

CHAPTER XI.

OF JUSTIFICATION.

Section I.—Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

Section II.—Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.

EXPOSITION.

The doctrine of justification by faith holds a most important place in the Christian system. It was justly termed by Luther, *articulus standis vel cadentis ecclesiae*—the test of a standing or of a falling Church. In the Church of Rome this doctrine was most grossly corrupted; and it was eminently through the preaching of the scriptural doctrine of justification that the reformation from Popery was effected. Even in the Protestant Churches, however, pernicious errors in regard to this subject have been widely disseminated, and at different periods have produced much acrimonious controversy. In our Confession, the scriptural doctrine of justification is accurately discriminated from the various forms of error; and, in the progress of our exposition, we shall point out the errors to which the statements of the Confession are opposed.

I. Justification is a judicial act of God, and is not a change of nature, but a change of the sinner's state in relation to the law. The Church of Rome confounds justification with sanctification, and represents justification as a physical act, consisting in the infusion of righteousness into the souls of men, making them internally and personally just. But though justification and sanctification be inseparably connected, yet they are totally distinct, and the blending of them together perverts both the law and the gospel. Justification, according to the use of the word in

Scripture, must be understood forensically; it is a law term, derived from human courts of judicature, and signifies, not the making of a person righteous, but the holding and declaring him to be righteous in law. The forensic sense of the word is manifest from its being frequently opposed to condemnation.—Deut. xxv. 1; Prov. xvii. 15; Rom. v. 16, viii. 33, 34. Condemnation lies not in infusing wickedness into a criminal, or in making him guilty, but in judicially pronouncing sentence upon him according to his transgression of the law; so justification does not lie in infusing righteousness into a person, but in declaring him to be righteous on legal grounds; and, like the sentence of a judge, it is completed at once.

Socinians, and some others, represent justification as consisting only in the pardon of sin. In opposition to this, our Confession declares that God justifies those whom he effectually calls, not only "by pardoning their sins," but also "by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous." The pardon of sin is unquestionably one important part of justification. It consists in the removal of guilt, or the absolution of the sinner from the obligation to punishment which he lay under by virtue of the sentence of the violated law. The pardon which God bestows is full and complete. It includes all sins, be they ever so numerous, and extends to all their aggravations, be they ever so enormous. Thus saith the Lord, "I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me."—Jer. xxxiii. 8. All the sins of the believer are at once pardoned in his justification; his past sins are formally forgiven, and his future sins will not be imputed, so that he cannot come into condemnation.—Ps. xxxii. 1, 2; John v. 24. But the pardon of sin alone would only restore the believer to such a state of probation as that from which Adam fell; he would be under no legal charge of guilt, but still he would have no legal title to eternal life. But when God justifies a sinner, he does not merely absolve him from guilt, or from a liability to eternal death; he also pronounces him righteous, and, as such, entitled to eternal life. Hence, it is called "the justification of life;" and they who "receive the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."—Rom. v. 17, 18.

II. No man can be justified before God, in whole or in part, on the ground of a personal righteousness of any kind. Romanists, Socinians, and Pelagians, maintain that we are justified either by a personal inherent righteousness, or by our own works. In opposition to this, our Confession teaches that persons are not justified "for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone." That we cannot be justified by an inherent righteousness, is manifest,—1. Because we can only be justified on the ground of a perfect righteousness, and our inherent righteousness is imperfect; for the Scripture says, "There is no man that sinneth not."—1 Kings viii. 46. 2. Because the righteousness by which we are justified is not our own.—Phil. iii. 9. 3. Because the sentence of justification must, in the order of nature, though not of time, precede the implantation of inherent holi-

ness. 4. Because, if we were justified by an inherent righteousness, it could not be said that God "justifieth the ungodly."—Rom. iv. 5.

