

IT IS GOD THAT JUSTIFIES

Romans 8:33

A WONDERFUL THING it is, this being justified, or made just. If we had never broken the laws of God we should not have needed it, for we should have been just in ourselves. He who has all his life done the things which he ought to have done, and has never done anything which he ought not to have done, is justified by the law. But you, dear reader, are not of that sort, I am quite sure. You have too much honesty to pretend to be without sin, and therefore you need to be justified.

Now, if you justify yourself, you will simply be a self-deceiver. Therefore do not attempt it. It is never worth while.

If you ask your fellow mortals to justify you, what can they do? You can make some of them speak well of you for small favors, and others will backbite you for less. Their judgment is not worth much.

Our text says, "It is God that justifies," and this is a deal more to the point. It is an astonishing fact, and one that we ought to consider with care. Come and see.

In the first place, *nobody else but God would ever have thought of justifying those who are guilty*. They have lived in open rebellion; they have done evil with both hands; they have gone from bad to worse; they have turned back to sin even after they have smarted for it, and have therefore for a while been forced to leave it. They have broken the law, and trampled on the gospel. They have refused proclamations of mercy, and have persisted in ungodliness. How can they be forgiven and justified? Their fellowmen, despairing of them, say, "They are hopeless cases." Even Christians look upon them with sorrow rather than with hope. But not so their God. He, in the splendor of his electing grace having chosen some of them before the foundation of the world, will not rest till He has justified them, and made them to be accepted in the Beloved. Is it not written, "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified"? Thus you see there are some whom the Lord resolves to justify: why should not you and I be of the number?

None but God would ever have thought of justifying *me*. I am a wonder to myself. I doubt not that grace is equally seen in others. Look at Saul of Tarsus, who foamed at the mouth, against God's servants. Like a hungry wolf, he worried the lambs and the sheep right and left; and yet God struck him down on the road to Damascus, and changed his heart, and so fully justified him that ere long, this man became the greatest preacher of justification by faith that ever lived. He must often have marveled that he was justified by faith in Christ Jesus; for he was once a determined stickler for salvation by the works of the law. None but God would have ever thought of justifying such a man as Saul the persecutor; but the Lord God is glorious in grace.

But, even if anybody had thought of justifying the ungodly, *none but God could have done it*. It is quite impossible for any person to forgive offences which have not been committed against himself. A person has greatly injured you; you can forgive him, and I hope you will; but no third person can forgive him apart from you. If the wrong is done to you, the pardon must come from you. If we have sinned against God, it is in God's power to forgive; for the sin is against Himself. That is why David says, in the fifty-first Psalm: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight"; for then God, against whom the offence is committed, can put the offence away. That which we owe to God, our great Creator can remit, if so it pleases Him; and if He remits it, it is remitted. None but the great God, against whom we have committed the sin, can blot out that sin; let us, therefore, see that we go to Him and seek mercy at His hands. Do not let us be led aside by those who would have us confess to them; they have no warrant in the Word of God for their pretensions. But even if they were ordained to pronounce absolution in God's name, it must still be better to go ourselves to the great Lord through Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and seek and find

pardon at His hand; since we are sure that this is the right way. Proxy religion involves too great a risk: you had better see to your soul's matters yourself, and leave them in no man's hands.

Only God can justify the ungodly; but *He can do it to perfection*. He casts our sins behind His back, He blots them out; He says that though they be sought for, they shall not be found. With no other reason for it but His own infinite goodness, He has prepared a glorious way by which He can make scarlet sins as white as snow, and remove our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. He says, "I will not remember your sins." He goes the length of making an end of sin. One of old called out in amazement, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoned iniquity, and passed by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retained not his anger for ever, because he delighted in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

We are not now speaking of justice, nor of God's dealing with men according to their deserts. If you profess to deal with the righteous Lord on law terms, everlasting wrath threatens you, for that is what you deserve. Blessed be His name, He has not dealt with us after our sins; but now He treats with us on terms of free grace and infinite compassion, and He says, "I will receive you graciously, and love you freely." Believe it, for it is certainly true that the great God is able to treat the guilty with abundant mercy; yea, He is able to treat the ungodly as if they had been always godly. Read carefully the parable of the prodigal son, and see how the forgiving father received the returning wanderer with as much love as if he had never gone away, and had never defiled himself with harlots. So far did he carry this that the elder brother began to grumble at it; but the father never withdrew his love. Oh my brother, however guilty you may be, if you will only come back to your God and Father, He will treat you as if you had never done wrong! He will regard you as just, and deal with you accordingly. What say you to this?

