

XVII

TESTIMONIES OUT OF THE EVANGELISTS CONSIDERED

Testimonies out of the evangelists considered

- Design of our Savior's sermon on the mount
- The purity and penalty of the law vindicated by him
- Arguments from thence
- Luke 18:9-14, the parable of the Pharisee and publican explained and applied to the present argument
- Testimonies out of the gospel by John, chap. 1:12; 3:14-18, etc.

The reasons why the doctrine of justification by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ is more fully and clearly delivered in the following writings of the New Testament than it is in those of the evangelists, who wrote the history of the life and death of Christ, have been before declared; but yet in them also it is sufficiently attested, as unto the state of the church before the death and resurrection of Christ, which is represented in them. Some few of the many testimonies which may be pleaded out of their writings unto that purpose I shall consider, first, —

The principal design of our blessed Savior's sermon, especially that part of it which is recorded, Matthew 5, is to declare the true nature of righteousness before God. The scribes and Pharisees, from a bondage unto whose doctrines he designed to vindicate the consciences of those that heard him, placed all our righteousness before God in the works of the law, or men's own obedience thereunto. This they taught the people, and hereon they justified themselves, as he charges them, Luke 16:15, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God," — as in this sermon he makes it evident; and all those who were under their conduct did seek to "establish their own righteousness, as it were by the works of the law," Romans 9:32; 10:3. But yet were they convinced in their own consciences that they could not attain unto the law of righteousness, or unto that perfection of obedience which the law did

require. Yet would they not forego their proud, fond imagination of justification by their own righteousness; but, as the manner of all men is in the same case, sought out other inventions to relieve them against their convictions; for unto this end they corrupted the whole law by their false glosses and interpretations, to bring down and debase the sense of it, unto what they boasted in themselves to perform. So does he in whom our Savior gives an instance of the principle and practice of the whole society, by way of a parable, Luke 18:11, 12; and so the young man affirmed that he had kept the whole law from his youth, — namely, in their sense, Matthew 19:20.

To root this pernicious error out of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ in many instances gives the true, spiritual sense and intention of the law, manifesting what the righteousness is which the law requires, and on what terms a man may be justified thereby. And among sundry others to the same purpose, two things he evidently declares: —

1. That the law, in its precepts and prohibitions, had regard unto the regulation of the heart, with all its first motions and acting; for he asserts that the inmost thoughts of the heart, and the first motions of concupiscence therein, though not consented unto, much less actually accomplished in the outward deeds of sin, and all the occasions leading unto them, are directly forbidden in the law. This he does in his holy exposition of the seventh commandment, chap. 5:27-30.
2. He declares the penalty of the law on the least sin to be hellfire, in his assertion of causeless anger to be forbidden in the sixth commandment. If men would but try themselves by these rules, and others there given by our Savior, it would, it may be, take them off from boasting in their own righteousness and justification thereby. But as it was then, so is it now also; the most of them who would maintain a justification by works, do attempt to corrupt the sense of the law, and accommodate it unto their own practice. The reader may see an eminent demonstration hereof in a late excellent treatise, whose title is, “The Practical Divinity of the Papists Discovered to be Destructive of Christianity and men’s Souls.”

The spirituality of the law, with the severity of its sanction, extending itself unto the least and most imperceptible motions of sin in the heart, are not believed, or not aright considered, by them who plead for justification by works in any sense. Wherefore, the principal design of the sermon of our Savior is, as to declare what is the nature of that obedience which God requires by the law, so to prepare the minds of his disciples to seek after another righteousness, which, in the cause and means of it, was not yet plainly to be declared, although many of them, being prepared by the ministry of John, did hunger and thirst after it.

