

# God's act of justification

## The doctrine in experience and in preaching

Theological Conference 2022

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### Plan of lecture

#### Introduction

A brief review of the doctrine

Limits of the lecture

Justification and preaching

#### 1. What is the act of God in justifying a sinner?

The sinner sisted at the bar of God

The Advocate in the court of heaven

What is the act of justification?

Not a future act nor an imminent act

The powerful application of the word of promise

Some discovery of the soul's security and safety

Justifying faith and the act of acquitment

#### 2. The question in relation to spiritual experience

A narrative of Thomas Halyburton's experience

The act of assent at his discovery

The effects of his discovery

The usefulness of his account

The account of his extremity leading to deliverance

#### 3. How this ought to inform and guide the preacher

The preaching of the law of God

Preaching Christ and him crucified

The assurance of salvation in preaching

*“What the rationalist most needs at the outset is a work of the law on his conscience: a clearer and more impressive apprehension of the spirituality and extent of its preceptive requirements; a deeper sense of sin - of the fact of sin, as undeniably chargeable against himself, and, especially of the guilt of sin, as that which exposes him to imminent and awful danger; a realising conviction of those threatened penalties which are expressive of God's holy hatred of sin, and God's inflexible determination to punish it; and a close and faithful application of the whole law to himself individually, as a sinner in the sight of God, standing before his awful tribunal and awaiting his sentence as a righteous judge. Without such experience as this he will feel little or no interest in the question of justification and will scarcely be able to understand what it means, or what principles are involved in it.”* James Buchanan, Introduction

*“Anyone who really understands the subject can hardly fail to be impressed with the conviction that the method of justification which is revealed in Scripture ... bears upon it the legible impress of profound wisdom ... It is an attempt to solve the deepest problem and to answer the most anxious question, which conscience continually prompts men to raise, but which their minds strive in vain to determine: ‘How shall man be just with God?’ or ‘How can God be just’ and yet ‘justify the ungodly’? ... The gospel of Christ alone has presented that problem in all its magnitude and in its just proportions; and the gospel of Christ alone has offered a solution of it, based on his law, of the principles and ends of moral government, and of the state, character and prospects of man as a dying yet immortal being, chargeable with past guilt and still depraved by inherent sin.”* James Buchanan, Conclusion

## Thirty-three propositions concerning justification – from the Lectures of James Buchanan

### (8) Justification: The Scriptural Meaning of the Term

I. Justification is a legal, or forensic term and is used in Scripture to denote the acceptance of anyone as righteous in the sight of God.

II. While ‘justification’ is a forensic or judicial term, it is used in Scripture to denote, sometimes the acceptance of a sinner as righteous in the sight of God; sometimes the manifestation or proof of his acceptance by which it is attested and made sure; and this variety in the application of it is the ground of an important theological distinction – the distinction between actual and declarative justification.

III. The distinction between actual and declarative justification – viewed in connection with the difference between and living and a dead faith – affords a sufficient explanation of the apparent discrepancy between the teaching of Paul and James.

### (9) Justification: The Proper Nature of the Blessing

IV. The term ‘justification’ denotes either an act of God or a privilege of his people; and in both cases, that which is denoted by it includes absolution and acceptance – the full pardon of sin, admission into God's favour, and a title to eternal life.

V. Justification, although inseparably connected with, is yet essentially different from, sanctification; and the former is not founded on the latter, as its procuring or meritorious cause.

### (10) Justification: Its Relation to the Law and Justice of God

VI. As justification is a forensic, legal, or judicial term, so that which is denoted by it must necessarily have some relation to the law and justice of God.

VII. The rule of justification, as revealed to man in his state of original righteousness, was the law of God in the form of a divine covenant of life.

VIII. The breach of the law in its covenant form by the sin of our first parents rendered it for ever impossible that either they, or any of their descendants, should be justified on the ground of their personal righteousness.

IX. The law of God which is the rule of man's duty, is also a revelation of God's eternal justice and holiness.

X. The doctrine of the law is presupposed in that of the gospel, and the justifying righteousness which is required in the one is revealed in the other.

