

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE PROOFS OF THE FIRST POSITION

But to pass this digression, and to come to my argument — namely, that men are justified from the curse of the law before God while sinners in themselves.

This is evident by what hath already been said; for if the justification of their persons is by, in, and through Christ; then it is not by, in, and through their own doings. Nor was Christ engaged in this work but of necessity, even because else there had not been salvation for the elect.

“Father” (saith he), “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,”
<483> Matthew 26:39.

If what be possible? Why, that my elect may be saved, and I not spill my blood. Wherefore he saith again, Christ ought to suffer. Christ must needs have suffered; for without shedding of blood is no remission of sin,
<426> Luke 24:26; <417B> Acts 17:3; <502> Hebrews 9:22.

2. We will now come to the present state and condition of those that are justified; I mean with respect to their own qualifications, and so prove the truth of this our great position. And this I will do,

(1.) By giving of you plain texts that discover it, and that consequently prove our point.

(2.) And after that, by giving of you reasons drawn from the texts.

For the first of these.

1. First,

“Speak not in thine heart” (no, not in thine heart) “after that the Lord thy God hath cast out thine enemies before thee, saying, For my righteousness do I possess the land:... not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go in

to possess the land... Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiff-necked people,” ^{<600>}Deuteronomy 9:4-6.

In these words, very pat for our purpose, two things are worthy our consideration.

1. The people here spoken to were the people of God; and so by God himself are they here twice acknowledged to be — “The Lord thy God, the Lord thy God.” So, then, the righteousness here intended, is not the righteousness that is in the world, but that which the people of God perform.

2. The righteousness here intended is not some, but all, and every whit of that the church performs to God: “Say not in thine heart, after the Lord hath brought thee in, it was for my righteousness.” No, all thy righteousness, from Egypt to Canaan, will not purchase Canaan for thee.

That this is true is evident, because it is thrice rejected — “Not for thy righteousness, not for thy righteousness, not for thy righteousness, dost thou possess the land.” Now if the righteousness of the people of God of old could not merit for them Canaan, which was but a type of heaven, how can the righteousness of the world now obtain heaven itself? I say again,

If godly men, as these were, could not by their works purchase the type of heaven, then must the ungodly be justified, if ever they be justified from the curse and sentence of the law, while sinners in themselves. The argument is clear; for if good men by what they do cannot merit the less, bad men by what they do cannot merit more.

Secondly,

“Remember me, O my God, for this; and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done,” ^{<631>}Nehemiah 13:14.

These words were spoken by holy Nehemiah, and that at the end of all the good that we read he did in the world. Also, the deeds here spoken of were deeds done for God, for his people, for his house, and for the offices thereof.

Yet godly Nehemiah durst not stand before God in these, nor yet suffer them to stand to his judgment by the law; but prays to God to be merciful both to him and them, and to spare him

“according to the multitude of his mercy,”

^{<432>}Nehemiah 13:22.

God blots out no good but for the sake of sin; and forasmuch as this man prays God would not blot out his, it is evident that he was conscious to himself that in his good works were sin. Now, I say, if a good man’s works are in danger of being overthrown because there is in them a tang [taint] of sin, how can bad men think to stand just before God in their works, which are in all parts, full of sin? Yea, if the works of a sanctified man are blameworthy, how shall the works of a bad man set him clear in the eyes of Divine justice?

Thirdly,

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we do all fade away as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away,” ^{<2316>}Isaiah 64:6.

In these words we have a relation both of persons and things.

1. Of persons. And they are a righteous people, a righteous people put all together — “We, we all are,” etc.
2. The condition of this people, even of all of them, take them at the best, are, and that by their own confession, “as an unclean thing.”
3. Again the things here attending this people are their good things, put down under this large character, “Righteousness, *all* our righteousness.” These expressions therefore comprehend all their religious duties, both before and after faith too. But what are all these righteousness? Why they are all as “filthy rags” when set before the justice of the law; yea, it is also confessed, and that by these people, that their iniquities, notwithstanding all their righteousness, like the wind, if grace prevent not, would “carry them away.” This being so, how is it possible for one that is in his sins to work himself into a spotless condition by works done before faith, by works done by natural abilities? or to perform a righteousness which is able to look God in the face, his law in the face, and to demand and obtain

the forgiveness of sins, and the life that is eternal? It cannot be: “men must therefore be justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves, or not at all.”

Fourthly,

“There is not a just man upon the earth, that doth good,
and sinneth not,” ^{<2072>}Ecclesiastes 7:20;
^{<1086>}1 Kings 8:46.