But he sufficiently intimates wherein it did consist, in that he affirms of himself that he “came to fulfill the law,” verse 17. What he came for, that he was sent for; for as he was sent, and not for himself, “he was born to us, given unto us”. This was to fulfill the law, that so the righteousness of it might be fulfilled in us. And if we ourselves cannot fulfill the law, in the proper sense of its commands (which yet is not to be abolished but established, as our Savior declares); if we cannot avoid the curse and penalty of it upon its transgression; and if he came to fulfill it for us (all which are declared by himself); — then is his righteousness, even that which he wrought for us in fulfilling the law, the righteousness wherewith we are justified before God. And whereas here is a twofold righteousness proposed unto us — one in the fulfilling of the law by Christ; the other in our own perfect obedience unto the law, as the sense of it is by him declared; and other middle righteousness between them there is none, — it is left unto the consciences of convinced sinners whether of these they will adhere and trust unto; and their direction herein is the principal design we ought to have in the declaration of this doctrine.

I shall pass by all those places wherein the foundations of this doctrine are surely laid, because it is not expressly mentioned in them; but such they are as, in their proper interpretation, do necessarily infer it. Of this kind are they all wherein the Lord Christ is said to die for us or in our stead, to lay down his life a ransom for us or in our stead, and the like; but I shall pass them by, because I will not digress at all from the present argument.

But the representation made by our Savior himself of the way and means whereon and whereby men come to be justified before God, in the parable

of the Pharisee and the publican, is a guide unto all men who have the same design with them. Luke 18:9-14: “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful unto me, a sinner. I tell you, that this man went down unto his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

That the design of our Savior herein was to represent the way of our justification before God is evident, —

1. From the description given of the persons whom he reflected on, verse 9. They were such as “trusted in themselves that they were righteous;” or that they had a personal righteousness of their own before God.
2. From the general rule wherewith he confirms the judgment he had given concerning the persons described: “Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted,” verse 14.

As this is applied unto the Pharisee, and the prayer that is ascribed unto him, it declares plainly that every plea of our own works, as unto our justification before God, under any consideration, is a self-exaltation which God despises; and, as applied unto the publican, that a sense of sin is the only preparation on our part for acceptance with him on believing. Wherefore, both the persons are represented as seeking to be justified; for so our Savior expresses the issue of their address unto God for that purpose: the one was justified, the other was not.

The plea of the Pharisee unto this end consists of two parts: —

1. That he had fulfilled the condition whereon he might be justified. He makes no mention of any merit, either of congruity or

condignity. Only, whereas there were two parts of God's covenant then with the church, the one with respect unto the moral, the other with respect unto the ceremonial law, he pleads the observation of the condition of it in both parts, which he shows in instances of both kinds: only he adds the way that he took to farther him in this obedience, somewhat beyond what was enjoined, — namely, that he fasted twice in the week; for when men begin to seek for righteousness and justification by works, they quickly think their best reserve lies in doing something extraordinary, more than other men, and more, indeed, than is required of them. This brought forth all the pharisaical austerities in the Papacy. Nor can it be said that all this signified nothing, because he was a hypocrite and a boaster; for it will be replied that it should seem all are so who seek for justification by works; for our Savior only represents one that does so. Neither are these things laid in by against his justification, but only that he “exalted himself” in “trusting unto his own righteousness.”

2. In an ascription of all that he did unto God: “God, I thank thee.” Although he did all this, yet he owned the aid and assistance of God by his grace in it all. He esteemed himself much to differ from other men; but ascribed it not unto himself that so he did. All the righteousness and holiness which he laid claim unto, he ascribed unto the benignity and goodness of God. Wherefore, he neither pleaded any merit in his works, nor any works performed in his own strength, without the aid of grace. All that he pretends is, that by the grace of God he had fulfilled the condition of the covenant; and thereon expected to be justified. And whatever words men shall be pleased to make use of in their vocal prayers, God interprets their minds according to what they trust in, as unto their justification before him. And if some men will be true unto their own principles, this is the prayer which, “mutates mutandis,” they ought to make.

If it be said, that it is charged on this Pharisee that he “trusted in himself,” and “despised others,” for which he was rejected; I answer, —

1. This charge respects not the mind of the person, but the genius and tendency of the opinion. The persuasion of justification by works includes in it a contempt of other men; for “if Abraham had been justified by works, he should have had whereof to glory.”
2. Those whom he despised were such as placed their whole trust in grace and mercy, — as this publican. It were to be wished that all others of the same mind did not so also.