### (11) Justification: Its Relation to the Mediatorial Work of Christ

XI. It was God's eternal purpose to overrule the fall of man for his own glory, by a signal manifestation of all his moral perfections, in justifying ‘the ungodly’ through Christ as Mediator.

XII. Christ, as Mediator, was ‘made under the law’ as the substitute, representative, and surety of his people.

XIII. The mediatorial work of Christ on earth properly consisted in his humiliation, sufferings and obedience, or, as it is stated by the apostle, ‘He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’

XIV. The mediatorial work of Christ, including both his sufferings and his obedience, constituted a complete and effectual satisfaction to the law and justice of God.

XV. The justification of sinners is directly connected in Scripture with the mediatorial work of Christ as a satisfaction to the law and justice of God.

#### **(12) Justification: Its Immediate and Only Ground – the Imputed Righteousness of Christ**

XVI. The righteousness which is the ground of a sinner's justification is denoted or described by various terms in Scripture so that its nature may be determined by simply comparing these terms with one another; and the ascertaining whether there be any righteousness to which they are all equally applicable and in which they all coincide, in the fullness of their combined meaning.

XVII. This righteousness – being the merit of a work, and not a mere quality of character – may become ours by being imputed to us but cannot be communicated by being infused; and must ever continue to belong primarily and in one important respect, exclusively to him by whom alone that work was accomplished.

XVIII. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to his people as the immediate ground of their pardon and acceptance with God may be proved deductively from the character in which he acted, as their representative; and from the vicarious nature of the work which he undertook to accomplish.

XIX. The righteousness of Christ considered as the merit of his mediatorial work, is not partially, but entirely imputed; and is effectual for the complete justification of all who believe in his name.

XX. The imputation of sin and righteousness is not, in any bad sense of the expression a 'legal fiction' as it has been offensively called, nor is it a theory, invented by man, but a fact, revealed by God.

#### **(13) Justification: Its Relation to Grace and Works**

XXI. When God forgives sinners and accepts them as righteous in his sight, they are 'justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.'

XXII. Justification 'by grace' is identified in Scripture with justification 'by faith' and opposed to justification 'by works.'

XXIII. Justification by 'the works of the law' is expressly excluded in the case of every sinner; while justification by a righteousness not his own is as expressly revealed.

XXIV. Justification by 'works,' such as are really 'good' and 'acceptable to God' is also excluded in the case of believers excepting only as it may be manifested or declared by them.

#### **(14) Justification: The Nature and Reason of its Connection with Faith**

XXV. We are justified by faith, and faith is counted or imputed to us for righteousness; but faith is not itself the righteousness on account of which we are justified.

XXVI. The faith by which we are justified is a spiritual grace – as being the gift of God and one of the fruits of his Spirit – and as such is acceptable and well pleasing to him 'through Jesus Christ.'

XXVII. A real influence or efficacy is ascribed to faith in connection with our justification, but it is such only as belongs to a divinely appointed means of receiving and appropriating a free gift.

XXVIII. The only warrant of faith is the word of God, and that word is sufficient, not only to entitle every sinner to receive and rest upon Christ for his personal salvation, but to make it his duty to do so without delay.

XXIX. We are justified by faith only, simply because it is by faith and by no other grace that we believe the truth concerning Christ and rely on him alone for salvation as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

#### **(15) Justification: Its Relation to the Work of the Holy Spirit**

XXX. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are revealed as concurring together in the whole purpose and plan of man's redemption; but as sustaining, each of them, a distinct office and undertaking a different part of the work in carrying that purpose and plan into effect.

XXXI. The work of the Holy Spirit is as necessary for our justification as the work of Christ himself; but it is not necessary for the same reasons, nor is it effectual for the same ends.

XXXII. The work of the Spirit consists in 'bearing witness to Christ' and applying to men the redemption which he obtained for them, so as to make it effectual for their complete and everlasting salvation.

XXXIII. Regeneration and justification are simultaneous; and no man is justified who is not renewed, nor is any man renewed who is not also and immediately justified.

### **Bibliography of Scottish Works and Writings on Justification**

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