

~Other Speakers A-F: Samuel Davies:

The Nature of Justification, and the Nature and Concern of Faith in it

by Samuel Davies

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:16-17

However little the gospel of Christ is esteemed in the world, it is certainly the most gracious and important dispensation of God towards sinful men, or else our Bible is mere fantasy and fable; for the Bible speaks of it with the highest encomiums, and the sacred writers are often in transports when they mention it. It is called: the gospel of the grace of God, Acts 20:24; the gospel of salvation, Ephesians 1:13; the glorious gospel, or, the gospel of the glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 4:4; the gospel of peace, Ephesians 6:15.

Nay, its very name has something endearing in the sound, "good tidings," "joyful news". It is the wisdom of God in a mystery, 1 Corinthians 2:7; the mystery which had been hidden from ages and from generations, Col. 1:26; the ministration of the Spirit, and of righteousness, which far exceeds all former dispensations in glory. 2 Corinthians 3:8, 9.

And it is represented as the only scheme for the salvation of sinners. When the wisdom of the world had used its utmost efforts in vain, it pleased God, by the despised preaching of this humble gospel, to save those who believe. 1 Corinthians 1:21.

In my text it is called "the power of God unto salvation, to every one who believes, whether Jew or Gentile." Paul, though the humblest man who ever lived, declares he would not be ashamed of professing and preaching the gospel of Christ, even in Rome—the metropolis of the world, the seat of learning, politeness, and grandeur. He represents it as a 'catholicon', a universal remedy, equally adapted to Jews and Greeks, to the posterity of Abraham, and to the numerous Gentile nations, and equally needed by them all.

Now this must be all extravagance and ostentatious parade, unless there is something peculiarly glorious and endearing in the gospel. It must certainly give the most illustrious display of the divine perfections: it must be the most grand contrivance of infinite wisdom; the most rich and amazing exertion of unbounded goodness; and particularly, it must bear the most favorable aspect upon guilty men, and be the best, nay, the only scheme for their salvation. And what are the glorious peculiarities, what are the endearing recommendations of this gospel? One of them, in which we are nearly interested, strikes our eyes in my text, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." Here let us inquire into the meaning of the expressions, and point out the connection.

The righteousness of God has generally one uniform signification in the writings of Paul; and by it he means that righteousness, upon the account of which a sinner is justified; that righteousness for the sake of which his sins are forgiven, and he is restored to the divine favor: in short, it is our only justifying righteousness. It may be called the righteousness of God, to distinguish it from our own personal righteousness. It is the righteousness of God, a complete, perfect, divine, and God-like righteousness; and not the base, imperfect, scanty righteousness of sinful, guilty men. So it seems to be taken, Romans 10:3. "Being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God;" where the righteousness of God is directly opposed to, and distinguished from, their own righteousness.

The various descriptions of this righteousness, and of justification by it, which we find in the apostolic writings, may assist us to understand the nature of it; and, therefore, it may be proper for me to lay them before you in one view.

It is frequently called the righteousness of Christ; and it is said to consist in his obedience; "by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous," Romans 5:19. Now obedience consists in the strict observance of a law;

and, consequently, the obedience of Christ, which is our justifying righteousness, consists in his obedience to the law of God. Hence he is said to be "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes." Romans 10:4, 5. To be justified by his righteousness is the same thing as to be justified by his blood, Romans 5:9; to be reconciled to God by his death, etc, verse 10. From whence we may learn, that the sufferings of Christ are a principal part of this righteousness; or, that he not only obeyed the precept—but also endured the penalty of the divine law in our stead; and that it is only on this account we can be justified.

This righteousness is called the righteousness of God without the law, Romans 3:21; an imputed righteousness without works, Romans 4:6. And it is plain, from the whole tenor of this epistle, and that to the Galatians, that the righteousness by which we are justified, is entirely different from our own obedience to the law: and hence we may learn, that our own merit or good works do not in whole or in part constitute our justifying righteousness; but that it is wholly, entirely, and exclusively the merit of Christ's obedience and sufferings.

This righteousness is often called the righteousness of faith. Thus, according to some, it is denominated in my text, which may be thus rendered, "For in it the righteousness of God by faith is revealed to faith;" and this is most agreeable to the phraseology of this epistle. Others, following our translation—or the apparent order of the original, understand it in another sense; yet still so as to assign faith a peculiar concert in the affair. "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;" that is, according to some, it is entirely and all through by faith; or, from one degree of faith to another; or from faith to faith, from believer to believer, all the world over, among the Jews and Gentiles; or from the faithfulness of God in the Word, to the grace of faith in the heart.

You see that whatever sense you put upon this difficult phrase, it still coincides with or countenances the translation, which I would rather choose. "The righteousness of faith is revealed to faith." So it is expressly called in Romans 3:22, "The righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Christ." See chapter 4:11, 13, 10:6; Philippians 3:9. "Not having my own righteousness, which is of the law—but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." From whence we may infer, that faith has a peculiar concurrence of instrumentality in our justification by the righteousness of Christ.