Although the words before are large, yet these seem far larger; there is not a man, not a just man, not a just man upon the earth, that doth good, and sinneth not. Now, if no good man, if no good man upon earth doth good, and sinneth not, then no good man upon earth can set himself by his own actions justified in the sight of God, for he has sin mixed with his good. How then shall a bad man, any bad man, the best bad man upon earth, think to set himself by his best things just in the sight of God? And if the tree makes the fruit either good or evil, then a bad tree (and a bad man is a bad tree) can bring forth no good fruit (^{<1076>}Matthew 7:16), how then shall such an one do that that shall cleanse him from his sin, and set him as “spotless before the face of God?”

Fifthly,

“Hearken to me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness:
I bring near my righteousness,” etc., ^{<2462>}Isaiah 46:12, 13.

- 1.** This call is general, and so proves, whatever men think of themselves that in the judgment of God there is none at all righteous men, as men are from being so.
- 2.** This general offer of righteousness, of the righteousness of God, declares that it is in vain for men to think to be set just and righteous before God by any other means.
- 3.** There is here also insinuated, that for him that thinks himself the worst, God has prepared a righteousness, and therefore would not have him despair of life that sees himself far from righteousness. From all these scriptures, therefore, it is manifest that “men must be justified from the curse of the law in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”

Sixthly,

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest,” ^{<412>}Matthew 11:28.

Here we have a laboring people, a people laboring for life; but by all their labor, you see, they cannot ease themselves; their burden still remains upon them; they yet are heavy laden. The load here is, doubtless guilt of sin, such as David had when he said by reason thereof “he was not able to look up;” ^{<383>}Psalms 38:3-5.

Hence, therefore, you have an experiment set before you, of those that are trying what they can do for life; but behold, the more they stir, the more they sink under the weight of the burden that lies upon them.

And the conclusion — to wit, Christ’s call to them to come to him for rest — declares that, in his judgment, rest was not to be had elsewhere. And I think one may with as much safety adhere to Christ’s judgment as to any man’s alive; wherefore “men must be justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”

Seventhly

“There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doth good, no, not one,” ^{<510>}Romans 3:10-12.

These words have respect to a righteousness which is justified by the law; and they conclude that none by his own performances is righteous with such a righteousness; and it is concluded from five reasons —

- 1.** Because they are not good; for a man must be good before he doth good, and perfectly good before he doth good and sinneth not.
- 2.** Because they understand not. How then should they do good? for a man must know before he does, else how should he divert himself to do?
- 3.** Because they want a heart, they seek not after God according to the way of his own appointment.
- 4.** They are all gone out of the way; how then can they walk therein?

5. They are together become unprofitable; what worth or value then can there be in any of their doings?

These are the reasons by which he proveth that there is “none righteous, no, not one.” And the reasons are weighty; for by them he proves the tree is not good; how then can it yield good fruit?

Now, as he concludes from these five reasons that not one indeed is righteous, so he concludes by five more that none can do good to make him so —

- 1.** For that internally they are as an open sepulcher, as full of dead men’s bones; their minds and consciences are defiled; how then can sweet and good proceed from thence? ^{<4833>}Romans 13; ^{<4827>}Matthew 23:27; ^{<5015>}Titus 1:15; ^{<2412>}Isaiah 44:12; ^{<2470>}Jeremiah 17:9.
- 2.** Their throat is filled with this stink; all their vocal duties therefore smell thereof.
- 3.** Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; how then can there be found one word that should please God?
- 4.** Their tongue, which should present their praise to God, has been used to work deceit; how then, until it is made a new one, should it speak in righteousness?
- 5.** The poison of asps is under their lips, therefore whatever comes from them, must be polluted.

Thus, you see, he sets forth their internal part; which being a true report, as to be sure it is, it is impossible that any good should so much as be framed in such an inward part, or come clean out of such a throat by such a tongue through such lips as these, ^{<4811>}Romans 3:11-14.

And yet this is not all: he also proves, and that by five reasons more, that it is not possible they should do good —

- 1.** “Their feet are swift to shed blood,” ^{<4815>}Romans 3:15. This implies an inclination, an inward inclination to evil courses; a quickness of motion to do evil, but a backwardness to do good.

2. “Destruction and misery are in their ways,” ^{<B16>}Romans 3:16. Take “ways” for their “doings,” and in the best of them destruction lurks, and misery yet follows them at the heels.
3. “The way of peace they have not known,” ^{<B17>}Romans 3:17; that is far above out of their sight. Wherefore the labor of these foolish ones will weary every one of them, because “they know not the way that goes to the city.”
4. “There is no fear of God before their eyes,” ^{<B18>}Romans 3:18. How then can they do anything with that godly reverence of his holy Majesty that is and must be essential to every good work? for to do things, but not in God’s fear, to what will it amount? will it avail?
5. All this while they are under a law that calls for works that are perfectly good, that will accept of none but what are perfectly good, and that will certainly condemn them because they neither are nor can be perfectly good: “For whatsoever things the law saith, it saith it to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God,” ^{<B19>}Romans 3:19.