Do you not see--for I want to bring this out clearly, what a splendid thing it is--that as none but God would think of justifying the ungodly, and none but God could do it, yet the Lord can do it? See how the apostle puts the challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." If God has justified a man it is well done, it is rightly done, it is justly done, it is everlastingly done. I read a statement in a magazine which is full of venom against the gospel and those who preach it, that we hold some kind of theory by which we imagine that sin can be removed from men. We hold no theory, we publish a fact. The grandest fact under heaven is this--that Christ by His precious blood does actually put away sin, and that God, for Christ's sake, dealing with men on terms of divine mercy, forgives the guilty and justifies them, not according to anything that He sees in them, or foresees will be in them, but according to the riches of His mercy which lie in His own heart. This we have preached, do preach, and will preach as long as we live. "It is God that justifies"--that justifies the ungodly; He is not ashamed of doing it, nor are we of preaching it.

The justification which comes from God himself must be beyond question. If the Judge acquits me, who can condemn me? If the highest court in the universe has pronounced me just, who shall lay anything to my charge? Justification from God is a sufficient answer to an awakened conscience. The Holy Spirit by its means breathes peace over our entire nature, and we are no longer afraid. With this justification we can answer all the roarings and railings of Satan and ungodly men. With this we shall be able to die: with this we shall boldly rise again, and face the last great assize.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,

For who aught to my charge shall lay?

While by my Lord absolved I am

From sin's tremendous curse and blame.

Friend, *the Lord can blot out all your sins*. I make no shot in the dark when I say this. "All *manner* of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." Though you are steeped up to your throat in crime, He can with a word remove the defilement, and say, "I will, be thou clean." The Lord is a great forgiver.

"I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS." DO YOU?

He can even at this hour pronounce the sentence, "Thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace;" and if He do this, no power in Heaven, or earth, or under the earth, can put you under suspicion, much less under wrath. Do not doubt the power of Almighty love. *You* could not forgive your fellow man had he offended you as you have offended God; but you must not measure God's corn with your bushel; His thoughts and ways are as much above yours as the heavens are high above the earth.

"Well," say you, "it would be a great miracle if the Lord were to pardon me." Just so. It would be a supreme miracle, and therefore He is likely to do it; for He does "great things and unreachable" which we looked not for.

I was myself stricken down with a horrible sense of guilt, which made my life a misery to me; but when I heard the command, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else"--I looked, and in a moment the Lord justified me. Jesus Christ, made sin for me, was what I saw, and that sight gave me rest. When those who were bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness looked to the serpent of brass they were healed at once; and so was I when I looked to the crucified Savior. The Holy Spirit, who enabled me to believe, gave me peace through believing. I felt as sure that I was forgiven, as before I felt sure of condemnation. I had been certain of my condemnation because the Word of God declared it, and my conscience bore witness to it; but when the Lord justified me I was made equally certain by the same witnesses. The word of the Lord in the Scripture said, "He that believeth on him is not condemned," and my conscience bears witness that I believed, and that God in pardoning me is just. Thus I have the witness of the Holy Spirit and my own conscience, and these two agree in one. Oh, how I wish that my reader would receive the testimony of God upon this matter, and then full soon he would also have the witness in himself!

I venture to say that a sinner justified by God stands on even a surer footing than a righteous man justified by his works, if such there be. We could never be surer that we had done enough works; conscience would always be uneasy lest, after all, we should come short, and we could only have the trembling verdict of a fallible judgment to rely upon; but when God himself justifies, and the Holy Spirit bears witness thereto by giving us peace with God, why then we feel that the matter is sure and settled, and we enter into rest. No tongue can tell the depth of that calm which comes over the soul which has received the peace of God which passes all understanding.