

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

JOHN OWEN



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A rigorous defense of **justification by faith alone** through the **imputation of Christ's righteousness**. Owen examines the nature of justifying faith, the biblical meaning of justification, and the imputation of Christ's obedience — both active and passive. Drawing extensively from Paul's epistles, especially Romans, he refutes the objections of Roman Catholic and Socinian theologians, and reconciles Paul and James on faith and works. A towering achievement of Puritan theological scholarship.



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CHAPTER 1: JUSTIFYING FAITH, THE CAUSES, OBJECT, AND NATURE OF IT, DECLARED



The means of justification on our part is faith. Scripture affirms so frequently and so plainly that we are justified by faith that no one can directly deny it in plain terms. Some, pushed by the biases that theological controversy tends to produce, have begun claiming that our justification is more often attributed to other graces or duties than to faith — but that claim is best passed over in silence rather than argued about. Yet even when people formally grant that we are justified by faith, some explain it in ways that completely hollow out the meaning, as surely as if they had rejected it outright. It would actually serve people better if this teaching were plainly refused at the start rather than leading them through a maze of words and distinctions that ends up excluding it entirely — which is exactly what both the Roman Catholics and the Socinians do. For now, we may take the proposition as established and simply ask what it truly means. The first thing to examine is faith itself, which raises two questions: (1) its nature, and (2) its role in our justification.

So many discourses already exist on the nature of faith in general, on the specific nature of justifying faith, and on its distinguishing marks from what is called faith but is not justifying — many of them the products of sound judgment and genuine experience — that it is entirely unnecessary to enter into a lengthy further discussion of them. Nevertheless, something must be said to clarify what we mean: what is the faith to which we attribute our justification, and what is its role in it?

The various distinctions commonly made about faith — since the word carries many meanings — I will skip entirely, not only because they are well known, but because they do not belong to our present argument. What does concern us is this: Scripture plainly speaks of two kinds of faith by which people believe the gospel. There is a faith by which we are justified — whoever has it will certainly be saved, it purifies the heart, and it works through love. And there is a faith, or a kind of believing, that does none of these things — whoever has it and nothing more is not justified and cannot be saved. Therefore, not every faith by which people are said to believe is justifying faith. For example, it is said of Simon the Magician that he believed (Acts 8:13), yet he was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity and therefore did not believe with the faith that purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). Similarly, many believed in the name of Jesus when they saw the miracles He performed, but Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in man (John 2:23-24). They did not believe in His name in the same way — or with the same kind of faith — as those who receive the power to become children of God (John 1:12). Some, when they hear the word, receive it with joy and believe for a while, but have no root (Luke 8:13). And faith without a root in

the heart will not justify anyone. For with the heart people believe and are justified (Romans 10:10). The same is true of those who will cry on the last day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name" — while they were always workers of lawlessness (Matthew 7:22-23).

This kind of faith is usually called historical faith. But that name is not taken from its object, as if it only related to biblical history or historical facts contained in Scripture. It actually extends to the whole truth of God's word, including the promises of the gospel. It is called historical faith because of the nature of the agreement it involves — the same kind of agreement we give to historical events that have been credibly reported to us.

This faith has various differences and degrees, both in regard to what grounds it and in regard to its effects. As for the first: all faith is agreement based on testimony, and divine faith is agreement based on divine testimony. The differences and degrees of this faith correspond to how that testimony is received. Some people grasp it only on human grounds, weighing its credibility by reason alone — and their agreement is a purely natural act of the understanding, which is the lowest degree of historical faith. Others have their minds enabled by spiritual illumination, which reveals the evidence of divine truth and makes it worth believing — and the agreement they give on that basis is more firm and more active than that of the first group.

This faith also has differences and degrees in regard to its effects. In some people it has little or no influence on the will or the affections and produces no change in how they live — as is the case with those who profess to believe the gospel yet live in all kinds of sin. At this level, the apostle James calls it dead faith, comparing it

to a lifeless body with no movement, and he says it is the same kind of agreement that even demons are compelled to make. This kind of faith is common in the world. In others, this faith works powerfully on the affections in varying degrees — pictured in the different kinds of soil where the seed of the word is sown — and it produces many visible effects in their lives. At its highest development, both in the strength of its evidential grounding and in the effects it produces, it is usually called temporary faith, because it neither holds firm against all opposition nor will bring anyone to eternal rest. The name comes from our Savior's description of the one who believes with this faith (Matthew 13:21).

I grant that this faith is genuine in its own category — it is not merely called faith in name only. As a general kind of faith it is real, but it is not the same specific kind as justifying faith. Justifying faith is not simply a higher or the highest degree of this faith — it is a different kind altogether. Therefore, several things may be observed about this faith at its highest development as they relate to our subject.

1. A person may have this faith along with all its effects and still not be justified — and if they have no other kind of faith, they cannot be justified. For justification is nowhere attributed to this faith; on the contrary, the apostle James explicitly states that no one can be justified by it.

2. This faith can produce great effects in the mind, the affections, and the lives of people, yet none of those effects are the ones that belong uniquely to justifying faith. Still, the effects may be significant enough that those who experience them should be regarded — and by charitable judgment ought to be regarded — as true believers.

3. This is the kind of faith that can exist alone. We are justified by faith alone — but not by the kind of faith that can exist alone. "Alone" refers to faith's role in justification, not to its nature or existence. We absolutely deny that anyone can be justified by a faith that can exist by itself — that is, apart from a principle of spiritual life and universal obedience that actively expresses itself in all the works that duty requires.

I have made these observations only to counter the slander and reproach that some people try to attach to the doctrine of justification by faith alone through the mediation of Christ. According to them, anyone who holds this doctrine must be a Solifidian or an Antinomian — someone who opposes or denies the necessity of universal obedience and good works. Most of those who press this charge know in their own conscience that it is false. But that is how many people handle theological disputes — they will assert anything that seems to benefit their cause, to the great scandal of religion. If by Solifidians they mean those who believe that faith alone is, on our part, the means, instrument, or condition of our justification — then all the prophets and apostles were Solifidians, and were taught to be so by Jesus Christ Himself, as will be proved. If they mean those who claim that justifying faith exists alone — separate or separable from a principle and practice of holy obedience — then they will have to find such people themselves, because we know nothing of them. We recognize no faith as the same kind as justifying faith unless it essentially and fundamentally contains universal obedience within it, as an effect exists in its cause or fruit in its root, and expresses itself in all particular duties as rule and circumstance require. In fact, we recognize no faith as justifying — or as belonging to the same kind — unless it is in its own nature a

spiritually vital principle of obedience and good works. And if this is not enough to persuade some people to stop seeking rhetorical advantage through such shameful slanders, it is at least enough for others to free their minds from any concern about those charges.

To understand the specific nature of justifying faith, the evidence for it can be organized under four headings: (1) Its causes on God's part. (2) What is required in us prior to it. (3) Its proper object. (4) Its proper and distinctive acts and effects. Each of these will be addressed as far as is necessary for our present purpose.

1. The doctrine of the causes of faith — tracing its ultimate origin in the divine will and the way it is communicated to us — is so expansive and so intertwined with the doctrine of how efficacious grace works in conversion (which I have treated elsewhere) that I will not discuss it here. It cannot be adequately addressed in a few words, and engaging with it fully would take us too far from our present argument. This much I will say: from this topic it can be conclusively demonstrated that the faith by which we are justified is a special kind of faith — one that no other faith, from which justification is not inseparable, shares.

2. Our first inquiry concerns the second point: what is required of us as a matter of duty before we believe unto the justification of life? I maintain that those in whom this faith is worked — to whom it is given and whose duty it is to believe — must already have experienced the work of the law in the conviction of sin; that is, conviction of sin is a necessary precondition to justifying faith. Much has been debated about what this conviction involves and what effects it produces in the mind that prepare the soul to receive the promise of the gospel. There are different views about those effects and accompanying experiences — things like compunction, humili-

ation, self-examination, sorrow for sin, and similar responses — as well as about the degree to which these are ordinarily required before faith and conversion to God. I will speak briefly about these, only so far as they are inseparable from the conviction itself. I will first consider conviction itself with what is essential to it, and then consider its effects in connection with the temporary faith described earlier. My purpose is not to analyze their nature — which I take as already understood — but only to consider how they relate to our justification.

Regarding conviction itself: I affirm that the work of conviction — by which the soul gains a practical understanding of the nature of sin, its guilt, and the punishment it deserves, and becomes aware of its own condition with regard to both original and actual sin, along with its complete inability to deliver itself from that condition — is the necessary precondition to justifying faith in adults for whom the word is the external means and instrument of justification.

