

CHAPTER 4

SEVERAL REASONS ADDUCED FOR THIS

I should now come to the second conclusion — viz., that this can be done by no other righteousness than that long ago performed by, and remaining with, the person of Christ. But before I speak to that, I will a little further press this, by urging for it several reasons.

The first reason.

First, Men must be justified from the curse while sinners in themselves, because by nature all are under sin —

“All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. He hath concluded all in unbelief; he hath concluded all under sin,”

<BIB> Romans 3:23; <BIB> Romans 11:32; <BIB> Galatians 3:22.

Now having sinned, they are in body and soul defiled, and become an unclean thing. Wherefore, whatever they touch with an intent to work out righteousness thereby, they defile that also. And hence, as I have said, all the righteousness they seek to accomplish is but as a menstruous cloth and filthy rags; therefore they are sinners still,” <BIB> Titus 1:15; <BIB> Leviticus 15:11; <BIB> Isaiah 64:6.

Indeed, to some men’s thinking, the Pharisee is holier than the Publican; but in God’s sight, in the eyes of Divine justice, they stand alike condemned — “All have sinned;” there is the poison. Therefore, as to God without Christ all throats are an open sepulcher, <BIB> Matthew 23:27; <BIB> Romans 3:13.

The world in general is divided into two sorts of sinners —

1. The open profane.
2. The man that seeks life by the works of the law. The profane is judged by all; but the other by a few. Oh! but God judgeth him.

First, For a hypocrite; because that notwithstanding he hath sinned, he would be thought to be good and righteous. And hence it is that Christ calls such kind of holy ones, “Pharisees hypocrites, Pharisees hypocrites,” because by their gay outside they deceived those that beheld them. But, saith he, “God sees your hearts;” you are but like “painted sepulchers, within you are full of dead men’s bones,” ^{3012} Proverbs 30:12; ^{4237} Matthew 23:27-30; ^{2123} Luke 11:24; ^{2365} Luke 16:15. Such is the root from whence flows all their righteousness. But doth the blind Pharisee think his state is such? No; his thoughts of himself are far otherwise —

“God, I thank thee (saith he) I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this Publican,” ^{2381} Luke 18:11, 12.

Ay, but still God judgeth him for a hypocrite.

Secondly, God judgeth him for one that spurneth against Christ, even by every such work he doth. And hence it is, when Paul was converted to Jesus Christ, that he calls the righteousness he had before, madness, blasphemy, injury; because what he did to save himself by works was in direct opposition to grace by Jesus Christ, ^{3080} Philippians 3:7, 8; ^{4238} Acts 23:3, 4; ^{4206} Acts 26:4; ^{5014} 1 Timothy 1:14, 15.

Behold, then, the evil that is in a man’s own righteousness!

1. It curseth and condemneth the righteousness of Christ.
2. It blindeth the man from seeing his misery.
3. It hardeneth his heart against his own salvation.

Thirdly, But again, God judgeth such for those that condemn him of foolishness —

“The preaching of the cross,” that is, Christ crucified, “is to them that perish foolishness,” ^{4018} 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23.

What! saith the merit-monger (mine ears have heard all this), will you look for life by the obedience of another man? Will you trust to the blood that was shed upon the cross, that run down to the ground, and perished in the dust? Thus deridingly they scoff at, stumble upon, and are taken in the gin that attends the gospel; not to salvation, but to their condemnation,

^{<2084}Isaiah 8:14; because they have condemned the Just, that they might justify their own filthy righteousness.

But, I say, if all have sinned, if all are defiled, if the best of a man's righteousness be but madness, blasphemy, injury; if for their righteousness they are judged hypocrites, condemned as opposers of the gospel, and as such have counted God foolish for sending his Son into the world; then must the best of "men be justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves;" because they still stand guilty in the sight of God, their hearts are also still filthy infected —

"Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before *me*, saith the Lord God,"

^{<2122}Jeremiah 2:22.