My text further observes that in the gospel this justifying righteousness is revealed to faith; that is, in the gospel it is clearly revealed, proposed, and offered as an object of faith. The light of nature is all darkness and uncertainty on this important point; it can only offer obscure and mistaken conjectures concerning the method of pardon and acceptance for a guilty sinner; it leaves the anxious conscience still unsatisfied and perplexed with the grand inquiry, "With what shall I come before the Lord? How shall such a guilty creature as I re-obtain the favor of my provoked Sovereign?" It may suggest some plausible things in favor of repentance, as the only method of pardon; it may flatter the sinner, that a God of infinite goodness will not rigorously execute his law; and it may draw a veil over the attribute of his justice; and thus it may build the hopes of the sinner upon the ruin of the divine government, and the dishonor of the divine perfections.

But a method of justification by the righteousness of another, by the obedience and death of an incarnate God; by his perfect obedience to the law, and complete satisfaction to justice, instead of the sinner; a method in which sin may be pardoned, and in the meantime, the honors of the divine government advanced, and the divine perfections gloriously illustrated; this is a mystery, which was hidden from ages and generations. This was a grand secret, which all the sages and philosophers, and all the sons of men, who had nothing but the light of nature for their guide, could not discover, nor indeed so much as guess at! This scheme was as far above their thoughts—as the heavens are above the earth. Nothing but infinite wisdom could contrive it: nothing but omniscience could reveal it.

In the writings of Moses and the prophets, indeed, we meet with some glimmerings of it; some few rays of gospel-light were reflected back from the Sun of Righteousness, through the dark medium of three or four thousand years, and shone upon the minds of the Jews, in the sacrifices, and other significant types of the law, and in the prophecies of the Old Testament writers; and hence the apostle says, that "the righteousness of God is witnessed by the law and the prophets" Romans 3:21; but it is in the gospel alone that it is explicitly and fully revealed: in the gospel alone it is proposed in full glory—as a proper object for a distinct, particular, and explicit faith.

And hence we may easily see the strong and striking connection of the text. You may connect this sentence, "For therein, is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith," with the first part of a foregoing text, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ;" and then the sense will be, "No wonder that I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ among Jews or Gentiles, and even in Rome itself; for it makes a most glorious and important discovery, in which they are all concerned; a discovery which the Jews, with all the advantages of the law and the prophets, could not clearly make: a discovery which the Greeks with all their learning and philosophy, and

the Romans with all their power and improvements, could not so much as guess at! And that is the discovery of a complete God-like righteousness, by which guilty men, of every nation under heaven, may obtain justification from all their sins! A righteousness which is a sufficient foundation for the hopes of sinners, and gives the most majestic and amiable view of the great God! A righteousness, without which Jews and Gentiles, and even the Romans, in the height of their empire, must unavoidably, irreparably, universally, and eternally perish, in general ruin."

Such a glorious and divine righteousness does the neglected and despised gospel reveal; such a benevolent, gracious, and reviving discovery does it make; and who would be ashamed of such a gospel? "For my part," says Paul, "I am not ashamed of it—**but would boldly publish it unto kings and emperors, to sages and philosophers; and whatever sufferings I endure for its sake, still I glory in so good a cause, and would spend and be spent in its service!**"

Or we may join this clause, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith," with the last part of the preceding verse, "For it is the power of God unto salvation," etc, and then the connection will run thus: "The gospel of Christ, so destitute of all carnal and secular recommendations, is sufficiently recommended to universal acceptance by this, that it is the only powerful and efficacious expedient for the salvation of all such as believe it, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. And no wonder it is attended with this divine power and efficacy, for in it, and in it alone, the righteousness of God by faith is revealed to the faith and acceptance of a guilty world. No religion but that of a Mediator can provide or propose such a righteousness; and yet without such a righteousness, no sinner, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved! And, on the other hand, the revelation of such a righteousness directly tends to promote the important work of salvation, as it encourages the despairing sinner, and inspires him with vigor: and as it lays a foundation for the honorable communication of the influences of the Holy Spirit, without which this work can never be effected."

I hope these things are sufficient to give you a view of the sense and connection of the text. And there is only one thing I would repeat and illustrate before I proceed to a methodical prosecution of my subject; and that is—**that the righteousness of God, or the righteousness of Christ, on account of which we are justified, signifies both the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ—to answer the demands of the law, which we had broken. Or, as it is usually expressed, "his active and passive obedience."** He obeyed the law, and endured its penalty, as the surety or substitute of sinners: that is, he did all this, not for himself—but for them, or in their stead. This is a matter of so much importance, that you should by all means rightly understand it; and I hope it is now sufficiently plain without enlarging upon it, though I thought it necessary to repeat it. My thoughts on this interesting subject I intend to dispose in the following order:

- I. I shall briefly explain to you the nature of justifying faith, and show you the place it has in our justification.
- II. I shall show, that no righteousness but that which the gospel reveals is sufficient for the justification of a sinner.
- III. I shall evince that it is the gospel alone which reveals such a righteousness.

