



Justification

(By Faith)

Its:

- Meaning
- Provision
- Appropriation
- Foundation
- Confirmation
- Promise
- Profession

My proper place as a believer is within the sanctuary. But before I can get into the sanctuary, I must stand before God “clean every wit.” This is where the Epistle to the Hebrews has me – within the holiest and coming boldly into the presence of God having – being in possession of, the full assurance of faith and a true heart, sprinkled from an evil conscience and a body washed with pure water – that is, without the stain of sin and guilt (Heb 10). I am there because of the divine undertaking that I am a purged worshipper having no more conscience of sins; that my sins and iniquities God will remember no more. It is not enough to be clean ceremonially as one under the law; but of me being clean *judicially* as one under grace. For my judicial cleansing and in order to get into the sanctuary, I must get out of the divine court of guilt and condemnation. Though a guilty and condemned sinner, I must be declared righteous and guiltless before God. This comes about through my justification, which takes me to the Epistle to the Romans. There I find the answer to the vital question asked by Job. “How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4).

There are many heartwarming gospel truths in the Bible such as *redemption, salvation, reconciliation* and *glorification*. They are distinct and yet vitally related. Our subject – **justification**, is among them. It cannot be appreciated apart from the truth of *condemnation*.

Justification – what it means

To be justified means that though I was once guilty and under God’s condemnation, I am now in a position where there is no charge against me. If I content myself with the lessons on justification given in some commentaries, then that is where I end up. Scripture however informs me that my justification means that my position before God is such that He can *never bring* a charge against me. It anticipates the wondrous principle of imputation. God’s righteousness prohibits Him imputing sin and guilt to me, as we shall observe. I am forever without guilt and forever righteous in Christ. Now that is something else indeed. It is the foundation of all divine blessing, not least of which is the assurance of my salvation. The heathen religions say “it is all too simple,” for they are built on the inventions of fallen man. The justified in Christ say “it is altogether sublime because of its simplicity,” for they rest on the impeccability of a risen Man.

Forgiveness

Justification is more than me being “forgiven” for what I have done – blessed though that is! Forgiveness of itself can never absolve guilt. You may forgive me for something that I have done against you; but that does not clear me of being guilty for doing the wrong thing. Justification does both; it forgives my sins and places me guiltless before God forever.¹

Natural justice?

There is a vital attribute in the *biblical* doctrine of justification not found in secular jurisprudence which prides itself in upholding natural justice. In those chambers I am declared to be without guilt – a “just” person, but *only* if I have been found not guilty as charged. That is, the Court has judged that I have not done the deed. The biblical meaning of justification however is that I have been declared guiltless even though I *am* guilty as charged. “Mea culpa” – I have sinned, I have done the deed. The fact that I can stand before God with no charge of guilt - even though once guilty and condemned in sin, evokes the deepest wonderment and highest praise from the emancipated heart and confers boldness to enter the sanctuary. Sadly, it provokes scorning incredulity in the unregenerate heart because of its resistance to the ways of God in grace. When faced with the truth of divine condemnation before God, the unregenerate heart rejects Him who is “good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy” unto all them that call upon Him (Ps 86:5).

Justification – its legal dimension

The Greek word for justification is *dikaioo*; it has the sense of being *free* from condemnation and guilt. “For he that is dead is freed [dikaioo - justified] from sin” (Rom 6:7).² It is essentially a *judicial* term – representing a change in legal standing, of which Paul has much to say in his Epistle to the Romans. It is

¹ This does not mean that I do not *feel* guilty when I have done something wrong. It is according to a proper conscience that I should do so. But this is to do with my spiritual *state* and not my spiritual *standing* before God – as one who is guiltless having been justified.

² In Romans 6:7 it is **justification** (*dikaioo*) from **sin**; in verse 22 it is **liberation** (*eleutheroo*) from the bondage of **sin**. The passage shows the connection between justification and redemption. The latter is predicated on the former which agrees with Paul’s Gospel polemic in Romans. The AV has “free” and freed” respectively blurring the vital distinction and causation.

no surprise then, that when in Chapter 8 Paul concludes his treatise on the Gospel, he trumpets the glorious truth that “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). That treatise began in Chapter 1 with the revelation of man’s universal condemnation before God. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). We have it too in Romans 5:18, “by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.”

Innocence?