The issue is, with this person, that he was not justified; neither shall any one ever be so on the account of his own personal righteousness. For our Savior has told us, that when we have done all (that is, when we have the testimony of our consciences unto the integrity of our obedience), instead of pleading it unto our justification, we should say (that is, really judge and profess) that we are “*douloi achreioi*”, — “unprofitable servants,” Luke 17:10: as the apostle speaks, “I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified,” 1 Corinthians 4:4. And he that is “*doulos achreios*”, and has nothing to trust unto but his service, will be cast out of the presence of God, Matthew 25:30. Wherefore, on the best of our obedience, to confess ourselves “*douloi achreioi*”, is to confess that, after all, in ourselves, we deserve to be cast out of the presence of God.

In opposition hereunto, the state and prayer of the publican, under the same design of seeking justification before God, are expressed. And the outward acts of his person are mentioned, as representing and expressive of the inward frame of his mind: “He stood afar off,” and “did not so much as lift up his eyes;” he “smote upon his breast.” All of them represent a person desponding, yea, despairing in himself. This is the nature, this is the effect, of that conviction of sin which we before asserted to be antecedently necessary unto justification. Displeasance, sorrow, sense of danger, fear of wrath, — all are present with him. In brief he declares himself guilty before God, and his mouth stopped as unto any apology or excuse. And his prayer is a sincere application of his soul unto sovereign grace and mercy, for a deliverance out of the condition wherein he was by reason of the guilt of sin. And in the use of the word; “*hilaskomai*”, there is respect had unto a propitiation. In the whole of his address there is contained, —

1. Self-condemnation and abhorrence.
2. Displacency and sorrow for sin.
3. A universal renunciation of all works of his own, as any condition of his justification.
4. An acknowledgment of his sin, guilt, and misery. And this is all that, on our part, is required unto justification before God, excepting that faith whereby we apply ourselves unto him for deliverance.

Some make a weak attempt from hence to prove that justification consists wholly in the remission of sin, because, on the prayer of the publican for mercy and pardon, he is said to be “justified:” but there is no force in this argument; for, —

1. The whole nature of justification is not here declared, but only what is required on our part whereunto. The respect of it unto the mediation of Christ was not yet expressly to be brought to light; as was showed before.
2. Although the publican makes his address unto God under a deep sense of the guilt of sin, yet he prays not for the bare pardon of sin, but for all that sovereign mercy or grace God has provided for sinners.
3. The term of justification must have the same sense when applied unto the Pharisee as when applied unto the publican; and if the meaning of it with respect unto the publican be, that he was pardoned, then has it the same sense with respect unto the Pharisee, — he was not pardoned. But he came on no such errand. He came to be justified, not pardoned; nor does he make the least mention of his sin, or any sense of it. Wherefore, although the pardon of sin be included in justification, yet to justify, in this place, has respect unto a righteousness whereon a man is declared just and righteous; wrapped up, on the part of the publican, in the sovereign producing cause, — the mercy of God.

Some few testimonies may be added out of the other evangelist, in whom they abound: “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,” John 1:12. Faith

is expressed by the receiving of Christ; for to receive him, and to believe on his name, are the same. It receives him as set forth of God to be a propitiation for sin, as the great ordinance of God for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners. Wherefore, this notion of faith includes in it, —

1. A supposition of the proposal and tender of Christ unto us, for some end and purpose.
2. That this proposal is made unto us in the promise of the gospel. Hence, as we are said to recede Christ, we are said to receive the promise also.
3. The end for which the Lord Christ is so proposed unto us in the promise of the gospel; and this is the same with that for which he was so proposed in the first promise, — namely, the recovery and salvation of lost sinners.
4. That in the tender of his person, there is a tender made of all the fruits of his mediation, as containing the way and means of our deliverance from sin and acceptance with God.
5. There is nothing required on our part unto an interest in the end proposed, but receiving of him, or believing on his name.
6. Hereby are we entitled unto the heavenly inheritance; we have power to become the sons of God, wherein our adoption is asserted, and justification included.

