

Chapter 11: Of Justification II

K. C. Juntunen

1 Paragraphs I & II

Last week the first two paragraphs of chapter 11 defined justification and faith for us.

In the first paragraph, our confession emphasized that we are not justified on account of our works, or anything intrinsic to us. But, rather, it's only by God's free grace—*sola gratia*—that God reckons Christ's righteousness to our account. In fact, our confession was careful and thorough in its denials and affirmations. It denied that God justified on the basis of righteousness infused in us, or that even he worked in us but for Christ's sake alone, *solus Christus*.

Although our confession's denials were directed at Socinian, and Roman Catholic heresy, its definition was clear, and thorough enough to deny Eastern Orthodox conceptions of justification as well. We saw that they came into contact with Protestantism and, about century after the Roman church, they also formally apostatized, declaring that justification is by faith and works, and faith is intellectual notions about God, *etc.*

In the first two paragraphs, our confession teaches that justification is received by faith alone, *sola fide*. It says faith is the “instrument of justification.” So that, when we say “saved by faith,” we mean “by means of faith,” not “on the basis of faith.” The basis is Christ and his righteousness—faith receives, and rests on him alone.

Charles Hodge calls faith the “condition of justification.” He means that, we're not justified without it. Joel Beeke doesn't like that word. He says that it can suggest to some that there's a prerequisite we must fulfill to merit salvation. He quotes Robert Shaw's *Exposition of the Westminster Confession*:

Some worthy divines have called faith a condition, who were far from being of the 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 nature. But the term “condition” is very ambiguous, and calculated to mislead the ignorant, it should be avoided¹.

He advises us to stick to our confession’s word: *instrument*. I think “condition” is fine so long as you admit, as Hodge does, that God gives the condition. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works...” (Ephesians 2:8-9) Of course, we could also say that justification is by works—the righteous works of Jesus Christ—which is true, but potentially confusing. So maybe Beeke has a point. After all, Molinists, and Arminians do make faith an intrinsic thing, and therefore necessarily meritorious. They, like the Catholics, eastern and western, haven’t gone anywhere.

Now, why is faith, of all things, the instrument? It’s because it’s exactly the opposite of laboring to create our own righteousness. It empties out our trust in ourselves, and replaces it with trust in Christ. It trusts in Christ and his righteousness alone. This is way it’s sometimes described as an open, empty, receiving hand. “Nothing in my hand I bring.” Paul says “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” That is, the nature of faith is to confess that the work is all his, so we cannot boast, or glory in any accomplishment. The satisfaction that results in our justification is Christ’s work. In *him* we can glory—the glory is his, *solī deo gloria*.

Kuiper wrote, “As little as a beggar who puts forth his hand to receive a piece of bread, can say that he has earned the gift granted him, so little can believers claim that they have merited justification, just because they have embraced the righteousness of Christ, graciously offered them in the Gospel.”

So, this saving faith—something we do—is something he gives. But we find, like everything we do, there’s some imperfection to it.

B. B. Warfield: “It is from its *object* [Jesus Christ] that faith derives its value.... The *saving power* of faith resides thus not in itself, but in Almighty Savior on whom it rests.... It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ.... It is not strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith.”

¹Robert Shaw, *The Reformed Faith: An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1845), 131. As cited in Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Theology* (2004), 382.

So, if you ever talk to an elder about lack of assurance, one of the first things they'll tell you to do is look to Christ. This is because we see all the problems in us, and all these imperfect, subjective fruits of our justification, and it doesn't look good. For assurance we need to look to extrinsic, objective things—Christ's perfect, finished work; God's binding, righteous declaration that we're just in his sight; and the fact that his justice is, once and for all, satisfied.

2 The regulating design of justification (3)

The Basis of Justification: The Work of Christ

Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did, by the sacrifice of Himself in the blood of His cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them, make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God'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.

did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified

Notice that “all” has a qualifying phrase. He did not discharge debt of all, but “the debt of all those that are justified.” There are those that balk at definite atonement, and say he died for all. But if he discharged the debt of all, then the debt is no longer owed, and God is unjust to punish anyone, whether believing or unbelieving.

Renihan points out that there's a double focus to Christ's work: “First, *he did fully discharge the debt of those who are justified*. The *debt* is the righteousness that is owed to God,” along with “the debit that increases with every sin.”

“Second, He endured their punishment.”