I. I am to explain to you the nature of justifying faith, and show you the place it has in our justification.

You see I do not propose to explain the general nature of faith, as it has for its object the Word of God in general; but only under that formal notion, as it has a peculiar instrumentality in our justification. When I mentioned the term justification, it occurs to my mind that some of you may not understand it; and for the sake of such, I would explain it. You cannot but know what it is to be pardoned, or forgiven, after you have offended: and it must be equally plain to you what it is to be loved, and received into favor, by a person whom you have offended; and these two things are meant by justification.

When you are justified, God pardons or forgives you all your sins; and he receives you again into his love and favor, and gives you a title to everlasting happiness. I hope this important point is now sufficiently plain to you all; and I return to observe, that I intend to consider faith at present, only under that formal notion, as we are justified by it; and in that view it is evident that the Lord Jesus, as a Savior who died for sinners, is its peculiar object. Hence a justifying faith is so often described in Scripture in such terms as these; "Believing in Christ, faith in his blood," etc; and the righteousness of Christ, by which we are justified, is called "the righteousness of faith, the righteousness which is of God by faith," etc. Therefore a justifying faith in Christ includes these two things:

1. A full persuasion of the truth of that method of salvation through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which the gospel reveals.

2. A hearty approbation of and consent to that method of salvation.

1. A justifying faith includes a full persuasion of the truth of that method of salvation through the righteousness of Jesus Christ which the gospel reveals.

Faith, in its general nature, is the belief of a thing upon the testimony of another. A divine faith is the belief of a thing upon the testimony of God; and consequently faith in Christ must be the belief of the testimony of God concerning him in the gospel. Hence faith is said to be a receiving the witness of God, which he has testified of his Son; and unbelief, on the other hand, is the not believing the record which God gave of his Son. 1 John 5:9, 10. Now John tells us, that the substance of the record or testimony, which God has given of his Son, is this: That God has given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son, verse 11; that is, "God in the gospel testifies, that he has established and revealed a method of bestowing immortal life and blessedness upon guilty sinners, who were justly condemned to everlasting death. And he farther testifies, that it is only in and through his Son Jesus Christ that this life and blessedness can be obtained; it is only through him that it can be hoped for; and nothing appears but horror and despair from every other quarter. Now faith is a firm, affecting persuasion of the truth of this gracious and important testimony. And as the foundation of all is, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the true Messiah, promised as the Savior of sinners; hence it is, that believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, etc, is so frequently the definition of faith.

The scheme of salvation through Jesus Christ, supposes that all are sinners, exposed to condemnation, and unable to make satisfaction for their offences, or merit the divine favor by anything they can do or suffer; and represents the Lord Jesus as substituting himself in the place of the guilty, bearing the punishment due to their sin, and obeying the law of God in their stead; and it represents our injured Sovereign as willing to be reconciled to such of his guilty creatures, on this account; but then that, in order to enjoy the blessings of righteousness, they must, as guilty, helpless sinners, place their whole dependence upon it, and plead it as the only ground of their justification; and that, though they must abound in good works—yet these good works must not make these in the least the ground of their hopes of pardon and acceptance.

This is the substance of the testimony of God in the gospel; this testimony has been repeatedly published in your ears; and if you have believed with a justifying faith, you have yielded a full assent to this testimony; you are thoroughly convinced, and deeply sensible that these things are true, and you can cheerfully venture your eternal all upon the truth of them. You are convinced that this Jesus is indeed the only Savior; that his righteousness is alone sufficient, and to the entire exclusion of every other righteousness in point of justification.

Such a faith may appear a very easy thing to a careless, impenitent sinner, who has imbibed this belief from his earliest days, and found no more difficulty in it, than in learning his creed, or assenting to a piece of history. But a person of this character is not at all the subject of a saving faith. It is ONLY the poor self-condemned penitent, broken-hearted sinner, that is capable of such a faith; and truly it is no easy matter to him; for one that sees his sins in all their aggravations, the divine law, and the righteous severity of divine justice: one that finds the lusts and prejudices of his heart rising against this method of salvation as foolishness, and as giving an intolerable mortification to his pride and vanity; for such a one to believe, is not an easy matter; it is the working of God's mighty power. Ephesians 1:19. But,

2. A justifying faith more peculiarly includes a hearty approbation of and consent to this method of salvation by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

To believe the gospel as a true history; to believe it as a true theory or speculation, with a languor, an indifference, or a disaffection of heart—this indeed is the common popular faith of our country, and it generally prevails where the profession of Christianity is become fashionable; but, alas! it is not that faith by which we can be justified and saved! A hearty approbation of the way of salvation through Christ; a willing, delightful dependence of the whole soul upon his righteousness; a free, vigorous choice of it, and a cheerful consent to all the terms of the gospel; this is essential to such a faith.