That we cannot be justified by our own work, is no less manifest,—1. Because our personal obedience falls far short of the requirements of the law. The law demands obedience in all respects perfect; but "in many things we offend all."—James iii. 2. 2. Because our obedience, though it were commensurate to the high demands of the law, could not satisfy for our past transgressions. The law requires not only the fulfilment of its precept, but also the endurance of its penalty: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission."—Heb. ix. 22. 3. Because we are justified freely by grace, and grace and works are diametrically opposed.—Rom. iii. 24, xi. 6. 4. Because justification by works not only makes void the grace of God, but also renders the death of Christ useless, and of no effect.—Gal. ii. 21. 5. Because we are justified in such a way as excludes all boasting.—Rom. iii. 27. 6. Because justification by works is in direct contradiction to the uniform testimony of Scripture. The Apostle Paul fully discusses the subject of justification in his Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians; and in both of these Epistles he explicitly declares, that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God."—Rom. iii. 20; Gal. ii. 16. In answer to this argument, it has been often urged, that the works which the apostle excludes from the ground of the sinner's justification before God, are only works of the ceremonial, not of the moral, law. This "witty shift," Calvin says, the "wrangling disputants" of his time borrowed from Origen and some of the old writers; and he declares it is "very foolish and absurd," and calls upon his readers to "maintain this for a certain truth, that the whole law is spoken of, when the power of justifying is taken away from the law." "The reference," says Mr Haldane, "is to every law that God has given to man, whether expressed in words or imprinted in the heart. It is that law which the Gentiles have transgressed, which they have naturally inscribed in their hearts. It is that law which the Jews have violated, when they committed theft, adulteries, and sacrileges, which convicted them of impiety, of evil speaking, of calumny, of murder, of injustice. In one word, it is that law which shuts the mouth of the whole world, as had been said in the preceding verse, and brings in all men guilty before God."

Others have contended that the works which the apostle excludes from any share in our justification are merely works not performed in faith. This allegation is equally groundless; for the apostle excludes works in general—works of every sort, without distinction or exception (Eph. ii. 9, 10); and the most eminent saints disclaim all dependence upon their own works, and deprecate being dealt with according to their best performances.—Ps. cxliii. 2; Phil. iii. 8, 9.

Arminians maintain that faith itself, or the act of believing, is accepted as our justifying righteousness. In opposition to this our Confession teaches, that God

does not justify us "by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, as our righteousness." And in confirmation of this, we observe, that faith, as an act performed by us, is as much a work of obedience to the law as any other; and, therefore, to be justified by the act of faith, would be to be justified by a work. But this is contrary to the express declarations of Scripture, which exclude all sorts of works from the affair of justification.—Gal. ii. 16. Besides, faith is plainly distinguished from that righteousness by which we are justified. We read of "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ;" and of "the righteousness which is of God by faith."—Rom. iii. 22; Phil. iii. 9. No language could more clearly show that righteousness and faith are two different things. "Nothing," says Mr Haldane, "can be a greater corruption of the truth than to represent faith itself as accepted instead of righteousness, or to be the righteousness that saves the sinner. Faith is not righteousness. Righteousness is the fulfilling of the law."

Neonomians allege, that though we cannot fulfil that perfect obedience which the law of works demanded, yet God has been graciously pleased, for Christ's sake, to give us a new law, according to which, sincere obedience, or faith, repentance, and sincere obedience, are accepted as our justifying righteousness. It may be here remarked, that the Scripture nowhere gives the slightest intimation that a near and milder law has been substituted in place of the law of works originally given to man. Christ came "not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it." The gospel was never designed to teach sinners that God will now accept of a sincere instead of a perfect obedience, but to direct them to Jesus Christ as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." The idea of a new law, adapted to the present condition of human nature, reflects the greatest dishonour both upon the law and the Lawgiver; for it assumes that the Lawgiver is mutable, and that the law first given to man demanded too much.

III. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the sole ground of a sinner's justification before God. It is not his essential righteousness as God that we intend, for that is incommunicable; but his mediatory or surety-righteousness, which, according to our Confession, consists of his "obedience and satisfaction." That sinners are justified only on this ground might be demonstrated by a multiplicity of proofs. None can be justified without a perfect righteousness; for the demands of the law cannot be set aside or relaxed. The judgment of God, in pronouncing the sinner righteous, would not be according to truth, unless the sentence were founded upon a righteousness adequate to the requirements of the law. In the Old Testament, the Messiah is mentioned under this endearing name, "The Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6); and it is predicted that he should "bring in everlasting righteousness."—Dan ix. 21. In the New Testament, Christ is said to be "made unto us righteousness;" and we are said to be "made the righteousness of God in him."—1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21. It is declared that "by the obedience of

one shall many be made righteous," and that "by the righteousness of one, the free gift comes upon all men unto justification of life."—Rom. v. 18, 19.