Thus you see that Paul here proves by fifteen reasons that none are, nor can be, righteous before God by works that they can do; therefore “men must be justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”

Eighthly,

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested,
being witnessed by the law and the prophets,” etc.,
^{<B21>}Romans 3:21.

This text utterly excludes the law — what law? The law of works, the moral law (^{<B22>}Romans 3:27) — and makes mention of another righteousness, even a righteousness of God; for the righteousness of the law is the righteousness of men, “men’s own righteousness,” ^{<B23>}Philippians 3:9.

Now, if the law, as to a justifying righteousness, is rejected, then the very matter upon and by which man should work is rejected; and if so, then he must be justified by the righteousness of God, or not at all; for he must be

justified by a righteousness that is without the law; to wit, the righteousness of God. Now this righteousness of God, whatever it is, to be sure it is not a righteousness that flows from men; for that, as I said, is rejected, and the righteousness of God opposed unto it, being called a righteousness that is without the law, without our personal obedience to it.

The righteousness of God, or a righteousness of God's completing, a righteousness of God's bestowing, a righteousness that God also gives unto, and puts upon, all them that believe (verse 22), a righteousness that stands in the works of Christ, and that is imputed both by the grace and justice of God, ^{<818>}Romans 3:24-26.

Where, now, is room for man's righteousness, either in the whole, or as to any part thereof? I say, where, as to justification with God?

Ninthly, "What shall we say, then, that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?"

Now the apostle is at the root of the matter; for Abraham is counted the father of the faithful; consequently the man whose way of attaining justification must needs be exemplary to all the children of Abraham.

Now the question is, How Abraham found? how he found that which some of his children sought and missed? ^{<819>}Romans 9:32 — that is, how he found justifying righteousness; for it was that which Israel sought, and attained not unto, ^{<810>}Romans 11:7.

"Did he find it (saith Paul) by the flesh?" or, as he was in the flesh? or, by acts and works of the flesh? But what are they? Why, the next verse tells you — "they are the works of the law."

If Abraham was justified by works, that is, as pertaining to the flesh; for the works of the law are none other but the best sort of the works of the flesh. And so Paul calls all they that he had before his conversion to Christ: "If any other man (saith he) thinketh he hath whereof he may trust in the flesh, I more." And then he counteth up several of his privileges, to which he at last adjoineth the righteousness of the moral law, saying,

"Touching the righteousness which is in the law, I was blameless,"
^{<810>}Philippians 3:4-6.

And it is proper to call the righteousness of the law the work of the flesh (~~FOR~~ 2 Corinthians 3:8), because it is the work of a man, of a man in the flesh; for the Holy Ghost doth not attend the law, or the work thereof, as to this, in man, as man; that has confined itself to another ministration, whose glorious name it bears.

I say, it is proper to call the works of the law the works of the flesh (~~SUB~~ James 3:10), because they are done by that selfsame nature in and out of which comes all those things that are more grossly so called, ~~FOR~~ Galatians 5:19, 20 — to wit, from the corrupt fountain of fallen man’s polluted nature.

This, saith he, was not the righteousness by which Abraham found justification with God — “For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness,” see ~~FOR~~ Romans 4:2-11. This “believing” is also set in flat opposition to “works,” and to the “law of works;” wherefore, upon pain of great contempt to God, it must not be reckoned as a work to justify withal, but rather as that which receiveth and applieth that righteousness.

From all this, therefore, it is manifest “that men must be justified from the curse of the law in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.” But,

Tenthly,

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace,
but of debt,” ~~FOR~~ Romans 4:4.

These words do not only back what went before, as to the rejection of the law for righteousness as to justification with God; but supposing the law was of force to justify, life must not be admitted to come that way, because of the evil consequences that will unavoidably flow therefrom.

First, By this means, grace, and justification by grace, would be rejected; and that would be a foul business; it would not be reckoned of grace.

Secondly, By this, God would become the debtor, and so the underling; and so we in this the more honorable. It would not be reckoned of grace, but of debt: and what would follow from hence? Why,

1. By this we should frustrate the design of Heaven, which is, to justify us freely by grace, through a redemption brought in by Christ, ~~ROM~~Romans 3:24-26; ~~EPH~~Ephesians 2:8-13.

2. By this we should make ourselves the saviors, and jostle Christ quite out of doors, ~~Gal~~Galatians 5:2-4.

3. We should have heaven at our own disposal, as a debt, not by promise, and so not be beholden to God for it, ~~Gal~~Galatians 3:18. It must, then, be of grace, not of works, for the preventing of these evils. Again; it must not be of works, because if it should, then God would be the debtor, and we the creditor. Now much blasphemy would flow from hence; as,

First, God himself would not be his own to dispose of; for the inheritance being God, as well as his kingdom — for so it is written, “Heirs of God,” ~~ROM~~Romans 8:17 — himself, I say, must needs be our purchase.