A convicted sinner is the only one who is in a fit state to receive justification — though this does not mean that everyone who is convicted is or must necessarily be justified. This conviction, along with its effects and consequences, does not so prepare the person that justifying grace must inevitably follow, as the Roman Catholics suggest. Nor does it constitute such a preparation that by virtue of any divine promise or agreement a convicted person will necessarily be pardoned and justified. Rather: just as someone may believe with a non-justifying faith — such as the kinds described above — without this conviction, so conviction ordinarily precedes, and is necessary as a prior condition to, the faith that

leads to justification. The point is not that conviction guarantees justification, but that without it justification cannot ordinarily occur.

This, I say, is required in the person to be justified — prior in order of nature to the faith by which we are justified — and I will prove this with the following arguments. First, without properly accounting for it, the true nature of faith can never be understood. As we showed earlier, justification is God's way of delivering the convicted sinner — the one whose mouth has been stopped, who stands guilty before God, accountable to the law, and shut up under sin. A sense of that condition and all that belongs to it is therefore required for believing. This is why Le Blanc, who has researched these matters with some care, commends the definition of faith given by Mestrezat: that faith is the flight of a penitent sinner to the mercy of God in Christ. There is in fact more truth and insight in that definition than in twenty others that appear more technically precise. But without assuming the conviction described above, that definition of faith is incomprehensible. For it is conviction alone that drives the soul to flee to God's mercy in Christ, to be saved from the wrath to come — as in Hebrews 6:18, where they "fled for refuge."

2. The order, relationship, and purpose of the law and the gospel together conclusively demonstrate the necessity of conviction prior to believing. The first thing any person must deal with concerning their eternal condition — both by nature and by God's design — is the law. The law is first presented to the soul with its terms of righteousness and life, and with its curse in the event of failure. Without this, the gospel cannot be understood, nor its grace properly valued. For the gospel is the revelation of God's way

of rescuing souls from the sentence and curse of the law (Romans 1:17). That was the nature, purpose, and aim of the first promise, and of the entire work of God's grace revealed in all subsequent promises — that is, the whole gospel. Therefore, since the faith we are discussing is evangelical — required not by the law but by the gospel, having the gospel as its source, rule, and object — it cannot be required of us or exercised by us apart from the prior work and effect of the law in convicting of sin, bringing knowledge of sin, a sense of its guilt, and an awareness of the sinner's condition before God. Any faith that has no bearing on this we absolutely deny to be the faith by which we are justified (Galatians 3:22-24; Romans 10:4).

3. Our Savior Himself teaches this directly in the gospel. He calls only those who are weary and heavy-laden, declares that healthy people have no need of a physician but only the sick, and says He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. In all of this He is not speaking of sinners in the general sense — which all people are — for He distinguishes between them, offering the gospel to some and not others. He is speaking of those who were convicted of sin, burdened by it, and were seeking deliverance.

Similarly, those to whom the apostle Peter presented the gospel promise of pardon — the proper object of gospel faith — were cut to the heart by conviction of their sin and cried out, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37-39). The same was true of the jailer to whom the apostle Paul offered salvation through Christ as what he must believe for his deliverance (Acts 16:30-31).

4. The condition of Adam after the fall, and God's dealings with him there, is the clearest illustration of the order and method of these things. We are by nature in the very same state and condition Adam was in after the fall. He was truly ruined by sin, and he was brought to conviction — both of the nature of his sin and its effects — through that act of God upon his mind by the law that Scripture calls "the opening of his eyes." This was nothing other than his conscience communicating to his mind an awareness of the nature, guilt, effects, and consequences of sin — something the law could then teach him that it could not before. This filled him with shame and fear. Against the shame he tried to cover himself with fig leaves, and against the fear he hid among the trees of the garden. None of the strategies people devise for freedom and safety from sin are any wiser or more likely to succeed than those, however much they may satisfy themselves with them. In this condition, God — by directly confronting Adam about what had happened — sharpened his conviction by adding His own testimony to its truth, and formally placed him under the curse of the law through a judicial pronouncement. In this lost, forsaken, hopeless state, God offered him the promise of redemption through Christ. And this promise was the object of the faith by which Adam was to be justified.

Although these things do not always happen in so clear and distinct a sequence in the minds and consciences of all who are called to believe the gospel, yet in substance — particularly the prior conviction of sin before faith — they are present in everyone who sincerely believes.

These things are well known and in substance generally agreed upon. Yet, when properly considered, they expose the emptiness and errors of many definitions of faith that are pressed upon us. Any definition or description of faith that does not explicitly, or at least implicitly, account for these things is simply misleading and fails to match the experience of those who truly believe. This includes all those who reduce faith to mere agreement with divine revelation — whatever the nature of that agreement and whatever effects are attributed to it. Such agreement can exist without any reference to the work of the law. To speak plainly: I place no value on even the most carefully argued analysis of the nature and acts of justifying faith from those who have never themselves experienced the work of the law in conviction and condemnation for sin — with its effects on their conscience — or who fail to reflect on their own experience, in which what they truly believe is better revealed than in all their theological debates. The faith by which we are justified is, in general terms, the soul's movement toward God as He reveals Himself in the gospel — offering deliverance from this lost condition, from under the curse of the law applied to the conscience — according to His will and through the ways He has appointed. I offer this not as a formal definition of faith, but simply to express what necessarily shapes it and from which its nature may be understood.

2. The effects of this conviction, and their real or claimed relationship to our justification, may also be briefly considered. Since conviction is purely a work of the law, it should not be considered alone with respect to these effects, but together with, and under the influence of, the temporary faith in the gospel described earlier. These two — temporary faith and legal conviction — are the

foundation of all religious works and duties that precede justification, and we must therefore deny that they have any causal role in producing it. That said, it is granted that many internal and external acts and duties will follow from genuine conviction. The internal ones can be grouped under three headings. First, displeasure and sorrow for having sinned. It is impossible for anyone who has been genuinely convicted of sin — in the way described above — not to experience a dislike of sin and of themselves for having sinned, along with shame and sorrow over it. And it is sufficient evidence that a person is not truly convicted of sin — whatever they profess or confess — if their mind is not affected this way (Jeremiah 36:24). Second, fear of the punishment due to sin. Conviction addresses not only the instructive and commanding aspect of the law — by which the existence and nature of sin are revealed — but also its sentence and curse, by which sin is judged and condemned (Genesis 4:13-14). Therefore, where fear of threatened punishment does not follow, no one is genuinely convicted of sin, and the law has not done its proper work in them as a preparation for the administration of the gospel. And since by faith we flee from the wrath to come, where there is no awareness or sense of that wrath as deserved, there is no basis or reason for believing. Third, a desire for deliverance from the condition in which a convicted sinner finds himself is unavoidable. This is naturally the first thing conviction produces in the mind, in varying degrees of anxiety, fear, distress, and restlessness — which many, drawing on experience and the guidance of Scripture, have explained at length to great benefit to the church, though others have mocked it freely. These internal acts of the mind will also produce various external duties, which can be grouped under two headings. First, abstaining

from known sin to the best of one's ability. Those who begin to feel the evil and bitterness of having sinned against God cannot help but resolve to avoid sin going forward. This flows from all the internal acts mentioned above as their cause, but especially from the last one — the desire for deliverance from their current state. They see this abstinence as the best path toward that deliverance, or at least as something without which deliverance will not come. In this condition their spirits typically act through promises and vows, with renewed sorrow when sin overtakes them — which it will in that condition. Second, the duties of religious worship — prayer and hearing the word — along with diligent participation in the church's ordinances, will also follow. For they know that without these things no deliverance can be found. A reformation of life and conduct in various degrees consists partly in these things and partly follows from them. And these responses are always present where people's convictions are genuine and lasting.

Nevertheless, it must be said that these things — individually or together, even at their highest level — are neither necessary dispositions, preparations, prior merits, nor conditions of our justification.

1. They are not conditions of justification. If one thing is the condition of another, that other thing must follow when the condition is fulfilled — otherwise it is not truly a condition. But all these things can be present without justification following. Therefore, there is no covenant, promise, or arrangement of God that makes them conditions of justification, even though in their own nature they may serve what is required of us in relation to it. They do not have the certain and infallible connection with justification that faith has — the kind guaranteed by divine promise or covenant.

Nothing should be called a condition unless it has been established as such by divine agreement or promise. Otherwise, conditions could be multiplied endlessly, and everything — natural as well as moral — could be made into one. By that logic, the food we eat could be called a condition of justification. Faith and justification are inseparable, but justification and the things we are now discussing are not — as experience demonstrates.