Notice who discharged the debt. There's no room for us to have discharged any of it. He discharged it. He *fully* discharged it. We don't participate in satisfying justice at all. The supporting text, Hebrews 10:14, says “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” “One offering,” it says—so nothing new needs to be offered. “Perfected,” it says—so nothing needs to be, or can be added.

and did, by the sacrifice of Himself in the blood of His cross, undergoing in their stead the penalty due unto them

This is penal substitutionary atonement. Atonement has to do with our reconciliation to God. It's substitutionary because he suffered in our place. It's penal (penal, as in penalty) because it deals with punishment, specifically the punishment due to us. The Old Testament sacrificial system was built on this idea, and the New Testament is clear in portraying Christ as the antitype of the OT sacrificial lamb.

Although it could hardly be taught more clearly in Scripture, it's denied by Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox alike. They would say this is a new atonement theory. Systematic theologians usually point out that the formulation was never made so clear as it was in the Reformation.

I found a helpful article by Michael J. Vlach, Assistant Professor of Theology at Masters Seminary². It lists out some of the other "atonement theories" and quotes a number of Early Fathers who seem to be espousing penal substitutionary atonement more or less explicitly.

Clement, who died before the second century, said, "Because of the love he felt for us, Jesus Christ our Lord gave his blood for us by the will of God, his body for our bodies, and his soul for our souls."

Ignatius seems less clear, "Now, He suffered all these things for our sakes, that we might be saved."

Peter says we're redeemed by Christ's blood.

I Peter 1:18-19: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹ But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"

Even more clearly, Isaiah says our iniquity was laid on Christ.

Isaiah 53:5-6: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

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

So in addition to undergoing our penalty—which was accepted for remission of sin—his obedience is also accepted in our stead.

Both of these he did freely. He didn't owe us. There wasn't anything in

²<https://tms.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/tmsj20i.pdf>

us. He wasn't obligated or compelled in any way. This connects back to the first two paragraphs; it's *solī gratia*, and *sola fide* again. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) The only thing we've earned through our works is death. Eternal life is a gift. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." (Romans 4:4)

a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in our behalf

"Proper," here, means exact. This isn't indiscriminate grace spread everywhere. It's grace for particular ones, and forgiveness for specific sins. This connects back to Chapter 3 and the doctrine of the decree. It says, "by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestined, or foreordained to eternal life through Jesus Christ." These two ideas hang together because of the specificity, and exactness of Christ's satisfaction. We're not justified because God's overlooking all our sin, but because Christ has bought satisfaction for each specific sin. So God's *exact justice*, and *rich grace* are both satisfied.

3 The specified occasion of justification (4)

Justification, Eternity, and Time

Real theologians will refer to these three categories:

pactum salutis This is the eternal decree of justification.

historia salutis This refers to Christ's work in history to purchase justification.

ordo salutis This is where the Holy Spirit "doth in due time actually apply Christ unto" us—his work, in history, in our specific lives.

Our paragraph is broken up that way:

God did from all eternity decree to justify all 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 personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them.

This paragraph refutes the idea that was going around in the 17th century that the elect were justified from all eternity, and never under God's wrath. I'm not sure if this is an idea still going around, but, if it is, I

have to wonder what they make of the fact that Scripture always relates our justification to faith—but faith occurs in time.

Thomas Goodwin³ says there are “three stages of motion” in justification.

1. *eternal decree to justify* “Justified then we were when first elected, though not in our persons, yet in our Head, as he had our persons then given to him.” So, “God doth judge, and pronounceth his elect ungodly and unjustified, till be believe.”

Galatians 3:8: “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.”

I Peter 1:2 is written to those “[elect] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. . .”

I Timothy 2:6: “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

2. *Christ did in the fullness of time* “The second stage “is a father act of justifying us, which passeth from God towards us in Christ, upon payment and performance by Christ at his resurrection.” ’ Ephesians 2:6 says we are seated with him in heavenly places.

Romans 4:25: “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”

1. “Those two acts of justification are wholly out of us, immanent acts in God; and though they concern us, and are *towards us*, yet are not acts of God *upon us* . . . only as existing in our Head.”

the Holy Spirit applies Christ in time

Colossians 1:21-22: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ²² In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight.” It says that there was a time when we were alienated, and separated from God. We can’t say that we’re justified from all eternity, and have never been under God’s wrath.

Titus 3:4-7: “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, ⁵ Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and

³Thomas Goodwin quotes from “Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith” cited from Renihan.

renewing of the Holy Ghost; ⁶ Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; ⁷ That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” So we were “made heirs.” We were not heirs, and then we were. The grace is applied to us in time when the Holy Spirit regenerates us, leading to faith, then justification, then adoption, then sanctification, and so on. Decree, and election happen in eternity. Calling, faith, justification, adoption, and sanctification all take place in history.