It is the greatest incongruity to suppose that it is sufficient to believe the gospel with a lukewarm indifference, or a careless, unaffected assent; or that our faith in Christ should be merely the act of a constrained, necessitated soul. He is the beloved Son of God, in whom he is well pleased; and we must be well pleased with him too, before we can expect salvation by him. To receive a scheme which God has so much at heart, a

scheme, for the accomplishment of which Jesus bled and died; a scheme on which our everlasting life depends, and without which we are undone forever; to receive such a scheme with a languid assent, what profaneness! what impiety!

If you have ever truly believed in Jesus Christ, my friends, it has not been the languid act of a cold, impenitent, unwilling heart—but your whole souls have exerted their utmost vigor in it, and it has been the most cheerful, animated act of your whole lives! It is true, necessity had no small influence in the case. You saw, you felt yourselves lost forever without this righteousness; you saw no other way of escape or safety; you found yourselves shut up to the faith; and it was this sense of your necessity that first set you upon seeking after Christ, and turned your thoughts towards this method of salvation. But when God shined into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, when you received the first glances of his glorious righteousness, and heard, as with new ears, the offer of it in the gospel—stand, and pause, and recollect—what were your sentiments, and the temper of your heart in that important and memorable hour?

Was not their language, "Blessed Jesus! until now I have been blindly seeking after you from a servile principle, not from the agreeable constraint of love—but from the painful compulsion of fear, horror, and necessity; not because I desired you on account of your own excellency—but because I was desirous to be saved from hell, though it should be by an unacceptable hand. I have been striving to work up my reluctant heart to a compliance with your gospel, not because I saw your glory—but merely because I must perish forever if I rejected it. But now, when I see your glory, O lovely Savior, I most cheerfully consent to the method of salvation revealed in the gospel, not only because I must—but because I choose to do so. I see it is a scheme well ordered in all things, and sure, and therefore it is all my salvation and all my desire. I would not only be saved—but I would be saved by you, blessed Jesus! I am willing, I am desirous, that you, and not I, should have the glory of it. Pardon is sweet to a guilty criminal; salvation is sweet to a perishing soul; but oh! pardon by your righteousness, salvation through your grace, this is doubly sweet!"

Such, my friends, has been, and such still is the language of your hearts, if you have ever received the righteousness of Christ through faith.

And hence it follows, that faith supposes the supernatural illumination of the mind and renovation of the heart, by the power of divine grace. Alas! while nature is left in its original darkness and depravity, it has no such views of the way of salvation through Christ, nor any such delight in it.

There are many, I am afraid, that secretly wonder what peculiar wisdom and grace there should be in the gospel, and why God should commend it so highly, and saints should be in raptures when they speak of it; for as for their part, they can discover no such great matters in it. Their hearts are cold and careless about it, or form insurrections against it. The way of salvation through the righteousness of Christ is something quite unnatural and mortifying to sinful men; they have no relish for it, nor aptitude or inclination to seek salvation, in this way; it is much more natural for them to choose some other, though it should be much more painful. They will submit to the heaviest penances and bodily austerities; they will afflict themselves with fasting; they will drudge at the duties of religion, in order to work out a righteousness of their own; and they are as fond of the covenant of works to obtain eternal life, as if it had never been broken! But tell them of a free salvation, purchased by Jesus Christ, and offered in the gospel; tell them that it is only on account of his righteousness they can be pardoned, and that all their personal good works, however necessary for other purposes, must all count for nothing in this affair; they are amazed, and wonder what you mean! It is strange, unintelligible doctrine to them, and their hearts rise against it!

Hence many a believer has found that it was easier for him to work up his heart to anything—rather than to believe in Jesus Christ; and that God alone could enable him to do this. But, when God works in him the work of faith with power, he opens his understanding to see a surprising glory in the mediatorial scheme of salvation, and gives him a heart to relish it: and without this, no external recommendations of this scheme, no speculative conviction in its favor, can gain the cordial approbation of the sinner!

I shall now endeavor, in a few words, to show you the peculiar place which FAITH has in our justification. You may observe, then, that as the righteousness of Christ is the peculiar ground of our justification, so the grace of faith has a peculiar reference to that righteousness; it is, as it were, the bent of the soul towards that particular object. Repentance has sin for its object.

Love has the intrinsic glory and communicated goodness of the divine nature for its object.

Charity and justice have a reference to man; and none of these objects are the proper grounds of our

justification; and consequently none of these graces which terminate upon them can have any direct concurrence in it.

But our justifying righteousness is the immediate, direct object of faith; and therefore faith must have a special instrumentality in our justification.

And if we recollect what has been said about the nature of faith, there will appear a peculiar propriety in conferring this honor upon it. It is certainly fit that we should believe in him who is our Savior; and it would be absurd to apply to him in that character, while we suspect him for an impostor. It is fit that we should approve of the righteousness by which we are justified, and heartily consent to that scheme by which we are saved. And, on the other hand, it would be highly preposterous that we should be justified and saved by a Savior, and in a way we despise or disgust. These considerations show not only the wisdom, but the grace of the constitution.