2. Justification can occur without the external acts and duties that proceed from conviction under the influence of temporary faith. Adam was justified without them, and so were the converts in Acts 2 — for everything reported about them is essentially just conviction itself (verse 37). The same was true of the jailer (Acts 16:30-31). And for many of these acts and duties, this is the case for most who do believe. Therefore they are not conditions. A genuine condition suspends the outcome it conditions.

3. These things are not formal dispositions to justification, because justification does not consist in the introduction of any new form or inherent quality into the soul — as has been partly shown already and will be more fully demonstrated later. Nor, fourth, are they moral preparations for justification. Since they precede evangelical faith, no one in that state can have any aim other than seeking righteousness by the works of the law — and that is no preparation for justification. All discovery of God's righteousness and the soul's embrace of it belongs to faith alone. There is indeed a repentance that accompanies faith and is at least radically included in its nature, and this repentance is required for our justification. But the legal repentance that precedes gospel faith and exists apart from it is neither a disposition, preparation, nor condition of our justification.

In brief, the order of these things can be seen in God's dealings with Adam, as mentioned earlier. There are three stages. First, the sinner's eyes are opened to see the filth and guilt of sin as the sentence and curse of the law is applied to his conscience (Romans 7:9-10). This produces in the sinner's mind everything described above and drives him toward all the duties that flow from it. People at the stage of initial conviction typically think no more than that their condition is bad and dangerous, that it is their duty to improve it, and that they can and will do so if they put their minds to it. But all these efforts, as a means of protection or deliverance from the sentence of the law, are no better than fig leaves and hiding. Second, God ordinarily works through His providence or through the preaching of the word to intensify the work of the law in a particular way — corresponding to the charge He gave Adam after Adam tried to hide himself. Through this the sinner's mouth is stopped, and he becomes thoroughly aware of his guilt before God and convinced that no relief or deliverance can be found through any of the paths of sorrow or duty he has tried. Third, in this condition, it is a pure act of sovereign grace — with no regard to any of those preceding things — to call the sinner to believe, to exercise faith in the promise unto the justification of life. This is God's order, yet what precedes His call to faith has no causal role in bringing that call about.

3. The next question is the proper object of justifying faith — that is, of true faith in its office, work, and duty with respect to our justification. We must first consider what we cannot accept. Beyond various other differences that appear to exist on this topic — most of which are really just different ways of expressing the same substance — there are two positions regarded as extremes:

one an excess, the other a deficiency. The first is the position of the Roman church and those who follow them on this point. They hold that the object of justifying faith, as such, is all divine truth — everything God has revealed, whether written in Scripture or delivered by tradition as presented through the authority of the church. We are not presently concerned with the second part of that description. What they maintain is that the whole of Scripture, all its parts, and all the truths of every kind it contains are equally the object of faith in its role in justification. From this it follows that faith, in their view, can only consist in the mind's agreement, since if the entire Scripture — laws, commands, promises, warnings, narratives, prophecies, and the like — is its object, and these things are considered not as containing things good or evil for us but simply as divinely revealed, then only agreement can be the required act of the mind. So confident are they in this — that faith is nothing more than agreement with divine revelation — that Bellarmine, opposing Calvin who placed knowledge in his description of justifying faith, declared that faith is better defined by ignorance than by knowledge.

This description of justifying faith and its object has been so thoroughly examined and rejected on such clear scriptural and rational grounds by Protestant writers of all kinds that it is unnecessary to dwell on it at length again. I will make a few observations about it to show both what is true in what they assert and where it falls short of the truth. Nor will I limit my attention to those in the Roman church who require nothing more for faith or believing than a bare mental agreement with divine revelation; I will also address those who locate faith entirely in such a firm agreement as produces obedience to all God's commands. For while faith does

both of these things — and both are included in it — the specific nature of faith as justifying requires something more. As justifying faith, it is neither merely a mental agreement nor any degree of such agreement, however firm, that produces such effects.

1. All faith, of whatever kind, is an act of that capacity of our souls by which we are able to firmly agree with the truth based on testimony, in matters not evident to us through sense or reason. It is "the evidence of things not seen." And all divine faith is, in general, agreement with the truth presented to us on the basis of God's testimony. By this, as is commonly agreed, faith is distinguished on one side from opinion and moral certainty, and on the other from scientific knowledge or logical demonstration.

2. Therefore, justifying faith includes agreement with all divine revelation on the basis of God's testimony as its Revealer. We cannot be justified by any act of the mind that does not include or assume this — not because such assent is not justifying, but because without it there is no faith at all. This agreement, I say, is included in justifying faith. And so we find it often spoken of in Scripture — as Bellarmin and others have collected the examples — with reference to various things, not limited to the specific promise of grace in Christ, which is what they contest. But beyond the fact that in most such passages the proper object of faith as justifying is implicitly included and ultimately referred to — though expressed in various ways through causes or accompanying circumstances — it is granted that we believe all divine truth with the very same faith by which we are justified, so that other things may rightly be attributed to it.

3. Given these concessions, we still maintain two things. First, the whole nature of justifying faith does not consist merely in the mind's agreement, however firm and steadfast, or in whatever effects of obedience it may produce. Second, in its specific duty and office in justification — from which it receives its special name, which is what we are now explaining — it does not equally regard all divine revelation as such, but has a particular object assigned to it in Scripture. Since both of these points will be immediately demonstrated in our description of the proper object and nature of faith, I will for now simply raise a few objections to their position, sufficient to show how far removed it is from the truth.

1. This agreement is an act of the understanding alone — an act of the mind in response to truth presented to it, whatever its nature. We agree to the worst and most painful truths just as readily as to the best and most useful ones. But believing, as Scripture describes it, is an act of the heart — which in Scripture represents all the faculties of the soul as one unified principle of moral and spiritual action. "With the heart people believe and are justified" (Romans 10:10). And it is frequently described as an act of the will — though it is not that alone, since no one can believe as they should without an act of the will. See John 5:40; John 1:12; John 6:35. We come to Christ through an act of the will, and "whoever wishes" may come. Indeed, willingness is equated with believing in Psalm 110:3, and unbelief is called disobedience in Hebrews 3:18-19.

2. All divine truth is equally the object of this kind of agreement. It pays no special regard to the particular nature or significance of any one truth over another, since it concerns only divine revelation as such. By this logic, the fact that Judas was the traitor

would have as much bearing on our justification as the fact that Christ died for our sins. But how completely this contradicts Scripture, the analogy of faith, and the experience of every true believer needs no further explanation or proof.

3. This kind of agreement with all divine revelation can be genuine and sincere even where there has been no prior work of the law and no conviction of sin. Nothing like that is required for it, and many who do agree with the truth have never experienced it. But, as we have shown, that prior work is necessary for evangelical, justifying faith. To suppose otherwise is to overturn the order and purpose of the law and the gospel and their mutual relationship as both serve God's design in the salvation of sinners.

4. This kind of agreement offers no real relief to a convinced sinner whose mouth has been stopped and who stands guilty before God. Only such people are in a position to be justified and to seek justification in the right way. A mere agreement with divine revelation is not suited to give them that relief. In fact, it is the very thing that brought them into the condition from which they need to be delivered — for the knowledge of sin comes through the law. But faith is a specific act of the soul reaching out for deliverance.

5. This kind of agreement is no more than what the devil himself has — and does have, as the apostle James affirms. The example of demons believing in one God proves that they also believe to be true whatever this one God — who is the first and essential truth — reveals. This kind of belief is consistent with every kind of wickedness and with no obedience at all, and in that state it makes God out to be a liar (1 John 2:4). It is no wonder that people who know no faith other than this kind deny that we are justified by faith.

6. This kind of agreement does not match the descriptions of justifying faith given in Scripture. In particular, it is through faith as justifying that we are said to receive Christ (John 1:12; Colossians 2:6), to receive the promise, the word, the grace of God, and the atonement (James 1:21; John 3:33; Acts 2:41; Acts 11:1; Romans 5:11; Hebrews 11:17), and to cleave to God (Deuteronomy 4:4; Acts 11:23). In the Old Testament, justifying faith is generally expressed through the language of trust and hope. None of these things are contained in a mere agreement with the truth — they require acts of the soul beyond what belongs to the understanding alone.

7. This kind of agreement does not match the experience of those who truly believe. All our inquiry and argument on this subject must relate to that experience. What we are really after is simply to discover what people actually do when they genuinely believe unto the justification of life. The question is not what notions people hold about it, how they express their ideas, or how well they can defend them against objections with careful wording and subtle distinctions — but only what we ourselves do when we truly believe. Our disagreements on this question reflect the deep imperfection of our present state, such that those who truly believe cannot even agree about what they are doing when they believe — a fact that should make us mutually tender and patient with one another. Yet if people would pay more attention to their own experience of turning to God for pardon of sin and a righteousness unto life, rather than to the notions their minds have been shaped or biased by on various occasions, many unnecessary disputes about the nature of justifying faith would be avoided. I therefore deny that this general agreement with truth — however firm it may be,

and whatever effects it may produce in the way of duty or obedience — answers the experience of any single true believer as a complete account of all the ways their soul acts toward God for pardon of sin and justification.