4 The balancing reality to justification (5)

The Ongoing Fruit of Justification

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 in that condition they have not usually the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.

These paragraphs all connect together so integrally, that, it seems, the last paragraph already inclined us to think about this. I’ve heard that there are some who believe that, because they think we’re justified from all eternity, therefore our sins are forgiven, and don’t need, or ought not to be confessed. This paragraph meant to oppose antinomianism. It follows from fine distinctions we made in the last paragraph. It also anticipates chapter 13, “Of Sanctification.”

Remember the old Norman Greenbaum song “Spirit in the Sky?”

[Verse 3]
Never been a sinner, I never sinned
I got a friend in Jesus
So you know that when I die
He’s gonna set me up with the spirit in the sky⁴

But what’s I John 1:8 say? “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And verse 10 says, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

⁴Norman Greenbaum, “Spirit in the Sky.” <https://genius.com/Norman-greenbaum-spirit-in-the-sky-lyrics>

the continuing forgiveness

Matthew 6:12: Christ teaches us to pray “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” We are to pray for forgiveness for our debts.

I John 7, 9: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

we can never fall

John 10:28: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

Chapter 17, paragraph 1 says, those accepted in the beloved “shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved, seeing the gifts and callings of God are without repentance.”

What’s it mean to persevere so that you never fall? Jonathan talks about “religious affections.” He’s talking about “vigorous, persistent, and lively” inclinations of the will. When we’re regenerated, the Lord changes our affections. As much as we struggle with sin, or by our sin come under God’s fatherly displeasure, we’ll just keep coming back. Christ is beautiful, and there’s just nothing else that’ll do. “Even if he throws me into hell, nothing is as lovely—where else shall I go?”

fatherly displeasure and lost light of his countenance

So though we can never fall away, we *can* fall under his “fatherly displeasure.” Antinomians would say that fatherly displeasure and chastisement is inconsistent with his love. But what does Hebrews 12:6 say? “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” It continues,

⁷ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ⁸ But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

So far from being inconsistent with love, chastisement is a necessary sign of his love for us.

Thomas Watson says, God’s *Judicial Wrath* is removed, tho’ God may lay on the Rod, yet he hath taken away the Curse: Correction may befall the Saints, but not Destruction.”

Psalms 89:31-33: “³¹ If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; ³² Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. ³³ Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.”

Notice how this connects back to §5¶5 “Of Providence.” But this paragraph adds on how one usually can regain the light of God’s countenance.

Our paragraph gives five conditions of restoration: “humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and [renew their] repentance.”

“humble themselves” Pride can show up in a lot of ways. I can think of two that might prevent us seeking restoration. We can hang on to the notion that we didn’t actually sin—that we’re in the right. This is what Job was thinking, I suppose. But I think more likely, with a tender-hearted believer, what might happen is a feeling of unworthiness, and embarrassment. “How can I return to him again?” I don’t think we can be embarrassed without pride. And the truth is we weren’t worthy before, and we don’t become worthy by our righteousness. Galatians 3:3 says,

³ Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

“confess their sins” It’s beautiful how ready his is to forgive us. Remember the prodigal son in Luke 11:

when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ ‘I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’

So he planned out what he was going to say. But notice what happens when he comes to his father. He only gets out the confession before his father interrupts:

the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son—’ ²² “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.

And Psalm 32:5 says more briefly,

I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.

Our confession cites Psalm 51, where David repents of his sin with Bathsheba. And Psalm 32:5, where David says, “I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.”

“beg pardon” We beg pardon by praying as Christ taught us: “forgive us our debts.”

“renew their faith” We renew our faith by believing what we know to be true. We return to believing, thinking, and therefore acting like his children. Romans 6 says

¹⁰ For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. ¹¹ Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. ¹³ Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

“renew their . . . repentance” Peter gives us an example of repentance in Matthew 26:75: “And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”

Sometimes it takes some kind of confrontation to bring us to our senses. I don’t know how long David stayed darkened after his sin with Bathsheba. But it was long enough to put together a conspiracy to kill her husband. It wasn’t until Nathan showed him his sin that the light went on and he repented.

5 The unchanging uniformity of justification (6)

Justification and Old Covenant Believers

The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

This connects back to Chapter §8¶6 “Of Christ the Medator” which shows that Old Testament saints who were justified were also justified on the basis of Christ.

Romans 4:22-24: “²² And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. ²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; ²⁴ But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;” So Paul understands Genesis 15 as saying Christ’s righteousness was imputed to Abraham by faith.

Galatians 3:9: “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” Which lumps together Old Testament saints with New Testament saints—making us all “children of Abraham.”