Approve of the Savior, and you shall be saved;
trust in his righteousness, and you shall be justified;
consent to the covenant of grace, and you shall inherit all its blessings.
And could you desire lower or easier terms? This approbation, this trust, this consent, is faith: and now, I hope, you see the peculiar place it has in our justification. Let us now proceed,

II. To show you that no righteousness but that which the gospel reveals, is sufficient for the justification of a sinner.

In order to form a right judgment of this matter, we must place ourselves in a proper situation and view it in an advantageous point of light. Is a blind, self-flattering sinner, who does not see the strictness of the law and justice of God, or who secretly murmurs at it as too precise and rigid, and who does not see the infinite evil of sin—**but loves it, indulges it, and is expert in making excuses for it, and diminishing its aggravations**—who forms his maxims of the divine government from the procedure of weak and partial mortals in human governments; who compares himself with his fellow-sinners, and not with the divine purity, and the holy law of God; whose conscience is secure, who places the tribunal of his supreme Judge far out of sight; and who forms his notions of his government not from God's Word—**but from the flattering suggestions of his own deceitful heart!**

I say, is such a blind, partial, careless sinner a competent judge in this matter? But let him be awakened to see himself and his sins in a proper light; and let him see the purity and extent of the divine law, and make that the only test of his good works; let him realize the divine tribunal, and place himself in the immediate presence of his Judge—**and then the controversy will soon be at an end! Then all his high thoughts of his own righteousness are mortified; all his excuses for his sins are silenced; and then he sees his absolute need of a perfect and divine righteousness, and the utter insufficiency of his own!**

O sirs! if you have ever placed yourselves in this posture, you are done forever with all disputes on this point. What could ease your consciences then but the complete righteousness of Jesus Christ? Oh! "none but Christ, none but Christ!" then appeared sufficient.

Here I beg permission to translate a very animated and striking passage, written about two hundred years ago, by that great and good man, John Calvin, who had long groped for salvation among the doctrines of merit in the church of Rome—but could find no relief, until the gospel revealed this righteousness to him:

"It is a very easy thing," says he, "to amuse ourselves with arguments for the sufficiency of good works for justification, while we are ingeniously trifling in schools and colleges of learning; but when we come into the presence of God, we have done with all such amusements: for there it is a very serious affair, and not an idle dispute about words. There, there we must place ourselves, if we would profitably inquire after the true righteousness, and how we shall answer our celestial Judge when he shall call us to an account! Let us represent this Judge to ourselves, and not such as our fancies would imagine him to be—but such as he is really represented in the Scriptures; as one by whose brightness the stars are turned into darkness; by whose power the mountains are melted; at whose anger the earth trembles; by whose wisdom the wise are caught in their own craftiness; before whose purity all things are turned into pollution; whose justice even angels are not sufficient to bear; who will by no means clear the guilty; whose vengeance, when once it is kindled, burns and penetrates to the lowest hell! Let him, I say, sit as Judge on the actions of men, and who can securely place himself before his throne of judgment? Lord, if you mark iniquity, who, O Lord, shall stand! All must be

condemned, and unavoidably perish.! Shall mortal man be justified before God? or be pure in the eyes of his Maker? Behold he puts no trust in his servants; and his angels he charges with folly—how much less in those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth! Behold he puts no trust in his saints; yes, the heavens are not clean in his sight; how much more abominable and filthy is man which drinks iniquity like water!

Eliphaz is struck silent; for he sees that God cannot be appeased even with angelic holiness, if their works should be brought to the impartial scale of justice—and certainly if our lives should be compared to the standard of the divine law, we must be stupid indeed, unless we are struck with the terror of its curses, and particularly of that, 'Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them!' And all the disputes we may have about the method of justification, are vain and insipid, unless we place ourselves as guilty before our heavenly Judge, and, solicitous for a pardon, voluntarily prostrate and empty ourselves before him!

To this great tribunal, sinners, you must lift your eyes, that, instead of vainly exalting yourselves, you may learn to tremble before him. While the comparison is between man and man—it is easy for every man to think he has something which others should not despise; but when we place ourselves before God—then all that confidence falls and perishes in an instant!"

I might go on with my quotation from this excellent author; but this is sufficient to show you a grand pre-requisite to the impartial determination of this point. And now, with a deep impression of this, with a deep sense of our sins, and of the strictness of the law and justice, and placing ourselves, as in the presence of our righteous Judge—let us inquire what righteousness is sufficient for our justification before him?

It may be of service to observe, that there is something singular in the phraseology of Scripture on this point, and different from what is used in other cases of the same general nature. To receive a pardon is a very different thing, in common language, from being justified. When a man is PARDONED, it supposes that he has broken the law—but that the law is dispensed with, and the threatened penalty not executed. But when he is JUSTIFIED, it supposes that he has a righteousness equal to the demands of the law, and therefore that he may be acquitted according to justice. These, you see, are very different things; but in the affair before us, they are happily united.