8. The only faith that is justifying is faith that is actually accompanied by justification. It receives that name from justification alone. To suppose that a person has justifying faith and is yet not justified is to suppose a contradiction. We are not looking for any faith other than the faith by which a believer is actually justified. But not everyone who has this kind of agreement is justified, and even those who defend this view do not claim that this agreement alone immediately justifies anyone. It is therefore sufficiently clear that something more is required for justifying faith than genuine agreement with all divine revelation — even though we do give that agreement through the very faith by which we are justified.

On the other side, some have restricted the object of justifying faith so narrowly, and thereby defined the nature of faith so precisely, that they fail to capture everything Scripture attributes to it. Some have said that the specific object of justifying faith is the pardon of our own sins in particular. On this view, faith is a firm personal conviction of the forgiveness of one's sins through the mediation of Christ — that what Christ did and suffered as our Mediator, He did for us individually. A specific personal application of God's mercy to one's own soul and conscience is thus made the essence of faith. Or, to put it plainly: believing that one's own sins are forgiven is made the primary and most characteristic act of justifying faith. It would follow from this that anyone who does not have a firm conviction of the personal forgiveness of their own sins has no saving faith and is not a true believer — a conclusion

that must not be accepted. If anyone has held this view, I suspect they were inattentive to their own experience in stating it — or perhaps they simply did not recognize how all the other acts of faith in which its essence truly consists were already included in the personal conviction they were emphasizing. We will address this later. But I have no doubt that what they are describing is what faith is suited for, aims toward, and ordinarily produces in true believers who grow in it and exercise it well.

Many great theologians at the time of the Reformation — as the Lutherans generally still do — made the mercy of God in Christ, and therefore the forgiveness of one's own sins, the proper object of justifying faith as such. They therefore placed the essence of faith in a trusting confidence in the grace of God through Christ as declared in the promises, with a steady personal application of those promises to oneself. I say with some confidence that those who do not aim at reaching this — either do not understand the nature of believing, or are seriously neglecting both the grace of God and their own peace.

What led those great and godly men to express themselves in this way, and to define the essence of faith by its highest act — within which they always included and assumed its other acts — was the state of the consciences of the people they were ministering to. Their dispute with the Roman church on this point was about the means by which the consciences of convicted, troubled sinners could come to rest and peace with God. At that time, people had been taught that such rest and peace were to be obtained not only through works of righteousness done in obedience to God's commands, but also through strict observance of many human inventions called church requirements, along with a strange

efficacy attributed to Mass sacrifices, sacramentals, absolutions, penances, pilgrimages, and similar superstitions. The Reformers observed that these practices kept people's consciences in perpetual anxiety, confusion, fear, and bondage — cutting them off from the rest, assurance, and peace with God through the blood of Christ that the gospel proclaims and offers. And when the leaders of the Roman church recognized that their own prescribed ways and means could never bring souls to rest or give any assurance of pardon, they made it a point of doctrine that believing in the forgiveness of one's own sins and having assurance of God's love in Christ were false and dangerous teachings. What else could they do, knowing full well that these things could not be attained by their methods? The central dispute that the Reformed theologians had with the Roman church on this matter was therefore this: whether, according to the gospel, a state of rest and assured peace with God is attainable in this life. Having every possible advantage in proving that it is — from the very nature, purpose, and goal of the gospel, from the grace, love, and plan of God in Christ, and from the power of His mediation through His sacrifice and intercession — the Reformers assigned these things to be the special object of justifying faith, and defined faith itself as fiduciary trust in the special grace and mercy of God through the blood of Christ as set forth in the promises of the gospel. In other words, they directed people's souls to seek peace with God, pardon of sin, and a right to the heavenly inheritance by placing their entire trust and confidence in the mercy of God through Christ alone. That said, I have never read any of them — as far as I know — claiming that every true and sincere believer always possesses full assurance of

God's special love in Christ or of the forgiveness of their own sins, even though they did argue that Scripture calls believers to this as a duty and that it is what they ought to aim for.

These things I will leave as I find them, for the benefit of the church. I will not quarrel with anyone over how the truth is expressed, as long as the substance of it is preserved. What all of these discussions are ultimately aiming at is the advancement and glory of God's grace in Christ, along with the guidance of people's souls to rest and peace with Him. Where that goal is reached or sincerely pursued — and pursued in a way that is true in its substance — a variety of views and ways of expressing the same realities can contribute to the useful exercise of faith and the building up of the church. Therefore, neither opposing nor dismissing what others have offered as their judgment on these matters, I will now share my own thoughts — with some hope that they may shed light on the thing itself being examined and help reconcile some differences among learned and godly people. My position is this: the Lord Jesus Christ Himself — as God's appointed Mediator for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, and as set forth to that end in the promises of the gospel — is the full and proper object of justifying faith, or of saving faith in its work and duty with respect to our justification.

The reason I define the object of justifying faith this way is that it fully accounts for everything Scripture attributes to faith and everything the nature of faith requires. What belongs to faith in general is assumed here, and what is specific to it as justifying is fully expressed. A few clarifications will explain this position, which will be confirmed further below.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the proper object of justifying faith. This is required by all the Scripture passages where justifying faith is described as believing in Him, believing on His name, receiving Him, or looking to Him — with the promise of justification and eternal life attached to it. See John 1:12; John 3:16, 36; John 6:29, 47; John 7:38; John 15:25; Acts 10:41; Acts 13:38-39; Acts 16:31; Acts 26:18; and others.

2. Christ is not proposed as the object of our faith unto the justification of life in an absolute sense, but as the ordinance of God the Father appointed to that end — which means that the Father Himself is also the immediate object of justifying faith, in ways we will explain shortly. So justification is frequently attributed to faith as it is especially directed toward the Father who sent Christ (John 5:24): "He who believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." And in this is included the grace, love, and favor of God, which is the primary moving cause of our justification (Romans 3:23-24). Add to this John 6:29, and the object of faith is complete: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." God the Father as the One who sends, and the Son as the One who is sent — that is, Jesus Christ in His work of mediation as God's appointed means for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners — is the object of our faith. See 1 Peter 1:21.

3. In order for Christ to be the object of faith — whose general nature consists in agreement and which is the foundation of all its other acts — He is set before us in the promises of the gospel. I therefore include the promises as part of faith's complete object. However, I do not consider the promises here merely as distinct divine revelations — in which sense they belong to the formal ob-

ject of faith — but as they contain, present, and offer Christ as the ordinance of God, and the benefits of His mediation, to those who believe. Some have placed the nature and essence of justifying faith in a special agreement with the promises of the gospel and have therefore made the gospel promises the proper object of faith. And it is certainly true that in the acts of justifying faith there is a distinctive agreement with those promises. But since this is only an act of the mind, neither the whole nature nor the whole work of faith can consist in it. Therefore, so far as the promises contribute to faith's complete object, they are also considered in their material content — namely, as they contain, present, and offer Christ to believers. In that sense, Scripture frequently affirms that the promises are the object of our faith unto the justification of life (Acts 2:39; Acts 26:6; Romans 4:16, 20; Romans 15:8; Galatians 3:16, 18; Hebrews 4:1; Hebrews 6:13; Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 10:36).

4. The goal for which the Lord Christ in His work of mediation is the ordinance of God — namely, the recovery and salvation of lost sinners — and for which He is set forth as such in the gospel promises, also belongs to the object of justifying faith. This is why the forgiveness of sins and eternal life are presented in Scripture as things to be believed unto justification, or as the object of our faith (Matthew 9:2; Acts 2:38-39; Acts 5:31; Acts 26:18; Romans 3:25; Romans 4:7-8; Colossians 2:13; Titus 1:2; and others). And since the righteous person is to live by faith, and each person is to believe for themselves — making personal application of what is believed to their own benefit — some have from this argued that the pardon of our own sins and our own salvation are the proper ob-

ject of faith. And indeed this does belong to faith's object when we are able to attain to it in God's appointed way and by the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:6-7).

Therefore, in asserting the Lord Jesus Christ in the work of His mediation to be the object of faith unto justification, I include in that: the grace of God as the cause, the pardon of sin as the effect, and the promises of the gospel as the means by which Christ and the benefits of His mediation are communicated to us.

All these things are so united, so intertwined in their mutual relationships, and so linked together in God's purpose and in the revelation of His will in the gospel, that believing any one of them effectively includes believing the rest. And anyone who disbelieves any one of them nullifies and renders void all the rest, and with them faith itself.