What this receiving of Christ is, and wherein it does consist, has been declared before, in the consideration of that faith whereby we are justified. That which hence we argue is, that there is no more required unto the obtaining of a right and title unto the heavenly inheritance, but faith alone in the name of Christ, the receiving of Christ as the ordinance of God for justification and salvation. This gives us, I say, our original right thereunto, and therein our acceptance with God, which is our justification; though more be required unto the actual acquisition and possession of it. It is said, indeed, that other graces and works are not excluded, though faith alone be expressed. But every thing which is not a receiving of Christ is excluded. It is, I say, virtually excluded, because it is not of the nature of that which is required. When we speak of that whereby we see, we exclude no other member from being a part of the body; but we exclude all but the eye from the act of seeing. And if faith be required, as it is a receiving of Christ,

every grace and duty which is not so is excluded, as unto the end of justification.

Chap. 3:14-18, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

I shall observe only a few things from these words, which in themselves convey a better light of understanding in this mystery unto the minds of believers than many long discourses of some learned men: —

1. It is of the justification of men, and their right to eternal life thereon, that our Savior discourses. This is plain in verse 18, “He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already.”
2. The means of attaining this condition or state on our part is believing only, as it is three times positively asserted, without any addition.
3. The nature of this faith is declared, —
 - (1.) By its object, — that is, Christ himself, the Son of God, “Whosoever believeth in him;” which is frequently repeated.
 - (2.) The especial consideration wherein he is the object of faith unto the justification of life; and that is as he is the ordinance of God, given, sent, and proposed, from the love and grace of the Father: “God so loved the world, that he gave;” “God sent his Son.”
 - (3.) The especial act yet included in the type, whereby the design of God in him is illustrated; for this was the looking unto the brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness by them who were stung with fiery serpents. Hereunto our faith in Christ unto

justification does answer, and includes a trust in him alone for deliverance and relief. This is the way, these are the only causes and means, of the justification of condemned sinners, and are the substance of all that we plead for.

It will be said, that all this proves not the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto us, which is the thing principally inquired after; but if nothing be required on our part unto justification but faith acted on Christ, as the ordinance of God for our recovery and salvation, it is the whole of what we plead for. A justification by the remission of sins alone, without a righteousness giving acceptance with God and a right unto the heavenly inheritance, is alien unto the Scripture and the common notion of justification amongst men. And what this righteousness must be, upon a supposition that faith only on our part is required unto a participation of it, is sufficiently declared in the words wherein Christ himself is so often asserted as the object of our faith unto that purpose.

Not to add more particular testimonies, which are multiplied unto the same purpose in this evangelist, the sum of the doctrine declared by him is, "That the Lord Jesus Christ was 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;' that is, by the sacrifice of himself, wherein he answered and fulfilled all the typical sacrifices of the law: that unto this end he sanctified himself, that those who believe might be sanctified, or perfected forever, by his own offering of himself: that in the gospel he is proposed as lifted up and crucified for us, as bearing all our sins in his body on the tree: that by faith in him we have adoption, justification, freedom from judgment and condemnation, with a right and title unto eternal life: that those who believe not are condemned already, because they believe not on the Son of God; and, as he elsewhere expresseth it, 'make God a liar, ' in that they believe not his testimony, namely, that 'he has given unto us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son.'" Nor does he anywhere make mention of any other means, cause, or condition of justification on our part but faith only, though he abounds in precepts unto believers for love, and keeping the commands of Christ. And this faith is the receiving of Christ in the sense newly declared; and this is the substance of the Christian faith in this matter; which oftentimes we rather obscure than illustrate, by debating the consideration of any thing in our

justification but the grace and love of God, the person and mediation of Christ, with faith in them.