

VI

EVANGELICAL PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE NATURE
AND USE OF IT — FINAL JUDGMENT, AND ITS
RESPECT UNTO JUSTIFICATION

Evangelical personal righteousness; the nature and use of it

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The things which we have discoursed concerning the first and second justification, and concerning the continuation of justification, have no other design but only to clear the principal subject whereof we treat from what does not necessarily belong unto it. For until all things that are either really heterogeneous or otherwise superfluous are separated from it, we cannot understand aright the true state of the question about the nature and causes of our justification before God. For we intend one justification only, — namely, that whereby God at once freely by his grace justifies a convinced sinner through faith in the blood of Christ. Whatever else any will be pleased to call justification, we are not concerned in it, nor are the consciences of them that believe. To the same purpose we must, therefore, briefly also consider what is usually disputed about our own personal righteousness, with a justification thereon; as also what is called sentential justification at the day of judgment. And I shall treat no farther of them in this place, but only as it is necessary to free the principal subject under consideration from being intermixed with them, as really it is not concerned in them. For what influence our own personal righteousness has into our justification before God will be afterwards particularly examined. Here we shall only consider such a notion of it as seems to interfere with it, and disturb the right understanding of it. But yet I say concerning this also, that it rather belongs unto the difference that will be among us in the expression of our conceptions about spiritual things whilst we know but in part, than unto the substance of the doctrine itself. And on such differences no breach of charity can ensue, whilst there is a mutual grant of that liberty of mind without which it will not be preserved one moment.

It is, therefore, by some apprehended that there is an evangelical justification upon our evangelical personal righteousness. This they distinguish from that justification which is by faith through the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, in the sense wherein they do allow it; for

the righteousness of Christ is our legal righteousness, whereby we have pardon of sin, and acquitment from the sentence of the law, on the account of his satisfaction and merit. But, moreover, they say that as there is a personal, inherent righteousness required of us, so there is a justification by the gospel thereon. For by our faith, and the plea of it, we are justified from the charge of unbelief; by our sincerity, and the plea of it, we are justified from the charge of hypocrisy; and so by all other graces and duties from the charge of the contrary sins in commission or omission, so far as such sins are inconsistent with the terms of the covenant of grace. How this differs from the second justification before God, which some say we have by works, on the supposition of the pardon of sin for the satisfaction of Christ, and the infusion of a habit of grace enabling us to perform those works, is declared by those who so express themselves.

Some add, that this inherent, personal, evangelical righteousness, is the condition on our part of our legal righteousness, or of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto our justification, or the pardon of sin. And those by whom the satisfaction and merit of Christ are denied, make it the only and whole condition of our absolute justification before God. So speak all the Socinians constantly; for they deny our obedience unto Christ to be either the meritorious or efficient cause of our justification; only they say it is the condition of it, without which God has decreed that we shall not be made partakers of the benefit thereof. So does Socinus himself, *De Justificat.* p. 17, “Sunt opera nostra, id est, ut dictum fuit, obedientia quam Christo praestamus, licet nec efficiens nec meritoria, tamen causa est (ut vocant) sine qua non, justificationis coram Deo, tque aeternae nostrae”. Again, p. 14, inter *Opuscul*, “Ut cavendum est ne vitae sanctitatem atque innocentiam effectum justificationis nostrae coram Deo esse credamus, neque illam nostrae coram Deo justificationis causam efficientem aut impulsivam esse affirmemus; set tantummodo causam sine qua eam justificationem nobis non contingere decrevit Deus”. And in all their discourses to this purpose they assert our personal righteousness and holiness, or our obedience unto the commands of Christ, which they make to be the form and essence of faith, to be the condition whereon we obtain justification, or the remission of sins. And indeed, considering what their opinion is concerning the person of Christ, with their denial of his satisfaction and merit, it is impossible they should frame any other idea of

justification in their minds. But what some among ourselves intend by a compliance with them herein, who are not necessitated thereunto by a prepossession with their opinions about the person and mediation of Christ, I know not. For as for them, all their notions about grace, conversion to God, justification, and the like articles of our religion, they are nothing but what they are necessarily cast upon by their hypothesis about the person of Christ.

