romans, chapter 3 and verse 24, tells us:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

God justifies men by grace, not because of merit. You and I had no merit. Everything was against us. Demerit was ours, and no merit did we have to plead. But now God says in grace, "I am ready to take up that man and save him, if he will but receive and confess My Son as his Lord." It is so hard for people to understand this. Men always seem to get the idea that they must do something in order to merit God's favor. It would not be grace if it were merited. Grace is unmerited favor, and it is favor to those who have merited the very opposite. That is grace.

Suppose, just to use a very hackneyed illustration, that my sons were still school boys and there is a rowdy, a regular bully in the neighborhood, and he falls upon one or the other of them and knocks him down and steals his books and his lunch basket, and then when I go out to talk to him, this bully turns on me and strikes me and stones my house, breaking my best plate-glass window. I have every reason to be thoroughly provoked with him. I would have a perfect right, you know, to go to the police and have him arrested and charged with assault and battery, and one thing or another. But suppose instead of that I wait, and on some cold winter day I happen to see that young rowdy, and, as I am watching, I see him fall in the snow, and I run out after him. I learn that he has had no one to care for him. He is an orphan, and has no father or mother to look after him, and I find he staggered and fell because of lack of food, he was so weak. When he sees me coming, he staggers to his feet and tries to run away. But he cannot get away because I have hold of his arm. He looks up at me and pleads, "I'll never do it again, if you will let me go." But I say, "You won't get away." I bring him into my own home, warm him up, feed him, and give him a suit of clothes belonging to one of my sons. I take care of him and show him every kindness. He can't understand it, but his heart is won. This is grace. He merited the very opposite, did he not?

Grace is favor shown to the undeserving. If people deserved it, it would not be favor; and so you cannot deserve God's salvation. Often when I say to somebody, "I hope you are on your way to heaven," I receive the reply, "Well, I am doing my best to get there." It is not a question of doing your best. It is a question of receiving the grace of

God as manifested in Christ Jesus.

I was very much struck by an incident which I heard our friend Dr. Chafer relate. He was riding in a train going down from Kansas City to Dallas, and they were getting near to Fort Worth when he realized that he had not spoken a word to the porter about his soul. He always tries to be conscientious about speaking to those who serve him and wait upon him in restaurants, hotels, and trains. So he went to look for the porter and found him just finishing up the last of the shoes he had to shine. He sat down there beside him and said, "May I ask you a question?" "Yessuh," replied the porter, "what's your question?" So Dr. Chafer asked him, "How good does a man have to be to get to heaven?"

"Well, I can't tell you just how good a man has to be, but ah knows he has to be mighty good," he replied.

"Well, do you ever expect to get to heaven?"

"I don't know. I've jist about give up tryin'. I've tried and tried for a long time but it don't seem to do no good, and I'm afraid I'll never make it."

Then Dr. Chafer asked the porter, "Where do you check in? at Kansas City or Forth Worth?"

"I have to check in at the Pullman office at Fort Worth half hour after the train pulls in."

"Oh, I see," said Dr. Chafer. "This train is due at Fort Worth at eight o'clock, and you should check in by eight-thirty. Well, we're late now; we'll never make it to Fort Worth by eight o'clock. Aren't you afraid that you are going to be pretty late this morning? Don't you think that you'd better get off at the next stop and start running for Fort Worth?"

The porter looked at him and said, "Why sir, what you talkin' about? You trying t'make a fool out of me? I never could make Fort Worth running for it as quick as I can make it by staying right on this train. I just trusts the man that runs the train to get me there."

And Dr. Chafer said, "My dear fellow, that is exactly how I am going to heaven. 'It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.' and I am trusting the One who runs the Gospel train, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is going to get me there. I never could get there through any goodness of my own."

The porter looked at him in amazement and said, "Tell me a little more about this. I never heard anything like this before." Dr. Chafer

explained the way of salvation to him, and then left a little booklet and a Gospel with him.