A proper understanding of these things resolves all the difficulties that arise — whether from Scripture or from the experience of believers — about the object of faith. Scripture tells us that we believe many things through faith and by faith unto justification. But two conclusions are evident from this. First, no single one of those things can be claimed to be the complete and adequate object of our faith. Second, none of them are the object of faith in an absolute sense — only as they relate to the Lord Christ as God's ordained means of our justification and salvation.

And this matches the experience of all who truly believe. Because these things are united and made inseparable in God's design, all of them are effectively included in each one of them. First, some direct their faith and trust principally toward the grace, love, and mercy of God — particularly believers under the Old

Testament before the clear revelation of Christ and His mediation. So did the psalmist (Psalm 130:3-4; Psalm 33:18-19), and so did the tax collector (Luke 18:13). These are proposed in countless Scripture passages as the causes of our justification (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:4-8; Titus 3:5-7). But they do this not in an absolute sense, but with reference to the redemption that is in the blood of Christ (Daniel 9:17). Nor does Scripture ever present them to us apart from that connection (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 1:6-8). For Christ's mediation is the cause, means, and channel through which that grace, love, and mercy are communicated to us. Second, some direct their faith principally to the Lord Christ Himself, His mediation, and the benefits of it. The apostle Paul frequently presents this in his own example (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:8-10). But he does this not in an absolute sense, but with reference to the grace and love of God from which they are given and communicated to us (Romans 8:32; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:6-8). Nor are they ever presented anywhere in Scripture as the object of our faith unto justification in any other way. Third, some fix their souls in believing particularly on the promises. This is illustrated in the example of Abraham (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:20), and the promises are likewise presented in Scripture as the object of our faith (Acts 2:39; Romans 4:16; Hebrews 4:1-2; Hebrews 6:12-13). But believers do this not merely because the promises are divine revelations, but because they contain and present to us the Lord Christ and the benefits of His mediation, flowing from the grace, love, and mercy of God. This is why the apostle argues at length in Galatians that if justification comes by any means other than the promise, then both the grace of God and the death of Christ are emptied of their meaning. The reason is that the promise is simply the means by

which Christ and His benefits are communicated to us. Fourth, some fix their faith on the things they are ultimately seeking — the pardon of sin and eternal life. These also are presented in Scripture as the object of our faith, or what we are to believe unto justification (Psalm 130:4; Acts 26:18; Titus 1:2). But this must be done in its proper order, especially in the application to our own souls. For we are nowhere called to believe in them, or in our own participation in them, except as they are effects of the grace and love of God through Christ and His mediation as set forth in the gospel promises. Therefore believing in them is included in believing in those prior causes, and comes after them in the order of nature. To believe in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life apart from the proper exercise of faith in their causes is nothing but presumption.

I have therefore given the complete object of faith as justifying — that is, in its work and duty with respect to our justification — in full agreement with the testimony of Scripture and the experience of those who believe.

Giving the promises their proper place, and the final effect of all — the pardon of sins and eternal life — their proper place as well, what I want to further confirm is this: the Lord Christ in the work of His mediation, as God's ordained means for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, is the proper and complete object of justifying faith. And the true nature of evangelical faith consists in the heart's response — which we will describe shortly — to the love, grace, and wisdom of God, along with the mediation of Christ in His obedience, sacrifice, satisfaction, and atonement for sin made through His blood. Some wickedly claim these things are incompatible. The second pillar of Socinian error is that the grace of

God and the satisfaction of Christ are mutually exclusive — that accepting one requires denying the other. But these things are presented in Scripture in such a way that neither can be believed without accepting both. And faith, which regards them in their proper relationship — the mediation of Christ subordinate to the grace of God — fixes itself on the Lord Christ and the redemption in His blood as the ordinance of God, the expression of His wisdom, grace, and love, and finds rest in both, and in nothing else.

Proof of this claim requires little labor, since it is not only abundantly declared in Scripture, but constitutes a central part of the design and substance of the gospel itself. I will therefore only point to some of the passages where it is taught.

The whole matter is expressed in the passage where the doctrine of justification is most fully presented: Romans 3:24-25 — "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God passed over the sins previously committed." To this we may add Ephesians 1:6-7: "He has made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, according to the riches of His grace." The thing by which we are justified is the special object of our faith unto justification. And that thing is the Lord Christ in the work of His mediation. For we are justified by the redemption that is in Jesus Christ — in Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Christ as a propitiation is the cause of our justification and the object of our faith — we attain justification through faith in His blood. But this is under one specific consideration: He is the ordinance of God appointed, given, set forth, and

proposed from and by the grace, wisdom, and love of God. God set Him forth as a propitiation. God makes us accepted in the Beloved. We have redemption in His blood according to the riches of His grace, by which He makes us accepted in the Beloved. And in this He lavishes on us wisdom in all its fullness (Ephesians 1:8). This, therefore, is what the gospel presents to us as the special object of our faith unto the justification of life.

But we may also confirm the individual parts of this claim in the same way.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ as presented in the promise of the gospel is the distinctive object of faith unto justification. Three kinds of scriptural testimony confirm this.

1. Passages that state this positively. Such as Acts 10:41: "To Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." Christ, believed in as the means and cause of forgiveness, is what all the prophets testify to. Acts 16:31: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" — the apostles' answer to the jailer's question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They give him his duty in believing and tell him its object: the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." What is presented as the only way and means of our justification and salvation — to the exclusion of everything else — is the object of faith unto our justification. And that is Christ alone, to the exclusion of all other things. Moses and the prophets testify to this; the design of the whole of Scripture is to direct the faith of the church to the Lord Christ alone for life and salvation (Luke 24:25-27).

2. All the passages where justifying faith is described as believing in Him or believing on His name — and there are many. John 1:12: He gave the right to become children of God to those who believed in His name. John 3:16: That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:36: He who believes in the Son has eternal life. John 6:29: "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." John 6:47: "He who believes in Me has eternal life." John 7:38: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" Also John 9:35-37; John 11:25; Acts 26:18: "That they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." 1 Peter 2:6-7. In all these passages, and many others, we are not only directed to place our faith in Him — the effect of justification is also attributed to that faith. This is stated explicitly in Acts 13:38-39, which is precisely what we are seeking to demonstrate.

3. Passages that describe the acts of faith in ways that make Christ the direct and proper object. These include passages where faith is called a receiving of Him: John 1:12, "to as many as received Him," and Colossians 2:6, "as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord." What we receive by faith is its proper object. Faith is also pictured as the act of the Israelites who, after being bitten by fiery serpents, looked to the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness (John 3:14-15; John 12:32). Faith is that act of the soul by which convicted sinners who would otherwise perish look to Christ as the one who was made a propitiation for their sins — and those who do so will not perish but have eternal life. He is therefore the object of our faith.

2. Christ is the object of our faith as He is the ordinance of God appointed to this end — a consideration that cannot be separated from our faith in Him. This too is confirmed by several kinds of testimony.

1. All the passages where the love and grace of God are presented as the sole cause of giving Jesus Christ as the way and means of our recovery and salvation — passages where God in His love and grace becomes the supreme efficient cause of our justification. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Similarly Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10; Romans 3:23: "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; Ephesians 1:6-8. The Lord Christ constantly directs our faith to these truths, referring everything back to the One who sent Him and whose will He came to accomplish (Hebrews 10:5).

2. All the passages where God is said to set forth and appoint Christ, and to make Him be for us and to us what He is unto the justification of life. Romans 3:25: "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation." 1 Corinthians 1:30: "Who of God is made to us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Acts 5:31; and others. Therefore, when faith acts toward Christ unto justification, we can only regard Him as the ordinance of God appointed to that end — He brings nothing to us and does nothing for us except what God appointed, designed, and made Him to be

and do. This must be carefully kept in mind: by directing our faith through His blood, His sacrifice, and His satisfaction, we take nothing away from the free grace, favor, and love of God.

3. All the passages that present to us the wisdom of God in devising this way of justification and salvation. Ephesians 1:7-8: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us in all wisdom and insight." See also Ephesians 3:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 1:24.

The whole is summed up by the apostle: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Everything accomplished in our reconciliation to God — the pardon of our sins and our acceptance with Him unto life — was accomplished through the presence of God in His grace, wisdom, and power in Christ, both designing and effecting it.