At present I shall only inquire into that peculiar evangelical justification which is asserted to be the effect of our own personal righteousness, or to be granted us thereon. And hereunto we may observe, —

1. That God does require in and by the gospel a sincere obedience of all that do believe, to be performed in and by their own persons, though through the aids of grace supplied unto them by Jesus Christ. He requires, indeed, obedience, duties, and works of righteousness, in and of all persons whatever; but the consideration of them which are performed before believing is excluded by all from any causality or interest in our justification before God: at least, whatever any may discourse of the necessity of such works in a way of preparation unto believing (whereunto we have spoken before), none bring them into the verge of works evangelical, or obedience of faith; which would imply a contradiction. But that the works inquired after are necessary unto all believers, is granted by all; on what grounds, and unto what ends, we shall inquire afterwards. They are declared, Ephesians 2:10.

2. It is likewise granted that believers, from the performance of this obedience, or these works of righteousness, are denominated righteous in the Scripture, and are personally and internally righteous, Luke 1:6; John 3:7. But yet this denomination is nowhere given unto them with respect unto grace habitually inherent, but unto the effect of it in duties of obedience; as in the places mentioned: “They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; “the latter words give the reason of the former, or their being esteemed righteous before God. And, “He that does righteousness is righteous;” — the denomination is from doing. And Bellarmine, endeavoring to prove that it is habitual, not actual righteousness, which is,

as he speaks, the formal cause of our justification before God, could not produce one testimony of Scripture wherein any one is denominated righteous from habitual righteousness, (De Justificat., lib. 2 cap. 15); but is forced to attempt the proof of it with this absurd argument, — namely, that “we are justified by the sacraments, which do not work in us actual, but habitual righteousness”. And this is sufficient to discover the insufficiency of all pretense for any interest of our own righteousness from this denomination of being righteous thereby, seeing it has not respect unto that which is the principal part thereof.

3. This inherent righteousness, taking it for that which is habitual and actual, is the same with our sanctification; neither is there any difference between them, only they are diverse names of the same thing. For our sanctification is the inherent renovation of our natures exerting and acting itself in newness of life, or obedience unto God in Christ and works of righteousness. But sanctification and justification are in the Scripture perpetually distinguished, whatever respect of causality the one of them may have unto the other. And those who do confound them, as the Papists do, do not so much dispute about the nature of justification, as endeavor to prove that indeed there is no such thing as justification at all; for that which would serve most to enforce it, — namely, the pardon of sin, — they place in the exclusion and extinction of it, by the infusions of inherent grace, which does not belong unto justification.

4. By this inherent, personal righteousness we may be said several ways to be justified. As, —

- (1.) In our own consciences, inasmuch as it is an evidence in us and unto us of our participation of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and of our acceptance with him; which has no small influence into our peace. So speaks the apostle, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world,” 2 Corinthians 1:12: who yet disclaims any confidence therein as unto his justification before God; for says he, “Although I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified,” 1 Corinthians 4:4.

- (2.) Hereby may we be said to be justified before men; that is, acquitted of evils laid unto our charge, and approved as righteous and unblamable; for the state of things is so in the world, as that the professors of the gospel ever were, and ever will be, evil spoken of, as evil doers. The rule given them to acquit themselves, so as that at length they may be acquitted and justified by all that are not absolutely blinded and hardened in wickedness, is that of a holy and fruitful walking, in abounding in good works, 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16. And so is it with respect unto the church, that we be not judged dead, barren professors, but such as have been made partakers of the like precious faith with others: “Show me thy faith by thy works”, James 2. Wherefore,
- (3.) This righteousness is pleadable unto our justification against all the charges of Satan, who is the great accuser of the brethren, — of all that believe. Whether he manage his charge privately in our consciences (which is as it were before God), as he charged Job; or by his instruments, in all manner of reproaches and calumnies (whereof some in this age have had experience in an eminent manner), this righteousness is pleadable unto our justification.

