

Samuel Stockell

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Knowledge of our Justification in the Sight of God by the Righteousness of Christ

In the treatment of the glorious and happy consequences of this gracious and powerful conquest {the conquest of grace;} which mighty grace hath made upon the hearts of God's elect, in bringing them down from their innate pride and vainglory, which naturally fills their hearts, to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ for life and salvation, without their own works, with a holy and humble willingness that Christ should be all in all in their salvation, and have all the praise and glory thereof, I would observe the following things, as the necessary result of their being made gracious and upright before God, in and through the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. First: A Conscious-Justification, or a sense of justifying love in and upon our own hearts. Justification is an act of Righteousness, wherein God accepteth the elect as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. It was a custom among the ancient Romans, in their courts of justice, to give to persons, who upon trial were found innocent, a white stone, as a token of their justification. This was their acquittance, because they were found not guilty. To this our Lord alludes, when speaking to the Church in Pergamos, for he saith, "I will give to such," as do, by living principles, "overcome the world," not only to eat of the hidden manna, but I will give him also a sense of his justification. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." {Rev.2:17} I will pronounce the sentence of justification in his soul; and his conscience shall be the witness of it, which shall carry with it an evidence of its relation and union to me and my Father; and he shall know me with comfort by my name, "the Lord our Righteousness," which none can know, but those that receive the sentence of justification into their own breasts. How miserably is this portion of sacred writ abused and mangled by the

daubers of untempered mortar of our age, who are generally agreed to call this white stone of conscious justification, the stone of absolution or pardon, and so carry off the text from its genuine signification; for absolution or pardon supposes guilt, but justification does not. For those, who were found guilty amongst the Romans, had a black stone given to them, which was their sentence of condemnation, as being upon trial found guilty. I confess, that the pardon of sin is an inestimable blessing; yet it is not contained in the text under consideration. The Great God, then, does not justify persons, as sinners, but as righteous, in and for a righteousness which is not their own, but the Redeemer's; so that the justified are perfectly righteous before God, or else he justifies the wicked, which is impossible. Objection: But God is said to justify the ungodly. {Rom.4:5} Answer: It is granted, that the elect are justified, while ungodly; but it does not therefore follow that they are justified as such. Indeed, the text serves gloriously to prove, that the elect, while in a state of ungodliness, are in a state of justification; but believers are nowhere in Scripture called by the terms of wicked, ungodly, &c. It is therefore evident, that the Great and Holy God is a Justifier of the elect, whilst in a state of sin and corruption; yet not for the sake of that sin and corruption, but for the sake of the Robe of Christ's Righteousness, which he hath been pleased to impute to his people; for Christ is of God made unto them righteousness. {I Cor.1:30} Thus, it appears from this objection, and the text brought to prove it, that the justification of the elect, before faith, is a truth; and the doctrine itself is established. If I'm justified before faith, as it is plain that I am, why not as soon as Christ became my Surety. If we are justified alone by, and for the righteousness of Christ, it is a necessary consequence, that we are justified in the sight of God, not only before our faith, but before our open existence; yea, before the world began; or else the Righteousness of Christ had not a sufficient merit and virtue in itself to do the work, but needed the assistance of my faith to give it an additional value. This is to treat the Righteousness of Christ and his Sufferings as so many ciphers, which stand for nothing, till a figure come before them, to make them tell; so, till my faith precede what Christ hath done, it is all as nothing, but must wait the motion of my believing for all its glory. Now, the case is plain, that this way of going to work is no better {which I have already charged in this work upon Arminians and others} than a trampling underfoot the blood and righteousness of the Son of God, because they account them as things not holy enough to justify without faith. Let those that espouse such a notion consider the dangerous consequences attending them; for, notwithstanding all their pretended airs of sanctity, they will be found guilty of robbing the Redeemer of the Glory which is his due. But, perhaps, they will object and say, my charge is false, for they do not affirm, that there is not a sufficiency in the blood and righteousness of Christ to justify, without faith; but only, that according to Scripture Revelation, which contains the whole mind and will of God, there is no such thing as