IV. Sinners obtain an interest in the righteousness of Christ, for their justification, by God imputing it to them, and their receiving it by faith. The doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is rejected, not only by Romanists and Socinians, but by several authors of widely different sentiments. Let it be observed, that we plead for the imputation of the righteousness of Christ itself, and not merely of its effects. "To say that the righteousness of Christ, that is, his obedience and sufferings, are imputed to us only as to their effects, is to say, that we have the benefit of them, and no more; but imputation itself is denied. So say the Socinians; but they know well enough, and ingenuously grant, that they overthrow all true, real imputation thereby." The effects of Christ's righteousness are communicated to us upon the ground of the imputation of his righteousness itself; but they are really imparted, and not imputed to us. Many, we apprehend, oppose the doctrine of imputation, owing to their misconception of its proper nature. It does not signify the infusion of holy dispositions, or the actual transference of the righteousness of Christ to believers, so that it becomes inherently and subjectively theirs—that is impossible, in the nature of things; but the meaning is, that God reckons the righteousness of Christ to their account, and, in consideration of it, treats them as if they were righteous. God does not reckon that they performed it themselves, for that would be a judgment not according to truth; but he accounts it to them for their justification. "There are certain technical terms in theology," says Dr Chalmers, "which are used so currently, that they fail to impress their own meaning on the thinking principle. The term 'impute' is one of them. It may hold forth a revelation of its plain sense to you, when it is barely mentioned that the term impute in the 6th verse (Rom. iv.), is the same in the original with what is employed in that verse of Philemon where Paul says, 'If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.' To impute righteousness to a man without works, is simply to put righteousness down to his account, though he has not performed the works of righteousness."

The doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is clearly taught in Scripture. We are represented as being constituted righteous by the obedience of Christ, as we are constituted sinners by the disobedience of Adam; and this can only be by imputation.—Rom. v. 19. We are also said to be made the righteousness of God in Christ, as he was made sin for us; and this, likewise, could only be by imputation.—2 Cor. v. 21. We are expressly told that God imputeth righteousness without works.—Rom. iv. 6. This imputation proceeds upon the grounds of the believer's federal union with Christ from eternity, and of his vital union with him in time. Christ as the Surety of his spiritual seed, engaged from everlasting to fulfil this righteousness for them; he fulfilled it in their nature, and in their room;

and when they become vitally united to him by the Spirit and by faith, God graciously accounts his righteousness to them for their justification.

V. Faith is the alone instrument of the sinner's justification. That we are justified by faith is so frequently and expressly declared in the Scriptures, that no one who professes to receive the Word of God as the rule of his faith can venture to deny it. There are very different opinions, however, in regard to the office of faith in the justification of a sinner. Some say that a sinner is justified by faith, as it is an act performed by him; as if faith came in the room of perfect obedience, required by the law. This we have already disproved; and "it is well known," says Witsius, "that the Reformed Churches condemned Arminius and his followers for saying that faith comes to be considered, in the matter of justification, as a work or act of ours." Some have said, that faith is to be considered as the condition of our justification. The "condition" of anything usually signifies that which, being done, gives us a right and title to it, because it possesses either intrinsic or conventional merit. To call faith, in this sense, the condition of our justification, would introduce human merit, to the dishonour of divine grace, and would entirely subvert the gospel. Some worthy divines have called faith a condition, who were far from being of opinion that it is a condition properly so called, on the performance of which men should, according to the gracious covenant of God, have a right to justification as their reward. They merely intended, that without faith we cannot be justified—that faith must precede justification in the order of time or of nature. But as the term "condition" is very ambiguous, and calculated to mislead the ignorant, it should be avoided. Others have said that faith justifies, as it is informed and animated by charity. This is the language of the Romanists; and here we may fitly use the words of the heroic champion of the Reformation. Commenting on Gal. ii. 16, he says: "This is the true mean of becoming a Christian, even to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law. Here we must stand, not upon the wicked gloss of the schoolmen, which say, that faith justifieth when charity and good works are joined withal. With this pestilent gloss, the sophists have darkened and corrupted this and other like sentences in Paul, wherein he manifestly attributeth justification to faith only in Christ. But when a man heareth that he ought to believe in Christ, and yet, notwithstanding, faith justifieth not except it be formed and furnished with charity, by and by he falleth from faith, and thus he thinketh: If faith without charity justifieth not, then is faith in vain and unprofitable, and charity alone justifieth; for except faith be formed with charity it is nothing.—Wherefore we must avoid this gloss as a most deadly and devilish poison, and conclude with Paul, 'that we are justified, not by faith furnished with charity, but by faith only and alone.'"