The sinner is said to be both pardoned and justified at once; and the reason of this unusual combination is this: The sinner has broken the divine law, and has no obedience to answer its demands; and therefore, his being freed from the guilt of sin and the threatened punishment, is, in this respect, a gracious, unmerited pardon. But by faith he has received the righteousness of Christ; and God imputes it to him, as though it were his own; and this righteousness answers all the requisitions of the law, and it has no charges against him: so that, in this respect, he is justified, or pronounced righteous according to law and justice.

Hence it follows, from the very meaning of the terms used in this case, that no righteousness can justify us in the sight of God but that which is equal to all the demands of the divine law. It must be perfect, and conformed throughout to that standard; for if it is not, we cannot be pronounced righteous in the eye of the law; but the law charges and condemns us as transgressors, and its sentence lies in full force against us!

And now, if any of you have such a perfect righteousness, produce it, glory in it, and carry it with you to the divine tribunal, and demand acquittance there! But if you have not, (as, if you know yourselves, you must own you have not) then fall down as guilty sinners before your righteous Judge, confess that you dare not appear in his presence in your own righteousness—but lay hold of and plead the righteousness of Jesus alone; otherwise the law thunders out its terrors against you, and justice will seize you as obnoxious criminals!

It was from such premises as these, that the apostle reasoned, when he drew this conclusion, that by the deeds of the law, shall no flesh shall be justified, Romans 3:20, 28; and that we are justified by faith, without the deeds of the law. He grants, that if any can produce a perfect righteousness of their own—they shall obtain life by the law; the law, says he, is not of faith: but the man that does these things, shall live in them. Galatians 3:12. But then he proves, that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned, and consequently have no righteousness agreeable to the law. He stops every mouth, and brings in the whole world, as guilty, before God. And hence, he infers the impossibility of justification by the works of the law. And then he naturally introduces another righteousness equal to all the demands of the law. "But now" says he, "a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God

presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice . . . he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus!" Romans 3:21-26.

O glorious scheme of salvation! O complete, divine righteousness! A righteousness by which Jew and Gentile, the greatest sinner as well as the least, may be made divinely righteous, and completely justified, even at the bar of a holy and just God! Here, you guilty sinners, you condemned criminals, you bleeding consciences, here is the only righteousness for you! Put forth the hand of faith, and humbly lay hold upon it!

It would be easy to collect a great variety of arguments to support this important truth; but if you carefully read over the apostolic writings, particularly this epistle to the Romans, and that to the Galatians, you cannot but be satisfied for yourselves.

III. And lastly, To show that it is the gospel alone, which reveals such a righteousness as is sufficient for the justification of a sinner.

The Jewish religion, as I observed before, gave several intimations of this method of justification by the righteousness of another. There were many prophecies and types of this import; and this was undoubtedly the original design of sacrifices; for it is quite unaccountable, that ever men should imagine that they could appease the wrath of God, and procure the pardon of sin, by offering to him sacrifices of brutes in their stead, unless we suppose that God did at first institute this method to signify that the way in which he would be reconciled to sinners was by the sufferings and death of another, as a sacrifice substituted in their place and stead.

This institution seems to have been immediately after the fall of man, when the first beam of gospel-light blessed our world in that promise, the seed of the woman, etc; for we are told that God made coats of skins, and with them covered our first parents. Genesis 3:21. Now animal food was not allowed to man until after the flood: and consequently those beasts, whose skins were used for this purpose, were not killed for that use: and we cannot suppose that they died naturally so soon after their creation. It is therefore most probable that Adam had killed them for sacrifices; and that God had commanded him to do this, immediately upon the promulgation of that promise, to typify the manner of its accomplishment, namely, by the sacrifice of Christ in the fullness of time. This practice we find continued by Cain and Abel; and thus Noah consecrated the new world after the flood. Genesis 8:20.

But though the patriarchs and Jews had these intimations of the method of pardon and acceptance, they were very dark and perplexing to them, and just as much as they had of this light, just so much they had of the gospel; and therefore the gospel, taking the word in its full extent, claims the honor of this discovery.

Now, if we except the patriarchal and Jewish religion, which had a mixture of the gospel in it, there is none that pretends to reveal a complete and perfect righteousness and atonement for the justification of a sinner. The religion of Mahomet is silent on this head; and the Socrateses and Platos of heathen antiquity, who had only the light of nature for their guide—knew nothing about it; much less did the ignorant populace, who are always the greater part of mankind. The custom of sacrifice was indeed universal: but, as it was received by a very remote tradition, mankind had quite lost its original design; and they corrupted it into the most absurd and cruel superstition. They offered their sacrifices to imaginary deities, or (as the apostle tells us) to devils! 1 Corinthians 10:20. They were so unnatural and barbarous, that they offered human sacrifices, and even their own children—to propitiate their angry gods! And, if we may believe some of their best authors, this was often practiced by the express command of their oracles—a sufficient evidence that it was not the true God who gave answers by them.