Therefore, the Lord Christ as presented in the promise of the gospel — as the object of our faith unto the justification of life — is considered as the ordinance of God appointed to that end. The love, grace, and wisdom of God in sending and giving Him are therefore included in that object, along with not only God's acts in Christ toward us but also all His acts toward the person of Christ Himself for that same end. With respect to His death: God set Him forth as a propitiation (Romans 3:24); He did not spare Him but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32); and in that He laid all our sins on Him (Isaiah 53:6). He was also raised for our justification (Romans 4:25), and our faith is in God who raised Him from

the dead (Romans 10:9). And in His exaltation (Acts 5:31). These things together complete the testimony that God has given concerning His Son (1 John 5:10-12).

The whole is confirmed by the exercise of faith in prayer — the soul's application of itself to God to receive the benefits of Christ's mediation. Prayer is called our access through Him to the Father (Ephesians 2:18), our coming through Him to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16), and our approach through Him as both High Priest and sacrifice (Hebrews 10:19-21). This is why we bow our knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:14). This matches the experience of everyone who knows what it is to pray. In prayer we come in the name of Christ, through Him and His mediation, to God the Father — seeking, through His grace, love, and mercy, to receive what He has designed and promised to give to poor sinners through Christ. And this represents the complete object of our faith.

A proper understanding of these things will reconcile and bring into perfect harmony everything Scripture says about the object of justifying faith, or about what we are said to believe by it. Since various distinct things are all described as its object, none of them individually can be the complete and adequate object of faith. But consider them all in their relationship to Christ, and each one has its proper place: the grace of God as the cause, the pardon of sin as the effect, and the promises of the gospel as the means of communicating the Lord Christ and the benefits of His mediation to us.

The reader should note that I not only disregard but reject with contempt the recent attempt by some to redirect everything said in Scripture about the person and mediation of Christ to the doctrine

of the gospel instead — treating this not only as something repugnant and impious in itself, but also as something that has not yet been argued with any show of learning, reasoning, or sobriety.

CHAPTER 2: THE NATURE OF JUSTIFYING FAITH



We now turn to the nature of justifying faith — specifically, the act and exercise of faith by which we are justified, or upon which justification follows according to God's ordination and promise. The reader should keep in mind everything already attributed to faith as sincere faith in general, as well as what is required prior to it regarding its specific nature, work, and duty in our justification. We deny that ordinarily — and according to the method of God's dealings with us as declared in Scripture, which prescribes the rule of our duty — anyone does or can truly believe unto justification without the work of conviction described above having first been accomplished in them. All descriptions or definitions of faith that take no account of this are mere empty speculation. This is why some offer definitions of faith that make it hard to believe they have ever asked themselves what they are actually doing when they believe on Jesus Christ for life and salvation.

The nature of justifying faith — with respect to that exercise of it by which we are justified — consists in the heart's approval of the way of justification and salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ

as proposed in the gospel (a way that proceeds from the grace, wisdom, and love of God), together with the heart's resting in that way for its own need and condition.

Little more is needed to explain this description of faith's nature than what has already been proved about its object. Whatever may seem lacking will be fully supplied in the confirmation that follows. The Lord Christ and His mediation — as the ordinance of God for the recovery, life, and salvation of sinners — are assumed as the object of this faith. And they are considered entirely as an expression of God's wisdom, grace, authority, and love, together with all of God's acts in and toward the Lord Christ Himself in His taking up and fulfilling His office. To all of this Christ constantly refers everything He did and suffered, along with all the benefits that flow to the church from it. This is why, as observed earlier, sometimes the grace, love, or special mercy of God, and sometimes God's specific acts toward the Lord Christ — sending Him, delivering Him to death, and raising Him from the dead — are presented as the object of our faith unto justification. But they are always presented in connection with His obedience and the atonement He made for sin. Nor are they presented in an absolute sense, but as set forth in the promises of the gospel. Therefore, sincere agreement with God's truthfulness in those promises is included in this approval.

The confirmation of this description of faith will be organized under four headings. First, the nature of unbelief as the opposite of faith upon the presentation of the gospel — since these two illuminate one another. Second, the design and goal of God in and

through the gospel. Third, the nature of faith's response to that design, and its acts in relation to it. Fourth, the order, method, and way of believing as declared in Scripture.

1. The gospel is the revelation of the way of justification and salvation for sinners through Jesus Christ — a way that God in infinite wisdom, love, and grace has prepared. On the assumption that it will be received, the gospel is accompanied by commands to obey and promises of reward. In it, the righteousness of God — what He requires, accepts, and approves unto salvation — is revealed from faith to faith (Romans 1:17). God's testimony in the gospel is that He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (1 John 5:10). See also John 3:14-17. It is called "the words of this life" (Acts 5:20) and "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Therefore, when the gospel is preached, this way of salvation is presented to sinners as the great expression of divine wisdom and grace. Unbelief is the rejection, neglect, non-reception, or disapproval of it — on the terms on which, and for the ends for which, it is presented. The unbelief of the Pharisees toward the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist is called their "rejecting the counsel of God against themselves" — that is, to their own ruin (Luke 7:30). "They would have none of my counsel" says the same thing (Proverbs 1:30), as does "neglecting this great salvation" (Hebrews 2:3) — failing to give it the reception its excellence demands. It is also described as disallowing Christ — the stone rejected by the builders as unfit for the place and purpose for which it was intended (1 Peter 2:7; Acts 4:14). This is unbelief: disapproving of Christ and the way of salvation through Him as failing to reflect di-

vine wisdom and as inadequate for the intended purpose. It is similarly described as refusing or not receiving Him — all expressions pointing to the same reality.

This will be clearer if we consider the cases where the gospel's initial proclamation — and its continuing proclamation today — met with unbelief.

1. Most of those who rejected the gospel in unbelief did so on the grounds that the way of salvation and blessedness it proposed was not a way that adequately reflected God's goodness and power — not something they could safely trust and rely on. The apostle addresses this at length in 1 Corinthians 1, expressing it plainly in verse 23-24: "We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." What the apostles declared in their preaching was that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). In this they presented Him as the ordinance of God — the supreme expression of His wisdom and power for the salvation of sinners. But those who remained in unbelief rejected it as any such thing, regarding it as both weakness and foolishness. And so the apostle describes the faith of those who are called by their approval of the wisdom and power of God in this way of salvation. The failure to perceive the glory of God in this way of salvation — and the resulting rejection of it — is the unbelief that destroys souls (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

The same is true of all who continue as unbelievers under the presentation of faith's object in gospel preaching. They may mentally agree with its truth, at least to the extent that it is a mere act of the mind — they may not feel compelled to actively reject it.

They may even agree with the kind of temporary faith described earlier and perform many religious duties as a result. Yet they reveal that they are not sincere believers — that they do not believe with the heart unto righteousness — by many things that are irreconcilable with and inconsistent with justifying faith. The question, then, is what precisely constitutes the unbelief of such people — the unbelief on account of which they perish — and what its essential nature is. It is not, as noted, the absence of agreement with the truths of gospel doctrine, since Scripture in many places describes them as believing on that basis, as has been demonstrated. This agreement may even be so firm, and so deeply embedded in their minds through various means, that they would give their bodies to be burned in testimony to it — as people may also do in defense of a false conviction. Nor is it the absence of a specific personal application of the gospel promises to themselves, or belief in the pardon of their own sins in particular. For this is not what is first called for when the gospel is preached — it is not the first thing they are asked to believe. And there can be a believing unto righteousness where this has not been attained (Isaiah 50:10). The absence of this assurance may show that faith is not genuine, but it is not itself what unbelief formally consists in. Nor is it the absence of obedience to the gospel's commands in matters of holiness and righteousness. For those commands, as formally given in and through the gospel, belong only to those who truly believe and are justified as a result. What evangelical faith requires — the essence of what it consists in — as the foundation of all future obedience, is therefore this: the heart's approval of the way of life and salvation through Jesus Christ, presented to it as the expression of God's infinite wisdom, love, grace, and goodness, and as the thing perfectly suited to

all the needs and entire condition of guilty, convicted sinners. This is what such people lack, and it is in this lack that unbelief essentially consists. Without it, no one is or can be moved by the gospel to abandon sin or encouraged toward obedience — whatever they may do on other grounds and motives that are foreign to the gospel's grace. But wherever this sincere, heartfelt approval of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ as proposed in the gospel takes hold, it will without fail produce both repentance and obedience.

If the mind and heart of a convicted sinner — for it is of such alone we are speaking — are able to spiritually discern the wisdom, love, and grace of God in this way of salvation and to be gripped by that conviction, they have the very foundation of repentance and obedience that the gospel provides. The receiving of Christ spoken of in Scripture — by which the nature of faith in its exercise is expressed — I connect to the second part of the description given earlier, which refers to the soul's resting in God through the way He has appointed.