On a supposition of these things, wherein our personal righteousness is allowed its proper place and use (as shall afterward be more fully declared), I do not understand that there is an evangelical justification whereby believers are, by and on the account of this personal, inherent righteousness, justified in the sight of God; nor does the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto our absolute justification before him depend thereon. For, —

1. None have this personal righteousness but they are antecedently justified in the sight of God. It is wholly the obedience of faith, proceeding from true and saving faith in God by Jesus Christ: for, as it was said before, works before faith, are, as by general consent, excluded from any interest in our justification, and we have proved that they are neither conditions of it, dispositions unto it, nor preparations for it, properly so called; but every true believer is immediately justified on his believing. Nor is there any moment of time wherein a man is a true believer, according as faith is required in the gospel, and yet not justified; for as he is thereby

united unto Christ, which is the foundation of our justification by him, so the whole Scripture testifies that he that believes is justified, or that there is an infallible connection in the ordination of God between true faith and justification. Wherefore this personal righteousness cannot be the condition of our justification before God, seeing it is consequential thereunto. What may be pleaded in exception hereunto from the supposition of a second justification, or differing causes of the beginning and continuation of justification, has been already disproved

2. Justification before God is a freedom and absolution from a charge before God, at least it is contained therein; and the instrument of this charge must either be the law or the gospel. But neither the law nor the gospel do before God, or in the sight of God, charge true believers with unbelief, hypocrisy, or the like; for “who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect,” who are once justified before him? Such a charge may be laid against them by Satan, by the church sometimes on mistake, by the world, as it was in the case of Job; against which this righteousness is pleadable. But what is charged immediately before God is charged by God himself either by the law or the gospel; and the judgment of God is according unto truth. If this charge be by the law, by the law we must be justified. But the plea of sincere obedience will not justify us by the law. That admits of none in satisfaction unto its demands but that which is complete and perfect. And where the gospel lays any thing unto the charge of any persons before God, there can be no justification before God, unless we shall allow the gospel to be the instrument of a false charge; for what should justify him whom the gospel condemns? And if it be a justification by the gospel from the charge of the law, it renders the death of Christ of no effect; and a justification without a charge is not to be supposed.

3. Such a justification as that pretended is altogether needless and senseless. This may easily be evinced from what the Scripture asserts unto our justification in the sight of God by faith in the blood of Christ; but this has been spoken to before on another occasion. Let that be considered, and it will quickly appear that there is no place nor use for this new justification upon our personal righteousness, whether it be supposed

antecedent and subordinate thereunto, or consequential and perfective thereof.

4. This pretended evangelical justification has not the nature of any justification that is mentioned in the Scripture, — that is, neither that by the law, nor that provided in the gospel. Justification by the law is this, — The man that does the works of it shall live in them. This it does not pretend unto. And as unto evangelical justification, it is every way contrary unto it. For therein the charge against the person to be justified is true, — namely, that he has sinned, and is come short of the glory of God; (but) in this it is false, — namely, that a believer is an unbeliever; a sincere person, a hypocrite; one fruitful in good works, altogether barren: and this false charge is supposed to be exhibited in the name of God, and before him. Our acquitment, in true, evangelical justification, is by absolution or pardon of sin; here, by a vindication of our own righteousness. There, the plea of the person to be justified is, Guilty; all the world is become guilty before God: but here, the plea of the person on his trial is, Not guilty, whereon the proofs and evidences of innocence and righteousness do ensue; but this is a plea which the law will not admit, and which the gospel disclaims.

5. If we are justified before God on our own personal righteousness, and pronounced righteous by him on the account thereof, then God enters into judgment with us on something in ourselves, and acquits us thereon; for justification is a juridical act, in and of that Judgment of God which is according unto truth. But that God should enter into judgment with us, and justify us with respect unto what he judges on, or our personal righteousness, the psalmist does not believe, Psalm 130:2, 3; 143:2; nor did the publican, Luke 18.

6. This personal righteousness of ours cannot be said to be a subordinate righteousness, and subservient unto our justification by faith in the blood of Christ: for therein God justifies the ungodly, and imputes righteousness unto him that works not; and, besides, it is expressly excluded from any consideration in our justification, Ephesians 2:7, 8.

7. This personal, inherent righteousness, wherewith we are said to be justified with this evangelical justification, is our own righteousness. Personal righteousness, and our own righteousness, are expressions equivalent; but our own righteousness is not the material cause of any justification before God. For, —

- (1.) It is unmeet so to be, Isaiah 64:6.
- (2.) It is directly opposed unto that righteousness whereby we are justified, as inconsistent with it unto that end, Philippians 3:9; Romans 10:3, 4.