Alas! how were the poor creatures bewildered and perplexed about the method of expiating their sins! They knew nothing of the great atonement which was to be made by the High Priest of the Christian profession, which the gospel reveals to us. Nay, the Jews themselves are often reproved by the prophets for their self-righteous trust in their sacrifices, to the neglect of their morals, and the grand atonement which they prefigured. The light of nature might teach the heathen world, that if they perfectly obeyed the law of God, they might be assured of his favor, or at least that they should not be punished; but it informed them, that they had not done so—but on the other hand, had repeatedly broken the law of God; and they had no notion at all of the possibility of their being justified by the righteousness of another.

This alone determines the point I am now proving. I have shown already, that a sinner cannot be justified, but

by a perfect righteousness; and it is evident that none of the sons of men can pretend to such a righteousness. Where, then, can it be found? Consult the light of nature; ask the multitude in the heathen world; nay, ask their most improved sages and philosophers, and you will find all silent, all bewildered and perplexed! Nothing was ever farther from their thoughts than a complete atonement for sin by the death of an innocent and divine person! I appeal to such of the negroes as came from Africa, as the best judges in this case. Did you ever hear, in your own country, of a righteousness equal to all the requisitions of the law of God, by which you could be justified? Was there no thoughtful person among you whose conscience was uneasy about his sins against a holy God, and who was concerned how he should obtain a pardon? And what way did he take to ease his mind? Alas! he knew nothing of the righteousness of God by faith. This happy discovery, poor creatures, you have met with in the land of your bondage; and oh! if you make a proper use of it, it will make your slavery the greatest blessing to you!

The light of nature might surmise a great many things upon this head; but, alas! all was uncertain. It might intimate, "that God is the compassionate Father of mankind, and therefore would dispense with the threatenings of his law, and not execute them rigorously upon his own creatures." This we often hear urged by sinners among ourselves, who, notwithstanding their profession of Christianity, will form a system of religion, and a scheme of reconciliation with God, according to their own selfish and flattering prejudices; and it seems to them incredible that God should inflict eternal punishment on his own creatures—for the sins of a few years. But to this it might be replied, that since God is the Father of mankind, it is a more unnatural and aggravated wickedness to sin against him: that he is not only the Parent—but also the Lawgiver and Judge of the world, and that he must sustain both these characters with honor. He must maintain the honor of his law, and preserve his government from contempt; and therefore the communications of his goodness—must be consistent with justice. He must also execute his laws upon sinners, in order to warn and deter others; and therefore every sinner must tremble for fear of the execution of the divine threatenings upon him. To all this I may add, that the miseries that are inflicted by divine Providence in this world, and that very often upon the best of men, must leave the sinner in a dreadful suspense.

If God does not allow the sins even of the best of men always to escape unpunished in this world—but afflicts them with pains, sickness, and an endless variety of calamities, how can our reason, that knows so little of the counsels of heaven, assure us that he will not punish them also, and that with greater severity, in the world to come? Nothing but a revelation from himself could ease an anxious mind from this dread suspicion.

The light of nature may also perhaps surmise, "That their own repentance and reformation are sufficient to procure the pardon of sin:" and mankind seem naturally inclined to look for pardon in this way. Hence sinners among ourselves, notwithstanding the clearer discoveries of the gospel, fly to their own repentance and reformation, not only as a pre-requisite to their salvation—but as sufficient ground of acceptance; and they gaze and wonder at a man if he intimates the contrary. It must be granted that repentance and reformation are necessary; but the question is, are repentance and reformation alone sufficient?

And this is easily answered, if what has been proved before be true, namely: That no righteousness but that which is perfect, and fully conformed to the divine law, can be sufficient for our justification. Now repentance, at best, is but a reformation from a wrong course, and a return to obedience; which should never have been interrupted. If the reformation were perfect, it would be but doing what we are obliged to do for the present time; and consequently it can be no atonement or satisfaction to the law for past offences; but, alas! The sinner, in the midst of all his repentance and reformation, is sinning still; there are guilty imperfections in his best duties; and can these atone for his past sins? So that repentance and reformation cannot be a sufficient justifying righteousness.

Again, what kind of government would that be among men—in which all crimes were pardoned upon repentance? What encouragement would this give to offenders! How soon would such a government fall into contempt! And what a low idea would it give of the wisdom and justice of the ruler, and of the evil of sin! And shall the Supreme Ruler imitate so weak a conduct, and thus:
obscure his perfections,
depreciate his laws,
and encourage vice?