Secondly, If so, then we have right to dispose of him, of his kingdom and glory, and all; (“Be astonished, O heavens, at this!”) for if he be ours by works, then he is ours of debt; if he be ours of debt, then he is ours by purchase; and then, again, if so, he is no longer his own, but ours, and at our disposal, etc.

Therefore, for these reasons, were there sufficiency in our personal works to justify us, it would be even inconsistent with the being of God to suffer it.

So, then, “men are justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”

Eleventhly,

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,”

~~ROM~~Romans 4:5.

These words shew how we must stand just in the sight of God from the curse of the law, both as it respecteth justification itself, as also the instrument or means that receiveth that righteousness which justifieth.

First, As for that righteousness that justifieth, it is not personal performances in us; for the person here justified stands, in that respect, as one that worketh not, as one that is ungodly.

Secondly, As it respecteth the instrument that receiveth it, that faith, as in the point of justifying righteousness, will not work, but believe, but receive the works and righteousness of another; for works and faith in this are set in opposition — “He doth not work, he doth believe,” ^{<BIB>}Galatians 3:12. He worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth us, ungodly. As Paul also saith in another place, “The law is not of faith.” And again; Works saith on this wise; faith, far different. The law saith, Do this, and live. But the doctrine of faith saith,

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” etc., ^{<BIB>}Romans 10:5, 10.

Objection: But faith is counted for righteousness.

Answer: True; but yet consider, that by faith we do oft understand the doctrine of remission of sins, as well as the act of believing.

But again; faith when it hath received the Lord Jesus, it hath done that which pleaseth God; therefore, the very act of believing is the most noble in the world; believing sets the crown upon the head of grace; it sets its seal to the truth of the sufficiency of the righteousness of Christ (^{<BIB>}John 3:33), and giveth all the glory to God; and therefore it is a righteous act: but Christ himself he is the “Righteousness that justifieth,” ^{<BIB>}Romans 4:20.

Besides, faith is a relative act, and hath its relation as such: its relation is the righteousness that justifieth, which is therefore called the righteousness of faith, or that with which faith hath to do, ^{<BIB>}Romans 10:6. Separate these two, and justification cannot be, because faith now wants his righteousness. And hence it is you have so often such sayings as these —

“He that believeth in me — he that believeth on him — believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,”
^{<BIB>}John 6:35-40.

Faith, then, as separate from Christ, doth nothing; nothing neither with God nor man; because it wants its relative object — but let it go to the Lord Jesus; let it behold him as dying, etc., and it fetches righteousness, and life, and peace out of the virtue of his blood, etc., ~~411D~~ Acts 10:29, 31, 33; or rather, sees it there as sufficient for me to stand just thereby in the sight of Eternal Justice:

“For him hath God set forth to be a propitiation through faith (belief) in his blood, with intent to justify him that believeth in Jesus,” ~~412S~~ Romans 3:25, 26.

Twelfthly,

“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness without works,” ~~413D~~ Romans 4:6.

Did our adversaries understand this one text, they would not so boldly affirm, as they do, that the words, “impute, imputed, imputeth, imputing,” etc., are not used in scripture but to express men really and personally to be that which is imputed unto them; for men are not really and personally *faith*, yet faith is imputed to men; nay, they are not really and personally *sin*, nor really and personally *righteousness*, yet these are imputed to men: so, then, both good things and bad may sometimes be imputed to men, yet themselves be really and personally neither.

But to come to the point: what righteousness hath that man that hath no works? Doubtless none of his own; yet God imputeth righteousness to him. Yea, what works of that man doth God impute to him that he yet justifies as ungodly?

Further, He that hath works as to justification from the curse before God, not one of them is regarded of God; so, then, it mattereth not whether thou hast righteousness of thine own or none.

“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works.” Man’s blessedness, then, the blessedness of justification from the curse in the sight of God, lieth not in good works done by us, either before or after faith received, but in a righteousness which God imputeth without works; as we work not, as we are ungodly. “Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered,” ~~414D~~ Romans 4:7. To

forgive and to cover are acts of mercy, not the cause of our merit. Besides, where sin is real, there can be no perfect righteousness; but the way of justification must be through perfect righteousness, therefore by another than our own, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin,” ~~ROM~~ Romans 4:8.

The first cause, then, of justification before God dependeth upon the will of God, who will justify because he will; therefore the meritorious cause must also be of his own providing, else his will cannot herein be absolute; for if justification depend upon our personal performances, then not upon the will of God. He may not have mercy upon whom he will, but on whom man’s righteousness will give him leave, ~~ROM~~ Romans 9:15, 18. But his will, not ours, must rule here; therefore his righteousness, and his only. So, then, “men are justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”