It stands marked *still* before God. So, then, what esteem soever men have of the righteousness of the world, yet God accounts it horrible wickedness, and the greatest enemy that Jesus hath. Wherefore, this vine is the vine of Sodom; these clusters are the clusters of Gomorrah; these grapes are grapes of gall; these clusters are bitter, they are the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps, ^{<4085}Matthew 3:7; 23. No marvel, then, if John in his ministry gives the first rebuke and jostle to such, still calling them serpents and vipers, and concluding it is almost impossible they should escape the damnation of hell; for of all sin, man's own righteousness in special bids defiance to Jesus Christ.

The second reason.

Secondly, A second reason why men must stand just in the sight of God from the curse while sinners in themselves is, because of the exactions of the law. For were it granted that men's good works arose from a holy root, and were perfect in their kind, yet the demand of the law — for that is still beyond them — would leave them sinners before the justice of God, ^{<6081}1 Peter 2:5; ^{<6074}Revelation 7:14-16; ^{<3838}Hebrews 13:8. And hence it is that holy men stand just in the sight of God from the curse, yet dare not offer their gifts by the law, but through Jesus Christ, knowing that not only their persons, but their spiritual service also, would else be rejected of the heavenly Majesty.

For the law is itself so perfectly holy and good as not to admit of the least failure, either in the matter or manner of obedience —

“Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. For they that shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, are guilty of all, and convicted of the law as transgressors,” ^{<480>}Galatians 3:10; ^{<500>}James 2:9, 10.

“Tribulation, therefore, and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile,” ^{<480>}Romans 2:9.

And observe, the law leaveth thee not to thy choice, *when*, or when *not*, to begin to keep it, but requireth thy obedience so soon as concerned, exactly, both as to the matter and manner, and that before thou hast sinned against it; for the first sin breaks the law, ^{<480>}John 3:18. Now, if thou sinnest before thou beginnest to do, thou art found by the law a transgressor, and so standest by that convicted of sin; so, then, all thy after-acts of righteousness are but the righteousness of a sinner, of one whom the law hath condemned already.

“The law is spiritual, but thou art carnal, sold under sin,”
^{<474>}Romans 7:14.

Besides, the law being absolutely perfect, doth not only respect the matter and manner as to outward acts, but also the rise and root, the heart, from whence they flow; and an impediment there spoils all, were the executive part never so good —

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, with *all* thy soul, with *all* thy mind, and with *all* thy strength,”
^{<423>}Mark 12:30.

Mark the repetition, with all, with all, with all, with all; with all thy heart, with all thy soul, in all things, at all times, else thou hadst as good do nothing. But

“every imagination of the thought of the heart of man is only evil continually,” ^{<0005>}Genesis 6:5.

The margin hath it, the “whole imagination, the purposes, and desires;” so that a good root is here wanting.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;
who can know it?” ^{<247B>}Jeremiah 17:9.

What thoughts, words, or actions can be clean, sufficiently to answer a perfect law, that flows from this original; it is impossible. “Men must therefore be justified from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves.”

But further yet to open the case. There are several things that make it impossible that a man should stand just in the sight of God but while sinful in himself.

First, Because the law under which he at present stands, holds him under the dominion of sin; for sin by the law hath dominion over all that are under the law, ^{<414>}Romans 6:14. Dominion, I say, both as to guilt and filth. Guilt hath dominion over him, because he is under the curse; and filth, because the law giveth him no power, neither can he by it deliver his soul. And for this cause it is that it is called beggarly, weak, unprofitable; imposing duty, but giving no strength, ^{<40B>}Galatians 3:2; ^{<40B>}Galatians 4:9; expecting the duty should be complete, yet bendeth not the heart to do the work; to do it, I say, as is required, ^{<40B>}Romans 8:3. And hence it is again that it is called a void of words, ^{<824>}Hebrews 12:14; for as words that are barely such are void of spirit and quickening life, so are the impositions of the law of works. Thus far, therefore, the man remains a sinner. But,

Secondly, The law is so far from giving life or strength to do it, that it doth quite the contrary. For,