There were also some at the beginning — and there still are — who did not reject this way of salvation in principle or in the abstract, but in practice, and so they perished in their unbelief. They judged their own righteousness to be a better path — one more safely trusted, more in line with God's mind, and more to His glory. This was the general disposition of the Jews, whose state of mind the apostle describes in Romans 10:3-4. Many of them agreed in a general way that the gospel doctrine was true, yet they did not embrace it in their hearts as the best way of justification and salvation. Instead they sought these things through the works of the law.

Therefore, unbelief in its essential nature consists in the lack of spiritual discernment and approval of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ as an expression of God's infinite wisdom, goodness, and love. Where those things are present, a convicted sinner's soul cannot help but embrace and hold to that way. Without them, all resting in this way — all trust and confidence in committing the soul to God through it — is impossible. For they lack the foundation on which alone such trust can be built. This understanding makes clear enough what the nature of true evangelical faith consists in.

2. God's design in and through the gospel — and the work and office of faith in relation to it — further confirms the description of faith given above. God's primary design in the gospel is not the justification and salvation of sinners. His ultimate and complete end in all His purposes is His own glory. He does all things for Himself — and He who is infinite cannot do otherwise. But He expresses this design in a particularly clear way in this way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Specifically, He designed in it the glory of His righteousness — "to demonstrate His righteousness" (Romans 3:25). The glory of His love — "God so loved the world" (John 3:16); "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). The glory of His grace — "accepted to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:5-6). The glory of His wisdom — Christ crucified is "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24); so "that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known" through the church (Ephesians 3:10). The glory of His power — "It is the power of God for salvation" (Romans 1:16). The glory of His faithfulness (Romans 4:16). God's design was not merely to restore all the glory

whose expression had been hindered and obscured by the entrance of sin, but to bring it to a higher and more conspicuous manifestation — both in degree and in aspects previously hidden (Ephesians 3:9). And all of this is called "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" — which faith beholds (2 Corinthians 4:6).

3. Since God's primary design in the way of justification and salvation through Christ as proposed in the gospel is the exaltation of His own glory, what is required of us to share in its benefits is that we ascribe to God the glory He aims to exalt. This means acknowledging all those glorious attributes of the divine nature as displayed in the provision and presentation of this way of life, righteousness, and salvation — together with approving the way itself as an expression of those attributes and as something safely to be trusted. This is what is required of us, and this is faith or believing. "Being strong in faith, he gave glory to God" (Romans 4:22). And this is the character of even the weakest degree of sincere faith. No other grace, work, or duty is suited to this, or has this as its primary and direct tendency — only faith has that; other things contribute only secondarily and in the way of gratitude. I cannot fully agree with the writer who says that faith in Paul's letters is nothing more than holding a high estimation of God's power, justice, goodness, and faithfulness in fulfilling His promises — since this description is too broad and is not specifically tied to the way of salvation through Christ, the one in whom God wills to be glorified. Yet there is much of faith's nature in it. From this I conclude that we can both learn the nature of faith and understand why faith alone is required for our justification. The reason is that faith is the only grace or duty by which we can or do give God the glory He designs to manifest and exalt in and through Jesus Christ. This

is what faith alone is suited to accomplish, and this is what it means to believe. Faith, in the sense we are examining, is the heart's approval of and consent to the way of life and salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ — the way in which the glory of God's righteousness, wisdom, grace, love, and mercy is exalted — giving praise to God for it and resting in it for its intended ends: justification, life, and salvation. It is to give glory to God (Romans 4:20), to behold His glory as in a mirror — that is, the gospel in which it is represented to us (2 Corinthians 3:18) — and to have in our hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6). To reject this makes God out to be a liar and thereby strips Him of the glory of all those holy attributes He designed to manifest through this way (1 John 5:10).

If I am not mistaken, this is what the experience of true believers — when they are out of the heat of theological debate — will confirm.

4. To understand justifying faith rightly — specifically the acts and exercise of saving faith in the order of our justification — we must consider its order: first, the things that necessarily precede it, and then what it means to believe in light of them.

1. The convicted sinner's condition — who is the only one in a position to be justified. This has already been addressed, and the necessity of conviction preceding the orderly presentation and reception of evangelical righteousness unto justification has been demonstrated. If we lose sight of this, we lose our best guide to understanding the nature of faith. Let no one think they can understand the gospel who knows nothing of the law. God's design and the nature of the things themselves give the law precedence in relation to sinners — for through the law comes the knowledge of

sin. And gospel faith is the soul's movement, according to God's will, toward deliverance from the condition into which the law has cast it. All the descriptions of faith that fill the writings of learned people — but that do not at least implicitly take account of this condition or the law's work on the conscience of sinners — are empty speculation. There is nothing in this entire doctrine that I hold to more firmly than the necessity of the conviction described, prior to true believing. Without it, not one part of this doctrine can be rightly understood, and people's arguments about it are no more than beating the air. See Romans 3:21-24.

2. We assume here a sincere agreement with all divine revelation — of which the promises of grace and mercy through Christ are a particularly important part. Paul assumed this in Agrippa when he sought to win him to faith in Christ Jesus: "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do" (Acts 26:27). This agreement — regarding the gospel promises not as they contain, present, and offer the Lord Christ and the benefits of His mediation to us, but simply as divine revelations of infallible truth — is genuine and sincere in its own kind, as we described earlier under the heading of temporary faith. But since it goes no further — since it includes no act of the will or heart — it is not the faith by which we are justified. Nevertheless, it is required for justifying faith and is included within it.

3. The proper proclamation of the gospel according to God's intent is also assumed here — that is, that it be preached as God has appointed. For not only the gospel itself, but its proclamation through the church's ministry, is ordinarily required for believing. The apostle asserts and demonstrates this necessity at length in Romans 10:11-17. In this proclamation, the Lord Christ and His

mediation with God — the only way and means of justification and salvation for lost, convicted sinners, as the product of divine wisdom, love, grace, and righteousness — are revealed, declared, presented, and offered to those sinners. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Romans 1:17), the glory of God is displayed as in a mirror (2 Corinthians 3:18), and life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:3).

4. The people who are called to believe — and for whom it is an immediate duty to do so — are those whose consciences have genuinely brought them to the questions Scripture describes: What shall we do? What must we do to be saved? How shall we flee from the wrath to come? With what shall we appear before God? How shall we answer the charges laid against us? Or, in other words, those who are aware of the guilt of sin and are seeking a righteousness before God (Acts 2:38; Acts 16:30-31; Micah 6:6-7; Isaiah 35:4; Hebrews 6:18).

Given these assumptions, the command and direction given to people — "Believe, and you will be saved" — raises the question: what is the act or work of faith by which they may gain a real share in the promises of the gospel and the things declared in them, unto their justification before God?

1. It is clear from the discussion so far that faith does not consist in, and cannot be fully expressed by, any single distinct habit or act of the mind or will. The descriptions Scripture gives of faith, the objects it assigns to it, and the experience of all who sincerely believe are such that no single act of mind or will can account for all of it. Nor can an exact sequential ordering of all the soul's acts in believing be prescribed. Only what is essential to faith is clear.

2. What appears to come first in the order of faith is the mind's agreement with what the psalmist turns to first for relief when he feels the weight of sin and trouble: Psalm 130:3-4 — "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" The sentence of the law and the verdict of conscience stand against him with respect to any acceptance before God. So he despairs of standing in judgment or being acquitted before Him. In this condition, the first thing the soul fixes on for relief is that there is forgiveness with God. As declared in the gospel, this means that God in His love and grace will pardon and justify guilty sinners through the blood and mediation of Christ — as set forth in Romans 3:23-24. The mind's agreement with this as proposed in the promise of the gospel is the root of faith, the foundation of everything the soul does in believing. There is no evangelical faith without it. But considered in the abstract as a mere act of the mind, the essence and nature of justifying faith does not consist in this alone — though it cannot exist without it.

2. In sincere believing, this is accompanied by an approval of the way of deliverance and salvation proposed — as an expression of divine grace, wisdom, and love — upon which the heart rests in it and turns to it according to God's will. This is the faith by which we are justified, and I will further demonstrate it by showing what is included in it and inseparable from it.

1. It includes a sincere renunciation of all other ways and means of attaining righteousness, life, and salvation. This is essential to faith (Acts 4:12; Hosea 14:2-3; Jeremiah 3:23; Psalm 71:16): "I will speak of Your righteousness, of Yours alone." When a person is in the condition described above — and only such people are immediately called to believe (Matthew 9:13; Matthew 11:28; 1

Timothy 1:15) — many things will present themselves as potential sources of relief, particularly one's own righteousness (Romans 10:3). Renouncing all of these as offering no hope or expectation of deliverance belongs to sincere believing (Isaiah 50:10-11).