It will be said that our own righteousness is the righteousness of the law, but this personal righteousness is evangelical. But, —

- (1.) It will be hard to prove that our personal righteousness is any other but our own righteousness; and our own righteousness is expressly rejected from any interest in our justification in the places quoted.
- (2.) That righteousness which is evangelical in respect of its efficient cause, its motives and some especial ends, is legal in respect of the formal reason of it and our obligation unto it; for there is no instance of duty belonging unto it, but, in general, we are obliged unto its performance by virtue of the first commandment, to “take the LORD for our God.” Acknowledging therein his essential verity and sovereign authority, we are obliged to believe all that he shall reveal, and to obey in all that he shall command.
- (3.) The good works rejected from any interest in our justification, are those whereunto we are “created in Christ Jesus”, Ephesians 2:8-10; the “works of righteousness which we have done,” Titus 3:5, wherein the Gentiles are concerned, who never sought for righteousness by the works of the law, Romans 9:30. But it will yet be said, that these things are evident in themselves. God does require an evangelical righteousness in all that do believe; this Christ is not, nor is it the righteousness of Christ. He may be said to be our legal righteousness, but our evangelical righteousness he is not; and, so far as we are righteous with any righteousness, so far we are justified by it. For according unto this evangelical

righteousness we must be tried; if we have it we shall be acquitted, and if we have it not we shall be condemned. There is, therefore, a justification according unto it.

I answer, —

1. According to some authors or maintainers of this opinion, I see not but that the Lord Christ is as much our evangelical righteousness as he is our legal. For our legal righteousness he is not, in their judgment, by a proper imputation of his righteousness unto us, but by the communication of the fruits of what he did and suffered for us. And so he is our evangelical righteousness also; for our sanctification is an effect or fruit of what he did and suffered for us, Ephesians 5:26, 27; Titus 2:14.

2. None have this evangelical righteousness but those who are, in order of nature at least, justified before they actually have it; for it is that which is required of all that do believe, and are justified thereon. And we need not much inquire how a man is justified after he is justified.

3. God has not appointed this personal righteousness in order unto our justification before him in this life, though he have appointed it to evidence our justification before others, and even in his sight; as shall be declared. He accepts of it, approves of it, upon the account of the free justification of the person in and by whom it is wrought: so he had “respect unto Abel and his offering”. But we are not acquitted by it from any real charge in the sight of God, nor do receive remission of sins on the account of it. And those who place the whole of justification in the remission of sins, making this personal righteousness the condition of it, as the Socinians do, leave not any place for the righteousness of Christ in our justification.

4. If we are in any sense justified hereby in the sight of God, we have whereof to boast before him. We may not have so absolutely, and with respect unto merit; yet we have so comparatively, and in respect of others who cannot make the same plea for their justification. But all boasting is excluded; and it will not relieve, to say that this personal righteousness is of the free grace and gift of God unto some, and not unto others; for we must plead it as our duty, and not as God’s grace.

5. Suppose a person freely justified by the grace of God, through faith in the blood of Christ, without respect unto any works, obedience, or righteousness of his own, we do freely grant, —

- (1.) That God does indispensably require personal obedience of him; which may be called his evangelical righteousness.
- (2.) That God does approve of and accept, in Christ, this righteousness so performed.
- (3.) That hereby that faith whereby we are justified is evidenced, proved, manifested, in the sight of God and men.
- (4.) That this righteousness is pleadable unto an acquitment against any charge from Satan, the world, or our own consciences.
- (5.) That upon it we shall be declared righteous at the last day, and without it none shall so be.

And if any shall think meet from hence to conclude unto an evangelical justification, or call God's acceptance of our righteousness by that name, I shall by no means contend with then. And wherever this inquiry is made, — not how a sinner, guilty of death, and obnoxious unto the curse, shall be pardoned, acquitted, and justified, which is by the righteousness of Christ alone imputed unto him — but how a man that professes evangelical faith, or faith in Christ, shall be tried, judged, and whereon, as such, he shall be justified, we grant that it is and must be, by his own personal, sincere obedience.