justification before faith; and that, therefore, God hath appointed that justification shall succeed believing. Answer: The reason why these gentlemen so strenuously endeavor to hide the glorious doctrine of Justification before believing from their hearers is what I am not able to comprehend; unless it be to keep them in ignorance of their liberty in Christ, and to bind them down to a servile admiration of themselves. The objection is partly true; but the greater part is false. Doubtless, the Scriptures contain a perfect Revelation of the mind and will of God; but that in this revelation there is nothing of the doctrine of justification, without faith, or before it, is a blatant falsity. Let us once more take a view of that passage in Romans, where we read with an impartial eye, and the doctrine, now under consideration, will shine forth with a convincing light. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." {Rom.4:5} Observe in the words, that the object of a believer's faith is he who justifieth the ungodly; and if ungodly, then consequently unbelievers, and he that justifies them, as such; for he that justifies the ungodly justifies unbelievers; but God justifies the ungodly; therefore, he justifies unbelievers. {Prior to their personal faith, which faith evidences their justification in Christ.} I could have offered many other arguments upon this great and weighty subject drawn both from Scripture and the Perfections of God in order to show that the contrary opinions have a tendency to introduce Arminianism and Atheism; but this is not my present business, and I must beg pardon of my readers for so long a digression. My design is only to speak of a Conscience-Justification, which is no more than bringing home to the soul that justification, already spoken of; and I am, now to explain, how a sense of this is communicated to the soul, and proclaimed in the conscience by the Holy Ghost, as a glorious Consequence of Grace, in the conquest it hath made upon our hearts, in destroying the rebellion, in some degree, that filled our wills. A Conscience Justification then is a knowledge of our justification in the sight of God by the Righteousness of a Redeemer. This knowledge is conveyed to us by that Spirit who is the Enlightener of our understandings, by whom we are brought to see that Christ hath given to God a full satisfaction for all our sins, and that he doth for the sake of that Satisfaction justify us in his sight; so that we perceive it to be impossible for us to come into eternal condemnation; for, being once justified in his sight, we shall never be condemned. Oh, how sweetly is all this done upon our souls by the Holy Ghost bringing home to our conscience the blood and righteousness of Christ; so that by faith we are enabled to put on this righteousness with joy, and walk in the daily comforts thereof. We can now say with Paul, "who shall lay anything to our charge; it is God that justifieth;" or, "who shall condemn us; since Christ hath died for us," hath reconciled us to God, and saved us from the Law, Death and Hell. Now we know, that "God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death;" {Ps.48:14;} and we are sure, that we shall never come into any

condemnation, but shall arrive safe at the haven of everlasting glory. Likewise, a Conscience-Justification implies a freedom from guilt and fear; for it doth always cast out terror, and dispossess the soul of all slavish and servile apprehensions; so that it fears not the Law, though its threatenings are many and terrible, being sensible that it hath a righteousness that hath answered all its demands, and banished all its threats, and hath magnified the Law and made it honorable in every part of its rigorous and righteous demands. Such a one fears not sin, because he sees that it is finished and done away forever by his Redeemer; and that, though it be sought for it shall never be found; for Christ hath carried it away into the "land of forgetfulness," into an everlasting oblivion, so that sin creates no fears, no condemning terrors or horrors in his sanctified and holy conscience. But, lest I should be blamed, and thought an antinomian, I shall take the liberty to explain myself a little further upon this point. Though a believer does not fear sin, as to its condemning power, yet he fears sinning, and as he is enabled by grace abhors sin and will shun all occasions leading to it; for, being a new creature, he cannot, as such, live in sin. I would, therefore, be understood, that a believer does not fear sin as damning, for he is not afraid of eternal damnation; for otherwise he would not be perfect as pertaining to the conscience, since all that are subject to such horrible apprehensions are still under the Law, being guided by a legal spirit and walking in bondage. It was a weakness of the Law dispensation that it could not make the comers thereunto perfect as pertaining to the conscience, for there was a continual remembrance of sin; {Heb.9:9;} but under the Gospel, in coming to our Great Sacrifice, our consciences are set at liberty; and the soul reads bright inscriptions of Divine love upon that Altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, to which legalists have no visible right, that casteth out all fear. There is no fear in love; love that comes into the soul under the sprinklings of the blood of Jesus Christ, which casts out all guilt and bondage. Hence the bond-woman and her son are turned out of doors, and must have no part, nor possession with God's holy Isaac's in whom the Divine seed is found. Furthermore, a Conscience-Justification implies a holy triumphing in a Redeemer. The believer's language is, "my soul shall make her boast in the Lord; and I will sing of his salvation. I will bless him from day to day, and speak of the glorious honor of his Majesty." {Ps.34:2, 96:2} God's Church of old, under a living sense of their justification in the righteousness of Christ, breaks forth with joy and triumph, saying, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." {Is.61:10} We see here, that the ground of all this holy joy and triumph in the Lord God was extracted from a conscience justification; for the clear apprehensions by faith of an imputed righteousness gives the soul a quietness in the worst of times, and enables it to love the Redeemer,