1. It weakeneth, it discourageth, and dishearteneth the sinner, especially when it shews itself in its glory; for then it is the ministration of death, and killeth all the world. When Israel saw this, they fled from the face of God; they could not endure that which was commanded; yea, so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I exceedingly fear and quake,” ^{<0208>}Exodus 20:18, 19; ^{<820>}Hebrews 12:20, 21. Yea, almost forty years after, Moses stood amazed to find himself and Israel yet alive — “Did ever people,” said he,

“hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire,
as thou hast done, and live?” ^{<0432>}Deuteronomy 4:32, 33.

Alas! he who boasteth himself in the works of the law, he doth not hear the law; when that speaks, it shakes Mount Sinai, and writeth death upon all faces, and makes the church itself cry out, A mediator! else we die, ^{}Exodus 20:19; ^{}Deuteronomy 5:25-27; 18:15, 19.

2. It doth not only thus discourage, but abundantly increaseth every sin.

(1.) Sin takes the advantage of being by the law; the motions of sin are by the law. Where no law is, there is no transgression, ^{}Romans 4:15; ^{}Romans 7:5.

(2.) Sin takes an occasion to live by the law:

“When the commandment came, sin revived;
for without the law, sin is dead,” ^{}Romans 7:8, 9.

(3.) Sin takes an occasion to multiply by the law:

“The law entered, that the offense might abound,”
^{}Romans 5:20.

(4.) “And the strength of sin is the law,” ^{}1 Corinthians 15:56.

(5.) “Sin by the commandment is become” outrageous, “exceeding sinful,” ^{}Romans 7:7, 8. “What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law, sin is dead.”

These things, then, are not infused or operated by the law from its own nature or doctrine, but are occasioned by the meeting of, and having to do with, a thing directly opposite. “The law is spiritual, I am carnal;” therefore every imposition is rejected and rebelled against. Strike a steel against a flint, and the fire flies about you; strike the law against a carnal heart, and sin appears, sin multiplies, sin rageth, sin is strengthened. And hence ariseth all these doubts, murmurings, and sinful complainings that are found in the hearts of the people of God; they have too much to do with the law; the law of works is now in the conscience, imposing duty upon the carnal part. This is the reason of the noise that you hear, and of

the sin that you see, and of the horror that you feel in your own souls when tempted. But to pass this digression.

The law, then, having to do with carnal men, by this they become worse sinners than before; for their heart now recoileth desperately, opposeth blasphemously; it giveth way to despair; and then, to conclude, there is no hope for hereafter; and so goeth on in a sordid, ungodly course of life, till his time is come to die and be damned, unless a miracle of grace prevent. From all this I conclude, that “a man cannot stand just from the curse in the sight of God but while sinful in himself.” But,

Thirdly, As the law giveth neither strength nor life to keep it, so it neither giveth nor worketh repentance unto life if thou break it — Do this and live, break it and die; this is the voice of the law. All the repentance that such men have, it is but that of themselves, the sorrow of the world (^{<4070>}2 Corinthians 7:10) that endeth in death, as Cain’s and Judas’s did, even such a repentance as must be repented of either here or ill hell-fire.

Fourthly, As it giveth none, so it accepteth none of them that are under the law, ^{<4080>}Galatians 5:9. Sin and die, is for ever its language; there is no middle way in the law; they must bear their judgment, whosoever they be, that stand and fall to the law. Therefore Cain was a vagabond still, and Judas hangeth himself; their repentance could not save them, they fell headlong under the law, ^{<0040>}Genesis 4:9-11; ^{<4170>}Matthew 27:3. The law stays no man from the due reward of his deeds; it hath no ears to hear nor heart to pity its penitent ones.