About six months later Dr. Chafer was again riding from Kansas City to Dallas, and again the thought came to him that he must speak to the porter. When he found him, he asked him the same question: "How good does a man have to be to get to heaven?" The porter looked at him and grinned, "You're not going to catch me twice on that. You're the man that asked me that question about six months ago. Well, I looked up all those Scriptures you showed to me and I'll tell you, sir, I just found there wasn't anything I could ever do to get to heaven, no matter how good I tried to be, so I am trusting Him who loved me and died for me, and I'm telling others about Him, and I know my soul is saved." Well, that's it—"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

But how do you make it your own? In what way is salvation applied to you individually? We read in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justified by faith! What is faith? The little boy was asked by his Sunday school teacher, "What is faith?" He lisped a little, so in reply he stuttered, "Pleathe, teacher, I think ith-juth-believing-God-and-athking-no-quethtionth." That is it. Faith is believing God and asking no questions. It is taking God at His word. God says, "I am satisfied with the work which My Son has done. Because of that work, I raised Him from the dead and now offer to justify any poor sinner who comes to me in My Son's name and trusts in Him." If you have come, you have a right to say: "Being justified by faith, I have peace with God [everything settled between me and God] through our Lord Jesus Christ." Have you said it? If not, say it now. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Romans 10:8).

The resurrection of Christ, you know, is the declaration, the seal of it all. In the previous verses, at the end of the fourth chapter of Romans, we read, beginning with verse 22: "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness." That is, when Abraham believed God, it [his faith] was imputed to him for righteousness. And then we read:

Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:23-25).

That is justification by His resurrection. Why? Because His resurrection tells of God's satisfaction in the work that His Son has done. When He hung upon that Cross He was bearing our sins, He was

taking our place, dying there in the sinner's stead. Now, if He had never come out of that tomb, it would show that redemption was never accomplished. If that tomb remained sealed and the body of Jesus remained in it, then it would show that it was all a farce, and I would not dare to trust Him as my Saviour at all. But see, it is the third day, and His resurrection is the divine declaration that all who believe on Him and rely on Him are justified from all things.

But I know that some of you have been saying in your hearts, or thinking subconsciously at least, "Yes, but there is another side to it. Doesn't the Bible say somewhere that faith without works is dead?" Yes, it does, for we read, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

"Well," someone asks, "does not that contradict what you have been telling us?"

Not at all. You need to see exactly what it is that various writers of the Epistles are dwelling on. The apostle Paul, and practically all of our references have been from his writings, is telling how poor sinners may be justified before God. But now we turn over to the Epistle of James to find out how we who have professed to believe in Christ may be justified before men.

Suppose I say to my companions in the world, "I have just come to Christ, and I am justified from all things." They have a right to look at me, at my life, to see for themselves whether there is any change in my life. You see, in order to be justified before them, in order to be justified before men, I have to manifest by my good works the fact that I have received a new and a divine nature. Let me read it to you.

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? (James 2:14).

That is, what kind of faith? a faith that has no works? Where there is real faith in Christ one's work will be different. His life will never again be what it used to be. Everything will be changed.

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone (James 2:15-17).

Real faith is manifested by your works.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works

(James 2:18).

I cannot show my faith without works, but I can show my faith by my works. If I put my faith in Christ and have trusted Him as my Saviour, I have been justified before God, justified freely, justified for nothing, justified without cost, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now as I live for the One who has justified me, as I devote my redeemed life to the glory of the One who has saved me, my confession is justified before men. Men who get to know me will say, "That man is real; that man is genuine; he lives what he professes." Do they say that of you? Does your life testify to the reality of the faith that you profess? If you have trusted Christ, you are complete in Him, you are justified freely by His grace. Now by a life devoted to His interests you are to prove to those around you the reality of that faith of which you speak.

Copied by Stephen Ross for www.WholesomeWords.org from *Great Words of the Gospel* by H. A. Ironside. (Moody Colportage Library; no. 188). Chicago: Moody Press, 1944. Chapter 4.