In opposition to these various views of the relation which faith bears to justification, our Confession teaches that "faith, receiving and resting on Christ and his

righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification." Some have misrepresented this expression, as if it meant that faith is the instrument wherewith God justifies. But it was never intended that faith is an instrument on the part of God, but on our part. Some have also inaccurately spoken of faith as the instrument by which we receive justification. Faith is more properly the instrument by which we receive Christ and his righteousness. Our Confession clearly teaches, that faith is "the instrument of justification," only as it "receives and rests on Christ and his righteousness." This, according to Mr Traill, is "the plain old Protestant doctrine, That the place of faith is only that of a hand or instrument receiving the righteousness of Christ, for which only we are justified." The language of modern evangelical divines entirely accords with this "old Protestant doctrine." "Faith," says Mr Haldane, "does not justify as an act of righteousness, but as the instrument by which we receive Christ and his righteousness." "When we read that we are justified by faith," says Dr Chalmers, "one should understand that faith is simply the instrument by which we lay hold of this great privilege." "As the hand is said to nourish," says Dr Colquhoun, "because it is the instrument of applying food to the body; so faith justifies, as the hand or instrument of applying the Redeemer's righteousness to the soul."

It is to be carefully observed, that our Confession not merely describes faith as the instrument, but as the alone instrument of justification. This is directed against an error of the Romanists, who hold that hope, and love, and repentance, are included in faith as justifying, and concur with faith, strictly so called, to justification. That we are justified by faith alone, is proved by such arguments as these:—we are justified by faith, in opposition to works (Rom. iv. 2, 3)—faith alone receives and applies the righteousness of Christ; we are justified freely by grace, and therefore by faith alone—because this alone is consistent with its being by grace (Rom. iii. 24, iv. 16); Abraham obtained the blessing of justification by faith alone, and he was designed as a pattern of the way in which all others, in succeeding ages, were to be justified. Gal. iii. 6-9.

The advocates of the doctrine of justification by faith alone were grossly calumniated, as if they had denied the necessity of good works. To guard against this injurious misrepresentation, our Confession teaches, that though "faith is the alone instrument of justification, yet it is not alone in the person justified." The faith that justifies is a living and active principle, which works by love, purifies the heart, and excites to universal obedience. It is accompanied with every Christian grace, and productive of good works. "Works," says Luther, "are not taken into consideration when the question respects justification. But true faith will no more fail to produce them, than the sun can cease to give light." This suggests a distinction, which enables us to remove the apparent discrepancy between the Apostles Paul and James; but we forbear entering on that subject.

Section III.—Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction, to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

EXPOSITION.

Socinians deny that Christ made any real and proper satisfaction to divine justice in behalf of his people; and their grand objection to this doctrine is, that it leaves no room for the exercise of grace in the salvation of sinners. Many modern writers, of a different class, deny that Christ satisfied retributive justice, and insist that he only satisfied public justice; consequently, they must maintain, that he neither discharged the debt of those who are justified, nor made a proper satisfaction in their behalf. Indeed, they hold that a debt of obedience or a debt of punishment, is, in its nature, intransferable; of course, neither was transferred to Christ, and neither was paid by him. The demands of the law, in respect both of obedience and satisfaction, instead of being exacted by Jehovah, and fulfilled by Christ, are, in their opinion, by an act of divine sovereignty, "suspended, superseded, overruled." And the chief argument which they urge against the doctrine of a "proper, real, and full satisfaction" to divine justice is, "its excluding anything of the nature of grace from every part of the process of a sinner's salvation, excepting the original appointment of the Surety." The statement of our Confession, in this section, is directly opposed to these views; and in confirmation of it, we need only refer to the explicit testimony of the Scriptures. "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."—Rom. v. 19. What stronger proof could we desire that Christ discharged the debt of obedience due by those who are justified? "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities."—Isa. liii. 11. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."—Gal. iii. 13. What words could more clearly convey the sentiment, that Christ endured the very penalty of the broken law, and thereby made "a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice," in behalf of all whom he represented? But the justification of sinners, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," instead of excluding or obscuring, serves rather to illustrate the glory of the grace displayed in it. Grace shines in God's condescending