It is a virtue in a private man to forgive an injury; and it may be a piece of generosity in such a one to give up some of his rights; but, as I have told you, God is not to be considered, in this case, as a private person—but as a supreme Ruler, and Governor of the universe: and sin is an offence against him in that capacity; and therefore for reasons of state, it is not fit he should remit it merely upon the sinner's repentance. He must maintain the dignity of law and government, and consult the public good; not the good of this man and that, nor

even of the whole race of men—but of men through all their generations; of angels through all their various ranks and orders, and in short, of the whole universe of reasonable creatures!

And the interest of individuals must be subservient to the more general good of the whole. An error in such an extensive government, through an excessive lenity towards offenders, would have a most extensive ill influence, and injure more worlds than we know of. If the magistrate in one particular government be lax in the execution of the laws, he may injure a whole nation. But what would be the consequence, if the Ruler of heaven and earth and the whole creation, should relax his law, and allow sin to go unpunished, upon so cheap a payment as repentance? No human government could be supported upon this principle, much less the divine government!

Further: it should be considered, that, in order to encourage offenders to repent, it is necessary it should be made a fixed constitution, and openly published, that whoever, in all time coming, should be guilty of any offence against the laws of God—that he shall be forgiven if he does but repent. Now, what encouragement would such a declaration give to sin! It would also be unprecedented in human governments. It is true, civil rulers do forgive some offenders: but then they do not declare beforehand that they will do so, or who the objects of their clemency shall be. To make a previous declaration of this, would be to give license to men to break the law.

Let it also be considered, that when civil rulers forgive criminals, there is no necessity they should receive them into special favor; but in the divine government these two things are inseparable: there is no medium between high favor and misery. When God forgives, he receives the sinner into complete happiness and intimacy with himself, as well as rescues him from punishment. And is it fit he should do this merely upon his repentance? How would such a conduct look in human governments?

Finally, the pardon of a crime, is a matter of sovereignty, and only has place in governments where the royal prerogative is above law, and has a power to dispense with it. Whether such a prerogative belongs to the divine government (that is, whether it would be a perfection upon the whole in such a government) I shall not now dispute: but suppose it is, still it is a matter of sovereignty; that is, it lies entirely in the breast of the Supreme Ruler, whether he will pardon penitents or not; and they can know his pleasure no other way but by his declaring it. This consideration shows the necessity of a revelation from God, to give a sinner assurance that he will pardon him upon any terms. The light of nature leaves a sinner awfully uncertain whether ever he can re-obtain the favor of his offended sovereign. Now, this revelation we have in the gospel, with the additional discovery of the way in which forgiveness and acceptance can be obtained. And it appears, from this short survey, that it is in the gospel alone we can find this discovery.

I. I shall now conclude with two reflections:

1. Let this subject lead us to a strict examination of the ground of our hopes, whether they are founded on the righteousness of God alone—or partly at least upon our own. To speak freely, I am afraid that some of you, my dear people, have built upon this sandy foundation. This may be the case of some of you who have very fair characters; for it is such sort of people, and not those who make little or no pretensions to good works—who are most in danger of the extreme of self-righteousness. I therefore beg you would inquire after this sly, lurking delusion; a delusion which perverts the best things—into the worst things—and makes your good works the occasion of your destruction, instead of means of salvation!

I beg you would inquire, whether ever you have been deeply sensible of the aggravated evil of sin, the perfection of God's law, the strictness of his justice, and the guilty imperfections of your own best works; whether ever you have seen the glory of God in the gospel, and the excellency and sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ? Have you cheerfully embraced it with your whole souls? And do you lay the whole dependence of your salvation upon it? Do you find it is the only relief for your wounded consciences, the only cordial for your sinking hearts? Do your whole souls embrace it with the tenderest endearment, and tenaciously cling to it as the only plank to keep you from sinking, after the general wreck of human nature? Do you relish its doctrines, even those who are the most mortifying to your pride and vanity, and love to hear them honestly preached? Are the humble, despised doctrines of the cross sweet to you, and the very life of your souls? If you can give a comfortable answer to these inquiries, then,

2. This subject affords you abundant encouragement, and strong consolation. It is true, you can never think too humbly of yourselves. You are as sinful as you can possibly suppose yourselves to be; your righteousness is as insufficient and imperfect, and you are as undeserving of the favor of God, as you can possibly imagine! But it is not to yourselves, that you look for a righteousness, which will bear you out at the bar of your Judge; you

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have been obliged to give up that point forever! You tried to stand upon your own footing as long as you could—but you found it would not do. And now your only refuge is the righteousness of Christ by faith; here you rest, and you look for salvation in no other way.

My friends, I would gladly do honor to this righteousness; but, alas! the highest thing I can say of it is quite too low. It is indeed a righteousness sufficient for all the purposes for which you need it; it is a sure, a tried foundation. Thousands have built their hopes upon it, and it has never failed one of them yet; you may make the experiment with the same safety. There is not a charge which the law or justice, your own conscience, or Satan, the accuser of the brethren, can bring against you—but what it can fully answer. Here, then, is safe footing—a sure foundation! Let nothing drive you from it; and oh, give glory to God for so great a blessing!