Fifthly, By the law, God will shew no mercy; for, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness,” is the tenor of another covenant, ^{<3000>}Hebrews 8:9, 10, etc. But by the law I regard them not, saith the Lord. For,

Sixthly, All the promises annexed to the law are by the first sin null and void. Though then a man should live a thousand years twice told, and all that while fulfill the law, yet having sinned first, he is not at all the better. Our legalists, then, begin to talk too soon of having life by the law: let them first begin without sin, and so throughout continue to death, and then if God will save them, not by Christ, but works, contrary to the covenant of grace, they may hope to go to heaven.

But, lastly, to come close to the point. Thou hast sinned; the law now calls for passive as well as active obedience; yea, great contentedness in all thou sufferest for thy transgressing against the law. So, then, wilt thou live by the law? Fulfil it, then, perfectly till death, and afterwards go to hell and be damned, and abide there till the law and curse for thy sin be satisfied for; and then, but not till then, thou shalt have life by the law.

Tell me now, you that desire to be under the law, can you fulfill all the commands of the law, and after answer all its demands? Can you grapple with the judgment of God? Can you wrestle with the Almighty? Are you stronger than he that made the heavens, and that holdeth angels in everlasting chains?

“Can thine heart endure, or can thy hands be strong in the day that I shall deal with thee? I, saith the Lord, have spoken it; I will do it,” ^{<3214>}Ezekiel 22:14.

Oh, it cannot be! “These must go away into everlasting punishment,” ^{<1254>}Matthew 25:46.

So, then, “men must stand just from the curse in the sight of God while sinners in themselves,” or not at all.

Objection: But the apostle saith,

“That the doers of the law shall be justified,”
^{<8213>}Romans 2:13,

plainly intimating that, notwithstanding all you say, some by doing the law may stand just before God thereby; and if so, then Christ fulfilled it for us but as our example.

Answer The consequences are not true; for by these words, “The doers of the law shall be justified,” there is no more proof of a possibility of saving thyself by the law than there is by these:

“For by the works of the law shall no man living be justified in his sight,” ^{<4216>}Galatians 2:16.

The intent, then, of the text objected is not to prove a possibility of man’s salvation by the law, but to insinuate rather an impossibility, by asserting

what perfections the law requireth. And were I to argue against the pretended sufficiency of man's own righteousness, I would choose to frame mine argument upon such a place as this — “The hearers of the law are not just before God;” therefore the breakers of the law are not just before God; not just, I say, by the law; but all have sinned and broken the law; therefore none by the law are just before God. For if all stand guilty of sin by the law, then that law that judgeth them sinners cannot justify them before God. And what if the apostle had said, “Blessed are they that continue in all things,” instead of pronouncing a curse for the contrary, the conclusion had been the same; for where the blessing is pronounced, he is not the better that breaks the condition; and where the curse is pronounced, he is not the worse that keeps it. But neither doth the blessing nor curse in the law intend a supposition that men may be just by the law, but rather to shew the perfection of the law, and that though a blessing be annexed thereto, no man by it can obtain that blessing; for not the hearers of the law are justified before God, but the doers, when they do it, shall be justified. None but doers can by it be just before God; but none do the law, no, not one, ^{481B}Romans 3:10, 11; therefore none by it can stand just before God.

And whereas it is said Christ kept the law as our example, that we by keeping it might get to heaven, as he, it is false, as before was shewn —

“He is the end of the law,” or, hath perfectly finished it,
“for righteousness to every one that believeth,”

^{481B}Romans 10:3, 4.

But a little to travel with this objection: no man can keep the moral law as Christ, unless he be first without sin, as Christ; unless he be God and man, as Christ.

And again; Christ cannot be our pattern in keeping the law for life, because of the disproportion that is between him and us; for if we do it as he when yet we are weaker than he, what is this but to outvie, outdo, and go beyond Christ? Wherefore we, not he, have our lives exemplary: exemplary, I say, to him; for who doth the greatest work, they that take it in hand in full strength, as Christ; or he that takes it in hand in weakness, as we? Doubtless the last, if he fulfils it as Christ. So, then, by this doctrine, while we call ourselves his scholars, we make ourselves indeed

the masters. But I challenge all the angels in heaven, let them but first sin as we have done, to fulfill the law, as Christ, if they can.