Justification we hasten to say, does not mean that I am declared legally “innocent” or, as some would have it, *just-as-if-I-had-never-sinned*. This is to take me to where Adam was before he fell. It denies me that infinitely better place that I have through justification, as standing in a risen and exalted Christ and possessing all the blessings associated with it.

Justification – its redemptive dimension

Justification is vitally connected to redemption as we noted above in Romans 6 verses 7 and 22. We have it explicitly in Romans 3. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption [*apolutrosis*] that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). To understand this relationship we need to remember that justification means being *freed* or liberated from sin, guilt and condemnation (Rom 6:7). This freedom is achieved by a deliverance, which comes by the way of a **ransom** paid by Christ; hence “the redemption,” which we know is through His shed blood. The Spirit of God is careful to ensure that the redeeming work of Christ Jesus our Kinsman is always before us!

Justification – its principles and process

The doctrine of justification like every other biblical doctrine is based upon principles and processes that are ordained and revealed by God for His glory and for our edification. When God reaches out to man He is pleased to declare what it is that motivates Him to do so. This is itself a measure of His wondrous grace and blessing. In this section we outline the divine principles and processes connected with biblical justification. Its:

1. Provision
2. Appropriation
3. Foundation
4. Confirmation
5. Promise
6. Profession

The provision of justification – by grace and by faith

What are the principles upon which God provides justification? Many correctly point to the principle of divine grace. However, we obscure the principle of grace and undervalue the blessing that comes from it if we were to exclude the principle of faith in the provision of justification. It is to faith and faith alone that God’s grace is known and valued. It is this which particularly defines the character of this present dispensation - yet not exclusive to it, because the principle that “the just shall live by faith” is trans-dispensational. We must of course distinguish between faith as a principle and faith as a process, the latter relates to the means through which we appropriate justification. The *principles of grace and faith* are co-dependent – the existence of one demands the existence of the other. This inextricable dependency is declared in Romans 4. “It is [on the principle of] faith, that it might be by [the principle of]

grace” (Rom 4:16). As principles, grace and faith are conjoint twins which share the same mind and so cannot be separated. So if God has provided justification by grace, then it must also be provided upon the principle of faith. We note too that this inexorable relationship between grace and faith excludes any principle that is to do with justification by the law and works. It must be said here that the *exercise* of faith is not a *work*. It is merely the means by which the provisions in grace are accessed and appropriated. When God sees faith in Christ He then by grace freely confers justification.

Grace

What then is grace? Divine grace is God offering each and every undeserving person what he does not deserve. It circumscribes every provision that God makes to fallen and helpless man. As a man in Adam I am not only fallen, but I am also helpless and so I must depend on God’s grace for all things. Sin not only renders me guilty before God but also powerless under His righteous judgment. It is “God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33). The law too indicts me and every other child of Adam as guilty before God. “Now we know that what things so ever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). If I am occupied with what God wants *from* me then I place myself under the law; if, on the other hand, I am occupied with what God has provided *for* me, then I place myself under His grace. So if I place myself under the law as many wish me to do, what do I find? That my mouth is stopped because it confirms my guilt in Adam! The mouth of God however has not been stopped - despite man’s rebellion. It has opened in grace to remove my sin and guilt by providing justification for me through faith. May we note its largeness! Grace provides what guilty man does not deserve – not just justification and righteousness, but that justification and righteousness are acquired through *faith*.

The principle of justification by grace is clearly established in Scripture. It is a foundation principle in Paul’s treatise on the Gospel. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). Grace (and faith by reason of principle) is:

- a. *A universal principle:* We have this in its expression and in its provision, given in the following verses of Scripture respectively.
 - i. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Tit 2:11).
 - ii. “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9).
- b. *An excluding principle:* By biblical definition, the principle of grace embraces the principle of faith and excludes the principle of the law in the provision of justification. “For by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). “I [Paul] do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21). How spiritually damaging – even for believers to contradict the bounty we have under grace with the burden under the law and works. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). (That is, fallen out of the practical blessings of grace and into the bondage of works that comes with the law).³
- c. *A liberating principle:* “By [the Lord Jesus Christ] whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2).

³ Though the context differs the principle remains unaltered. “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6).

The appropriation of justification – *by and through faith*

Divine process follows divine principle. This is an invaluable interpretive rule that should always be kept in mind. Every provision by grace must be appropriated by faith and by faith alone. *Sola fide!* It is *by faith and through faith*. The first expression declares the *principle* the latter the *process*.