to accept of the righteousness of a surety; still more in his providing the surety; above all, in giving his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Besides, that faith by which we receive the righteousness of Christ is the gift of God.—Eph. ii. 8. "The glory of the gospel is, that grace reigns through righteousness. Salvation is of grace; but this grace comes to us in a way of righteousness. It is grace to us; but it was brought about in such a way that all our debt was paid. This exhibits God as just as well as merciful. Just, in requiring full compensation to justice; and merciful, because it was he, and not the sinner, who provided the ransom."

Section IV.—God did, from all eternity, decree to justify the elect; and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins and rise again for their justification; nevertheless they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.

EXPOSITION.

This section is directed against the Antinomian error, that the elect were justified from eternity, or when the price of their redemption was paid by Christ. It is readily admitted that God, from eternity, decreed to justify the elect; but till the period of effectual calling they are in a state of wrath and condemnation.—Eph. ii. 3; John iii. 18. The righteousness by which they are justified was perfected in Christ's death, and the perfection of it was declared by his resurrection, and they may be said to have been virtually justified when Christ was acquitted and discharged as their head and representative; nevertheless, they are not actually and formally justified until they are vitally united to Christ by faith.

Section V.—God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may by their sins fall under God's Fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

EXPOSITION.

As justification is an act completed at once, so those who are justified cannot come into condemnation: "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."—Rom. viii. 1. The sins which they afterwards commit cannot re-

voke the pardon which God has graciously given them; but they may subject them to his fatherly displeasure, and to temporary chastisements.—Ps. lxxxix. 30-33. Here we must advert to the well-known distinction between judicial and fatherly forgiveness. Though God, in the capacity of a judge, pardons all the sins of believers, in the most free and unconditional manner, in the day of their justification, yet that forgiveness which, as a father, he bestows upon his justified and adopted children, is not, in general, vouchsafed without suitable preparation on their part for receiving and improving the privilege. They ought, therefore, to humble themselves before God, make ingenuous confession of their offences, renew their faith and repentance, and earnestly supplicate the removal of his fatherly displeasure, and the restoration of his paternal smiles.

Section VI.—The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respect, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

EXPOSITION.

The reverse of this is maintained by Socinians. We shall only observe, that though "the righteousness of God" is now more clearly manifested by the gospel, yet it was "witnessed by the law and the prophets."—Rom. iii. 21. And those, under the Old Testament, who laid hold upon that righteousness by faith, were as really and fully justified as believers under the New Testament. Paul, accordingly, adduces the justification of Abraham as an example of the method in which believers in all ages must be justified.—Rom. iv. 3. Though the everlasting righteousness was not actually brought in until Christ "became obedient unto death," yet the efficacy of his death extended to believers under the former as well as under the present dispensation.

What an invaluable and transcendently glorious privilege is justification! How unspeakably blessed is the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works! Delivered from the awful curse of the broken law, and introduced into a state of acceptance and favour with God, all penal evil is extracted out of the cup of his affliction, death itself is divested of its sting, and all things shall work together for his good. Adorned with the glorious robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, he shall stand before the judgment-seat undismayed, while the exalted Saviour and Judge shall bid him welcome to that state of final and everlasting blessedness which God has prepared for him, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." But where will the sinner and the ungodly appear in that day when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and summon them before his august tribunal

to receive their final doom? How will the impenitent and unbelieving—all who have not submitted to the righteousness of God—then “call to the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” Let those who have hitherto been labouring to establish their own righteousness cease from their attempt—let them recede the gift of righteousness which is presented for their acceptance in the offer of the gospel and let them plead this perfect and glorious righteousness, and improve it by faith, as the sole ground of all their expectations from a God of grace either in time or through eternity. Renouncing all dependence on their own works of righteousness, let them, like Paul, desire to “win Christ, and be found in him, not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”