But again; if Christ be our pattern in keeping the law for life from the curse before God, then Christ fulfilled the law for himself; if so, he was imperfect before he fulfilled it. And how far short this is of blasphemy let sober Christians judge; for the righteousness he fulfilled was to justify from sin; but if it was not to justify us from ours, you know what remaineth, ^{<208>}Daniel 9:26; ^{<208>}Isaiah 53:8-10.

But when must we conclude we have kept the law? Not when we begin, because we have sinned first; nor when we are in the middle, for we may afterwards miscarry. But what if a man in this his progress hath one sinful thought? I query, is it possible to come up to the pattern for justification with God? If yea, then Christ had such; if no, then who can fulfill the law as he?

But should I grant that which is indeed impossible — namely, that thou art justified by the law; what then? Art thou now in the favor of God? No, thou art fallen by this thy perfection from the love and mercy of God:

“Whosoever of you are justified by the law are fallen from grace,”
^{<808>}Galatians 5:4, 5.

He speaks not this to them that are doing, but to such as think they have done it, and shews that the blessing that these have got thereby is to fall from the favor of God. Being fallen from grace, Christ profits them nothing, and so they still stand debtors to do the whole law.

So, then, they must not be saved by God’s mercy, nor Christ’s merits, but alone by the works of the law. But what should such men do in that kingdom that comes by gift, where grace and mercy reigns? Yea, what should they do among that company that are saved alone by grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ? Let them go to that kingdom that God hath prepared for them that are fallen from grace.

“Cast out the bond-woman, with her son; for he shall not be heir with the son of the promise,” ^{<808>}Galatians 4:30.

But to pass this objection. Before I come to the next reason, I shall yet for the further clearing of this urge these scriptures more. The first is that in

^{<B10}Galatians 3:10, “As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse.” Behold, how boldly Paul asserts it! And observe it, he saith not here, so many as sin against the law (though that be true), but, “As many as are of the *works* of the law.” But what, then, are the works of the law? Not whoredom, murder, theft, and the like; but works that are holy and good, the works commanded in the ten commandments, as to love God, abhor idols, reverence the name of God, keeping the sabbath, honoring thy parents, abstaining from adultery, murder, theft, false-witness, and not to covet what is thy neighbor’s — these are the works of the law. Now he, saith Paul, that is *of* these is under the curse of God. But what is it then to be *of* these? Why, to be found in the practice of them, and there resting; this is the man that is under the curse: not because the works of the law are wicked in themselves, but because the man that is in the practice of them comes short of answering the exactness of them, and therefore dies for his imperfections, ^{<B17}Romans 2:17.

The second scripture is that of the 11th verse of the same chapter, “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.” These words, “the just shall live by faith,” are taken out of the Old Testament, and are thrice used by this apostle in the New.

- 1.** To shew that nothing of the gospel can be apprehended but by faith: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” “As it is written, The just shall live by faith,” ^{<B17}Romans 1:17; ^{<S18}Hebrews 10:38.
- 2.** To shew that the way to have relief and succor under temptation is then to live by faith: “Now the just shall live by faith.”
- 3.** But in this of the Galatians it is urged to shew that how holy and just soever men be in themselves, yet as such they are dead, and condemned to death by the law before God. “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.”

The word “just,” therefore, in this place in special, respecteth a man that is just, or that so esteems himself by the law, and is here considered in a double capacity.

First, What he is before men.

Secondly, What he is before God.

1. As he stands before men, he is just by the law; as Paul before his conversion, <sup>Philippians 3:4.
2. As he stands in the sight of God; so, without the faith of Christ, he cannot be just, as is evident; for the just shall live, not by his justice or righteousness by the law.