Justification and faith – the biblical teaching:

- *A universal principle and process:* This is clearly presented in Romans 3. “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Rom 3:22). Can this be any clearer?” “Unto all who believe!” However, in case there be any misunderstanding, in verse 30 Paul confirms the universal nature of justification by faith from the point of view of the Jew and Gentile. “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom 3:30).⁴
- *An excluding principle and process:* If, as we have shown from Scripture, that the law is excluded in the *provision* of justification in principle and process then it cannot possibly have anything to do with its appropriation. Scripture confirms it. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:25-28). Two things are excluded – *works* (the righteous deeds of the law) and *boasting*. They stand mutually exclusive in relation to justification, which is by “faith in His blood.” By mutually exclusive we mean that faith cannot exist alongside works and boasting. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Salvation is the gift. It is to be appropriated not by works - but by faith. Paul corroborates the impotence of works for salvation when he writes to Titus. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit 3:5). “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight” (Rom 3:20). “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). “And by him [Christ] all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). When correcting the wayward Galatians Paul forcibly reminded them 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 [in] Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). “The just shall live by faith” (Gal 3:11). Again, can anything be plainer?
- *A liberating principle:* “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). I can have no peace – no judicial settlement before God if I am under the bondage and burden of laboring for my justification according to the principle and process associated with my good works. Justification is not a process and neither is it in any way probationary. It is received absolutely, instantaneously and eternally upon my exercise of faith in Christ as my Lord and Saviour.

⁴ Paul employs “by faith” to the Jews because they need to learn the *principle* having laboured under the principle of the law. That law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. He need only speak of the *process* to the Gentiles - “through faith” – because strictly speaking they were never “under” the law.

Justification and faith – the biblical example

In Romans 4 Paul presents us with two revered cases to show that justification is by faith and faith alone – Abraham and David.

1. Abraham: The Jews believed that Abraham their “father” was justified because of his works. Paul refutes their mistaken belief. In doing so he reiterates the principle that it was Abraham’s *faith* that was counted for his justification before God – not his works. If Abraham’s justification (*dikaioo*) and righteousness (*dikaioosune*) was due to his works, then Abraham would have had reason to glory in himself – i.e., boast of his own merit before God (and before men). It would contradict the truth noted above, that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). “It is not of works lest any man should boast.” Abraham is a notable example because in Scripture he is portrayed as the father of all who stand before God by faith – not works. “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Gal 3:7-8). Those inscribed on the roll call of honour in the NT are listed because of their *faith* – not because of their works (Heb 11).
2. David: “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom 4:6-8). Here again, my standing before God as one who is justified is explicitly declared to be apart from my works.

Imputation and righteousness

The term “imputation” is *logizomai* in the Greek. The verb means to “reckon,” to “ascribe” or to “deem.” In Scripture it is associated with justification and likewise takes on a legal meaning which is to reckon, to deem or to ascribe something about a person’s judicial standing and state. For instance, as unregenerate souls, we all stand in Adam and so we are all deemed to be guilty sinners. This is a *determination* in the mind of God, which is vitally connected to the *character* of God - His absolute holiness.

Justification means a righteous standing before God. How does this righteous standing come about? Paul tells us that it is through divine imputation which is a determination by God. We are all condemned in sin because in God’s reckoning we are all regarded as standing in Adam, and thus partake of his sin and guilt. It is here that we see the vital necessity of righteousness being imputed, for “as it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10). When through faith I accept Christ as my Saviour, God no longer sees me in Adam but in Christ (in whom there is no sin or guilt).

Imputing righteousness does not mean that I am *made* righteous in myself, but that I am *reckoned* by God as righteous in Christ – a risen Christ. Neither does it mean that Christ’s righteousness is imparted to me. Imputation is not impartation. It is entirely a matter of God seeing me as *standing* in the righteousness of Another – a risen Christ. He was raised for our justification. Blessed truth - for as such it cannot fail! “For He [God] hath made Him [Christ] to be sin [a sin offering] for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made [become] the righteousness of God **in Him** [Christ]” (2 Cor 5:21).

As we continue let us remember that the imputation of righteousness is not confined to us. It is a universal principle bestowed to all of faith as seen in Abraham, the father of all who have faith in God.

“And he [Abraham] believed Jehovah; and He reckoned it to him [as] righteousness” (Gen 15:6 cf Rom 4:3).

The non-imputation of sin

The principle of imputing righteousness on the basis of faith has its corollary – the non-imputation of sin. Both are judicial principles. David declared it and Paul reiterated it. “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Ps 32:1-2; Rom 4:8). It expresses the impossibility of God imputing sin to those who stand in Christ through faith. They stand justified - guiltless before Him.