to cleave unto Him, and delight in Him more than in all the glories of time and sense. Another consequence of the truth of grace in the heart, made by this powerful and holy conquest {the conquest of grace} is a Conscience-Pardon of Sin. Remission of Sin is a glorious act of Grace, for by it I am forgiven all my trespasses; it finds me a sinner, but forgives all my sins. Pardon of sin is a Divine Favor that more immediately flows from the nuptial love of Christ to his Church. It is he, as a Husband, who forgives the sins of his wife, heals all her backslidings, and loves her freely, because he is married to her. Question: But do we not sin against our God and Father, the Great and Infinite Being, and doth not he forgive us our sins? Answer: In a strict and proper sense, the Infinite God doth not forgive sin, for it is readily granted by all who are sound in the Faith, that Jesus Christ hath given full satisfaction to Divine Justice for all sin, and hath fully paid the debt of his Church, his bride and spouse, whom he represented as a federal Head; and God himself hath declared his being well pleased with the Redeemer's Righteousness, which is a full demonstration of his Satisfaction. "The LORD is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the Law, and make it honorable." {Is.42:21} Now, Christ hath, by his active and passive obedience, magnified the Law and made it honorable; by which he gave satisfaction to Justice; and, if Christ hath satisfied the Justice of God for all the sins of his people, how then can it be justly, or with propriety of speech be said that God pardons our sins and transgressions? Sure I am, that debt can never be forgiven which is paid. For instance, suppose I owe a man a thousand pounds, and he should demand this debt from me, I must pay, or be imprisoned; my adversary is about to deliver me to the officer, that I may be cast into prison. I acknowledge, that the whole of this proceeding is just; but, in the interim, a third Person interposes, who formally loved me and demonstrates that he still loves me, in engaging {as my Surety} to pay my debt. "I love him," saith he, "he shall not go to jail, for I will pay the debt. Here I give my bond for the payment." This being a Man of great worth and credit, his bond is accepted; and, at the time appointed, {"the fulness of the time" Gal.4:4,} he pays off the bond to the uttermost farthing. Tell me, now, did my creditor forgive me my debt? I'm certain every wise man will answer in the negative. This then, is the true state of the case in hand; for the wrath of God might have been sent down upon us, as soon as ever we had our existence in a way of strict Justice; and it must have been inflicted, if Christ the Redeemer had not stepped in, and as our spiritual Moses, {our eternal Surety,} stood in the gap for us. {Ez.22:30} Absolute Justice was ready to apprehend us and commit us to the everlasting prison of darkness for our iniquities, but our glorious Head and Husband, Jesus Christ, who had loved us in our Supralapsarian state, as his bride and spouse, did as our Husband lay himself under an obligation to pay our debt; he became our Sponsor or Surety, and gave {to speak after the manner of men,} a bond for our debt, for all was placed to his account, and he did, at the time

appointed by the Father, dip his pen in his own blood, and cross the black lines of all our sins, by which he made to God a full payment of our debt. Tell me now, were my sins forgiven me in a strict and proper sense? This must be also answered in the negative; and God {give me leave to say} is more glorified thus, than if he had absolutely forgiven sin, without any Satisfaction, for then he must have forever let the honor of his Justice fall to the ground, which is in this way advanced and fully satisfied. Objection: This way totally eclipses the freedom of Divine Grace which is so abundantly displayed in the Holy Scriptures. Answer: It does not eclipse the glory of Free Grace as will appear as we consider in what sense God may be said to forgive the sins of his people. Our God may be said to forgive sin, with respect to us, though not with respect to Jesus Christ; for our parts, we never were able to pay anything, and yet on us he takes no vengeance. But God may also be said to pardon sin in another sense, as he was pleased from everlasting to find a satisfactory price to his own Justice; it was a price of his own finding, and a price of his own accepting; his Justice is satisfied and our debt is fully paid; yet it was his own free love and grace that found the matter and way, by and in which it was accomplished. In these and such like foreign and improper senses God may be said to pardon our sins, when he manifests the freedom of his Grace, for all our sins are fully pardoned and God hath nothing against us, because all things between him and us stand fair and clear; so that, in all our prayers to God for pardon of sin we do not ask Him to issue out a fresh act of pardon, but only to reveal his love and grace to us afresh, and to seal to our souls a sense of pardon in the blood of Christ. "Oh {saith a gracious and truly enlightened believer,} Lord, lead me to Christ's Blood and Satisfaction, or bring that blood and satisfaction home to my soul by which means I shall see that fury is not in thee towards me, and that will satisfy my conscience, that I am a pardoned man. O give me daily manifestations of pardoning grace into my heart, that my soul may sing thy praise, and triumph in thy Holy Name." In this light the soul perceives God to be at peace with it, and carries about, in itself, a sealed pardon into which it looks with a daily delight and pleasure, as knowing that its Redeemer hath removed all its sins out of God's judicial sight forever; so that, under such a dispensation, it is dispossessed of all fears that may arise from the apprehension of Divine Wrath, and it perseveres in a course of cheerful obedience to Christ, its glorious Husband, and the great Paymaster of its debt. Our Redeemer, having paid our debt, in the relation of an Husband hath thereby delivered us from the Law by a powerful divorcement, and married us unto himself in a sensible way; {"wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" Rom.7:4;} and we are now to live to Him, to be faithful and holy, cleaving to none but Him.