And these things are spoken, not with a design to contend with any, or to oppose the opinions of any; but only to remove from the principal question in hand those things which do not belong unto it.

A very few words will also free our inquiry from any concernment in that which is called sentential justification, at the day of judgment; for of what nature soever it be, the person concerning whom that sentence is pronounced was, —

- (1.) Actually and completely justified before God in this world;

- (2.) Made partaker of all the benefits of that justification, even unto a blessed resurrection in glory: “It is raised in glory”, 1 Corinthians 15:43.
- (3.) The souls of the most will long before have enjoyed a blessed rest with God, absolutely discharged and acquitted from all their labors and all their sins; there remains nothing but an actual admission of the whole person into eternal glory.

Wherefore this judgment can be no more but declaratory, unto the glory of God, and the everlasting refreshment of them that have believed. And without reducing of it unto a new justification, as it is nowhere called in the Scripture, the ends of that solemn judgment, — in the manifestation of the wisdom and righteousness of God, in appointing the way of salvation by Christ, as well as in giving of the law; the public conviction of them by whom the law has been transgressed and the gospel despised; the vindication of the righteousness, power, and wisdom of God in the rule of the world by his providence, wherein, for the most part, his paths unto all in this life are in the deep, and his footsteps are not known; the glory and honor of Jesus Christ, triumphing over all his enemies, then fully made his footstool; and the glorious exaltation of grace in all that do believe, with sundry other things of an alike tendency unto the ultimate manifestation of divine glory in the creation and guidance of all things, — are sufficiently manifest.

And hence it appears how little force there is in that argument which some pretend to be of so great weight in this cause. “As every one”, they say, “shall be judged of God at the last day, in the same way and manner or on the same grounds, is he justified of God in this life; but by works, and not by faith alone, every one shall be judged at the last day: wherefore by works, and not by faith alone, every one is justified before God in this life”. For, —

1. It is nowhere said that we shall be judged at the last day “ex operibus”; but only that God will render unto men “secundum opera”. But God does not justify any in this life “secundum opera”; being justified freely by his grace, and not according to the works of righteousness which we have done. And we are everywhere said to be justified in this life “ex fide”, “per

fidem”, but nowhere “propter fidem”; or, that God justifies us “secundum fidem”, by faith, but not for our faith, nor according unto our faith. And we are not to depart from the expressions of the Scripture, where such a difference is constantly observed.

2. It is somewhat strange that a man should be judged at the last day, and justified in this life, just in the same way and manner, — that is, with respect unto faith and works, — when the Scripture does constantly ascribe our justification before God unto faith without works; and the judgment at the last day is said to be according unto works, without any mention of faith.

3. If justification and eternal judgment proceed absolutely on the same grounds, reasons, and causes, then if men had not done what they shall be condemned for doing at the last day, they should have been justified in this life; but many shall be condemned only for sins against the light of nature, Romans 2:12, as never having the written law or gospel made known unto them: wherefore unto such persons, to abstain from sins against the light of nature would be sufficient unto their justification, without any knowledge of Christ or the gospel.

4. This proposition, — that God pardons men their sins, gives then the adoption of children, with a right unto the heavenly inheritance, according to their works, — is not only foreign to the gospel, but contradictory unto it, and destructive of it, as contrary unto all express testimonies of the Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New, where these things are spoken of; but that God judges all men, and renders unto all men, at the last judgment, according unto their works, is true, and affirmed in the Scripture.

5. In our justification in this life by faith, Christ is considered as our propitiation and advocate, as he who has made atonement for sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness; but at the last day, and in the last judgment, he is considered only as the judge.

6. The end of God in our justification is the glory of his grace, Ephesians 1:6; but the end of God in the last judgment is the glory of his remunerative righteousness, 2 Timothy 4:8.

7. The representation that is made of the final judgment, Matthew 7 and 25, is only of the visible church. And therein the plea of faith, as to the profession of it, is common unto all, and is equally made by all. Upon that plea of faith, it is put unto the trial whether it were sincere, true faith or no, or only that which was dead and barren. And this trial is made solely by the fruits and effects of it; and otherwise, in the public declaration of things unto all, it cannot be made. Otherwise, the faith whereby we are justified comes not into judgment at the last day. See John 5:24, with Mark 16:16.