Imputation and faith

How blessed, that this imputation of righteousness comes about by and through **faith** – and not by works. “For what saith the scripture? Abraham **believed** God, and it [his belief] was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3 cf Gen 15:6). “But to him that worketh **not**, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his **faith** is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). God looks upon our faith in Christ and *not* upon our works when He imputes righteousness to us – not the force of our faith, but the fact of it. By and through faith we stand in the unimpeachable righteousness that is Christ’s by divine right, title and Person – Jesus Christ the Righteous.

The foundation of justification

The foundation of justification as with its provision must be based on divine principle – “by His blood.” “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom 5:8-9). “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins” (Rom 3:25). Here the process is in view – “through His blood” and it reinforces the truths that justification is a provision of God and that it is appropriated through faith. We also have God setting forth His Son to be a propitiation. The ground upon which justification is provided is the propitiatory work of Christ on the cross – His shed blood. There He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In so doing he vindicated God whose holiness was slighted by the coming of sin – the very principle of it.

The confirmation of justification

God’s righteousness is not manifested by what Christ did under the law, but by what He did under grace – namely, His entering into death and coming out of it in resurrection. For this reason Scripture never teaches that we are justified by Christ fulfilling the law. The idea that He did is not new and it is embraced by the Reformed School. It implicates the keeping of the law in the provision of justification and denies the singular value of Christ’s death in regard to it.

No redeemed saint of God will quibble with the fact that the perfectly obedient life of Christ brought infinite pleasure to God. Heaven opened to testify to it. “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). His death, too, brought pleasure to God. It “pleased” the Lord [Jehovah] to bruise Him (Isa 53:10). This verse expresses God’s holy delight in the Son as the sacrifice for sin. In *this* case God was pleased because He was **appeased**, since that foreseen obedient death vindicated the holiness of God that was offended by sin. We are therefore informed by God’s Word that we are justified by Christ’s shed blood – never by His life and obedience to the law – even though He was made under the law (Gal 4:4). It was His death and His death alone that dealt with the matter of sin before God, putting it away “by the sacrifice of Himself.” It is Christ in His *death* that

we are asked to remember corporately on the first day of each week, significantly, the day of His resurrection – for “He was raised again for our justification.”

We have the Lord’s death in Romans 3 as noted above; His resurrection we get in Romans 4. The chapter order in which they are presented is preserved in the verse that is now before us. “[Christ] - Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). What does the Spirit of God seek to tell us here? It is that our justification is established and confirmed by the resurrection of Christ (which is predicated on His *death*). His resurrection shows that what He did in death vindicated a holy God. If it were not so then God would be unrighteous in raising up Christ. But it was assuredly so, and God revealed His righteousness in raising up His Son (Acts 10:40 13:30 13:37). He can therefore impute righteousness to all who come to Him having faith in Christ’s death and resurrection. “But for us also [not only Abraham], to whom it [righteousness] shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:24). The evangelist can thus confidently proclaim, “That 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; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom 10:9-10).

There is more! Being justified means that I am in a *new place* before God. It is a place that takes its character and confirmation from resurrection ground. Resurrection ground is redemption ground and it is also *righteous* ground. This is my “new place,” one which the Man Christ Jesus entered into and established by His resurrection. It is where I have my first dealings with God as a justified sinner with righteousness imputed.

Further, because God’s holiness was fully vindicated by His Son, God was righteous in not only raising up His Son, but also righteous in glorifying Him at His right hand. My justification therefore is confirmed in a risen as well as a glorified Man. And, being justified, I have, on resurrection ground a *new relationship* with God in Christ, as One who has been raised and exalted. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God” (Rom 8: 33-34).

The promise through justification

“That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). This precious promise is prefaced by the explicit disclaimer that it is *not* obtained through works of righteousness which we have done (Tit 3:5).⁵ It is all to do with a provision in divine love, mercy and grace. The expression “according to the hope of eternal life” is not to be taken as something yet to be possessed. Eternal life is the present possession of the justified. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 Jn 5:12). It is that we who are justified in Christ are inheritors in Christ because we *have* eternal life. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). The hope is not in relation to something that *may* happen. Rather, it is in the biblical sense of *looking forward* to that which *will* happen.