This is the true intent of this place,

1. Because they carry with them a supposition that the just here intended may be excluded life, he falling within the rejection asserted within the first part of the verse. No man is just by the law in the sight of God; for “the just shall live by faith”: his justice cannot make him live, he must live by the faith of Christ. Again,
2. The words are a reason dissuasive, urged to put a stop to those that are seeking life by the law; as if the apostle had said, Ye Galatians! what are you doing? Would you be saved by keeping the law? Would you stand just before God thereby? Do you not hear the prophets, how they press faith in Jesus, and life by faith in him? Come, I will reason with you,
1. By way of supposition. Were it granted that you all loved the law, yet that for life will avail you nothing; for, “the just shall live by faith.”
2. Were it granted that you kept the law, and that no man on earth could accuse you; were you therefore just before God? No; neither can you live by works before him; for “the just shall live by faith.” Why not live before him? Because when we have done our best, and are applauded of all the world for just, yet then God sees sin in our hearts:

“He putteth no trust in his saints;
yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight,” <sup>Job 4:18.

There is then a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, if he want the faith of Christ, <sup>Job 15:15; for that no man is “justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident; for, the just shall live by faith;” and the law is not of faith.

The third scripture is this —

“We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,” ^{<R015>}Galatians 2:15, 16.

These words are the result of the experienced Christians in the primitive times; yea, of those among them that had given up themselves before to the law, to get life and heaven thereby; the result, I say, of believing Jews — we who are Jews by nature. But how are they distinguished from the Gentiles?

“Why, they are such that rest in the law, and make their boast of God; that know his will, and approve the things that are excellent; that are guides to the blind, and a light to them that are in darkness; that are instructors of the foolish, teachers of babes, and which have the form of knowledge, and of the truth of the law,” ^{<R017>}Romans 2:17-19.

How far these attained we find by that of the Pharisee — I pray, I fast, I give tithes of all; and by the young man in the gospel —

“All these have I kept from my youth up,” ^{<R011>}Luke 18:11, 12;

and by that of Paul — “Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless,” ^{<R013>}Philippians 3. This was the Jew by nature, to do and trust in this. Now these attaining afterwards the sound knowledge of sin, the depravedness of nature, and the exactions of the law, fled from the command of the law to the Lord Jesus for life. We know it; we that are taught of God, and that have found it by sad experience, we, even we, have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.

Surely, if righteousness had come by the law, Paul and the Jews had found it, they being by many privileges far better than the sinners of the Gentiles; but these, when they received the word of the gospel, even these now fly to Christ from the law, that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.

To conclude this. If righteous men, through the knowledge of the gospel, are made to leave the law of God, as despairing of life thereby, surely righteousness is not to be found in the law; I mean that which can justify thee before God from the curse who livest and walkest in the law.

I shall therefore end this second reason with what I have said before — “Men must be justified from the curse in the *sight* of God while sinful in themselves.”

THE THIRD REASON.

Thirdly, Another reason why not one under heaven can be justified by the law, or by his own personal performances to it, is, because since sin was in the world God hath rejected the law and the works thereof for life, ^{<B17D>}Romans 7:10.

It is true, before man had sinned, it was ordained to be unto life; but since, and because of sin, the God of love gave the word of grace. Take the law, then, as God hath established it — to wit, to condemn all flesh, ^{<B1E2>}Galatians 3:21; and then there is room for the promise and the law, the one to kill, the other to heal; and so the law is not against the promises, ^{<B1H4>}Romans 4:14; but make the law a justifier, and faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect; and the everlasting gospel, by so doing, thou endeavorest to root out of the world.

Methinks, since it hath pleased God to reject the law and the righteousness thereof for life, such dust and ashes as we are should strive to consent to his holy will, especially when in the room of this of works there is established a better covenant, and that upon better promises.

The Lord hath rejected the law, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for finding fault with them of the law,

“The days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant
with the house of Israel,” etc., ^{<B1K0F>}Hebrews 8:7, 8.

Give God leave to find fault with us, and to condemn our personal performances to death, as to our justification before him thereby; let him do it, I say; and the rather, because he doth by the gospel present us with a better. And certainly, if ever he be pleased with us, it will be when he findeth us in that righteousness that is of his own appointing.