The manifestation of justification

The epistles to the Romans and Galatians unambiguously teach me that I am justified by and through faith and faith alone. God does not look at my works for my justification. This would be contrary to the

⁵ Scripture recognizes that we do perform acts that are “righteous.” But it also maintains that righteous acts do not make a man righteous for they fall short of the righteousness which is of God.

divine principles relating to its provision and appropriation that we have noted. Moreover, He knows well of my faith because He searches the hearts. God imputes righteousness to me because of my faith. His Word explicitly excludes works from this gracious imputation.

What role then do works have in relation to my justification? James particularly takes up this matter in his epistle. If my faith is a true faith, then it will count for my justification and, further, it will be *evidenced* by my works. Notice that James speaks of Abraham believing *in* (and *on*) God. *This* is justifying or true faith. It is very different to a faith that is limited to believing *about* God. Even the demons believe that God is One and they fear and tremble because of it. However, they do not believe in or on God – that is, they do not bow before Him nor put their trust in Him.

My justifying faith then should be evident before *men* by my works – “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt 7:20). *They* will see me as one whose claim to have faith is not contradicted by my life. Notwithstanding, there are many who do righteous works and yet they are not justified. We noted that the Bible makes it abundantly plain that righteous works do not justify and save us (Tit 3:5). Many are pious in word and deed, but they may have never exercised faith in Christ as their Saviour.

A “just” God

On the cross Christ bore the wrath of God against sin and God’s holiness was perfectly vindicated. He willingly shed His blood so that God could righteously justify the sinner who believes. This being so, God would be unjust if He failed to justify all who came to Him by faith. After all, it is the “righteousness which is of faith.” God must, if He is to be just, honour the propitiating work of Christ by accepting all who come to Him by the way of it. He must then reckon them to be righteous (and so they become the righteousness of God in Christ). This He delights to do because it honours His Son and His work and it brings glory to Himself – revealing His righteousness; for in the Gospel of Christ (justification through faith), the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Rom 1:17).

Conversely, God would be unjust if He were to declare a sinner guiltless if he did not come to Him by faith. This would be tantamount to imputing righteousness apart from the finished and accepted work of Christ - which *demand*s faith and faith alone. This principle of faith held true in the past as Romans 3 tells us (as we have it in the case of Abraham and all the ancients of faith). “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25). It holds true now and into the future. An abrogation of it would deny the Gospel of Christ and fail to reveal the righteousness of God – “which is of faith.”

We see then how God is just and righteous when He justifies sinners because of their belief - and just and righteous when He judges sinners because of their unbelief.

The law

We have a corollary. A just God *must* rule out the law in my justification. It must be the case if He is to fully honour the vindicating work of His Son on the cross. The law therefore does not reveal the righteousness of God. It is God’s grace through the Gospel that reveals His righteousness. And so we read that it is “from faith to faith i.e., *by* the principle of faith *to* all who would appropriate it through faith. Such is the way of grace and not the law, given in the truth that “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:18).

Christ – is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth

The “righteousness of the law” is a biblical principle that is not well understood. As a means of justification it can rise no higher in effectiveness than the best efforts of fallen man, every bit of which is declared worthless by God. Yet, fallen man clings to it tenaciously, striving to earn his righteousness before God through good works. Like the Jews of old, he labours in pride and vanity, because he rejects the higher principle, that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom 10:4). Fallen man is preoccupied with his own righteousness and so he fails to yield to the related principle – “the righteousness of God.” “For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:3). May we appreciate that the law was simply “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb 10:1); “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24); that Christ came in order to take away the first [righteousness under the law], that He may establish the second [the righteousness of God under grace] (Heb 10:9) – even “the righteousness of faith” (Rom 10:5-6). There is therefore no need to bring Christ down again or to have Him die and be resurrected again (Rom 10:6-7). The truth is “nigh” – in the Word of God if only man will heed it.

We have then in our immediate context, two opposing principles in Scripture – “the righteousness which is of the law” (Rom 10:5) and the “righteousness of God” (Rom 3:22). The former is extinct, enfeebled by fallen flesh and can never attain to the righteousness of God; the latter is extant, established by the risen Christ and attains to the righteousness of God through faith. Paul summed it up well when he wrote to the Philippians. “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philipp 3:8-9)

May the Spirit of God create within us the desire to devote time to meditate upon these blessed truths – difficult though they may be at first glance. We must have cause to praise God. As the justified in Christ, we have grand reasons to do so. Let us take them into our hearts and so enhance our worship of God individually and collectively within the sanctuary.

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