2. There is in faith the will's wholehearted consent, by which the soul turns sincerely and completely — as to all its hope of pardon and righteousness before God — to the way of salvation proposed in the gospel. This is what Scripture so often calls coming to Christ and receiving Him — the expressions by which true justifying faith is most frequently described — or, as it is specifically called, believing in Him or believing on His name. The whole is expressed in John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

3. There is a resting of the heart in God as the author and primary cause of the way of salvation He has prepared — God acting in sovereign grace and mercy toward sinners. "Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Peter 1:21). In this, the sinner's heart gives to God the glory of all those holy attributes He designed to manifest in and through Jesus Christ (see Isaiah 42:1; Isaiah 49:3). And this resting of the heart in God is the immediate source of the waiting, patience, endurance, and hope that are the proper acts and effects of justifying faith (Hebrews 6:12, 15, 18-19).

4. Trust in God — or in the grace and mercy of God in and through the Lord Christ as set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood — belongs to this, or necessarily follows from it. For the person called to believe has: first, been convicted of sin and is exposed to wrath; second, nothing else to rely on for help and relief; and third, genuinely renounced everything else that presents

itself for that purpose. Therefore, without some act of trust, the soul must remain in actual despair — which is completely incompatible with faith and with the choice and approval of the way of salvation described above. 5. The most frequent description of the nature of faith in Scripture — especially in the Old Testament — is through this trust, because it is the act of faith that settles the soul and brings it to all the rest it can attain. All our rest in this world comes from trust in God. And the special object of this trust — insofar as it belongs to the nature of the faith by which we are justified — is God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. This is what is in view wherever His goodness, mercy, grace, name, faithfulness, and power are mentioned as the immediate ground of our reliance. For these can be the object of our trust only on the basis of the covenant confirmed and ratified in and through the blood of Christ alone.

Whether this trust or confidence should be considered the essence of faith itself, or as the first fruit and expression of faith in exercise, is not something we need to decide definitively. I therefore place it as something that belongs to justifying faith and is inseparable from it. For even if everything said so far about faith can be included under the idea of a firm agreement and conviction, it cannot be so if that agreement is conceivable without this trust.

This trust is what many theologians make the object of special mercy, defining that special mercy as including the pardon of one's own sins in particular. Their opponents fiercely contest this on grounds that reveal they do not believe any such state is attainable in this life — and that even if it were, it would not benefit us but would instead lead to spiritual complacency and neglect of duty. In saying this they betray a deep ignorance of these things in their

own minds. But mercy may be called special in two ways. First, in itself and in contrast to common mercy. Second, with respect to the individual believer. In the first sense, special mercy is the object of justifying faith — meaning nothing more than God's grace in setting forth Christ as a propitiation through faith in His blood (Romans 3:23-24). And faith in this special mercy is what the apostle calls "receiving the atonement" (Romans 5:11) — that is, our approval of it and adherence to it as the great expression of divine wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, love, and grace, which therefore will never fail those who put their trust in it. In the second sense, it is understood as the pardon of one's own sins in particular — God's special mercy to one's own soul. I deny that this is the object of justifying faith in the sense that a person is required to believe it prior in the order of nature to their justification. Nor am I aware of any scriptural testimony or reliable experience that confirms this. Yet to deny that a genuine conviction of it can be attained in this life — or that it is our duty to believe in the pardon of our own sins and in God's special love in Christ, in the order and method of duty and privilege set out in the gospel, so as to arrive at full assurance of them — seems to show little understanding of God's design in the gospel, the power of Christ's sacrifice, the nature and work of faith, one's own duty, or the declared experience of believers recorded in Scripture. See Romans 5:1-5; Hebrews 10:2, 10, 19-21; Psalm 46:1-2; Psalm 138:7-8; and others. Yet it is granted that all these things are more properly fruits or effects of faith as it is exercised and developed, than part of its essence as the instrument of our justification.

The trust mentioned above — which is either essential to justifying faith or inseparable from it — is beautifully expressed by Bernard (*De Evangelio*, Sermon 3): "I consider three things on which all my hope rests: the love of adoption, the truth of the promise, and the power of fulfillment. Let my foolish thoughts grumble all they will, saying, 'Who are you, and how great is that glory, and by what merits do you hope to obtain it?' — I will answer confidently: I know whom I have believed, and I am certain that He has adopted me in love, that He is true in His promise, and that He is powerful in its fulfillment — for it is His right to do as He wills. This is the threefold cord that is not easily broken. I earnestly pray that we hold firmly to it as it has been let down to us from our heavenly home into this earthly life, so that He may lift us up, draw us, and bring us all the way to the presence of the glory of the great God, who is blessed forever."

Regarding this faith and trust, many people earnestly argue that obedience is included in it — though they express this in different ways. Socinus and his followers make obedience the essential form of justifying faith, a position denied by Episcopius. The Roman Catholics distinguish between unformed faith and faith formed by charity — which amounts to the same thing. Both positions rest on the assumption that genuine evangelical faith — the faith required of us as a duty and accepted by God — can contain everything that goes by the name of faith and yet exist without charity or obedience, and so be useless. The Socinians do not make obedience the essence of faith absolutely, but only as faith justifies. They therefore appeal to the argument that faith without works is dead. But to suppose that dead faith — faith that is dead — is the faith the gospel requires of us as a duty is a monstrous notion.

Others argue that obedience, charity, and the love of God are included in the nature of faith — not as the form of faith itself, but as what belongs to its perfection as justifying faith. Nor do they argue that this means a continuous course of works and obedience is required for our first justification — only a sincere active intention to obey. Then, as is common today, they heap reproaches on those who think otherwise. But let me briefly show how impossible it is, on the principles of those who believe in justification by faith alone, for justifying faith to exist without a sincere purpose of heart to obey God in all things. First, they believe that faith is not of ourselves — it is the gift of God, a grace worked in people's hearts by the exceeding greatness of His power. To suppose such a grace to be dead, inactive, unfruitful, and not working toward the great end of God's glory and the transformation of those who receive it into His image, is a reflection on the wisdom, goodness, and love of God Himself. Second, this grace is in believers a principle of spiritual life — which, as a permanent disposition residing in the heart, is not really distinct from all the other grace by which we live to God. It is therefore utterly impossible for the evangelical faith we are discussing to be present as a habit in the heart — or actually exercised — where there is not also a habit of all other grace. And it is equally impossible for this faith to be exercised toward justification without the mind being prepared, disposed, and committed to universal obedience. Therefore, third, it is denied that any faith, trust, or confidence that can be conceived as completely separable from — and fully consistent in its nature with — the total absence of all other grace, is the faith that is the special gift of God and is required of us in the gospel as a duty. Some have claimed that people may believe and place their firm trust in Christ

for life and salvation, and yet not be justified. This position is so destructive to the gospel, so offensive to all godly souls, and so plainly contradicts the testimony God has given concerning His Son Jesus Christ, that I am amazed any sober and learned person could be drawn to it. When they appeal to the experience of multitudes who profess this firm faith and trust in Christ and yet are not justified — this is true, but it proves nothing for their argument. Whatever such people profess, not one of them trusts Christ in this way in the sight and judgment of God, where the matter must ultimately be decided. And it is no difficult thing to expose the foolishness and falseness of such professions by the light and rule of the gospel, even in the consciences of such people themselves, if they would attend to instruction.

We therefore say that the faith by which we are justified is found only in those who have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, united to Christ by Him, renewed in their nature, and in whom there is a principle of all grace and a purpose of obedience. But we say that it is not any other grace — such as charity or the like, nor any obedience — that gives life and form to this faith. Rather, it is this faith that gives life and power to all other graces, and form to all evangelical obedience. Nor does any of this give ground to our opponents — those who would have all the graces that are present in principle and root in everyone to be justified carry the same weight in justification as faith does. They say we are justified by faith alone, and then explain this to mean — in answer to the accusations of the Roman Catholics — that we are justified by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone, intending by faith all other graces and obedience as well. But no other grace is capable of the office assigned to faith in our justification, nor can any other

grace be joined with faith in that operation — namely, to receive Christ and the promises of life through Him, and to give glory to God on their account. When they can provide any scriptural testimony attributing our justification to any other grace, or to all graces together, or to all their fruits, in the way that it is attributed to faith, they will be heard.

This applies in particular to repentance, about which the claim is most vigorously pressed that it is just as necessary to our justification as faith is. They say this is easily proved from countless Scripture passages calling all who would be saved to repentance — with special emphasis on Acts 2:38-39 and Acts 3:19. But what they need to prove is not that repentance is equally necessary as faith for those who are to be justified, but that it plays the same role as faith in their justification. In Acts 2:38-39, baptism is joined to repentance no less than faith is. And in other passages it is placed in the same position. Most of the ancient writers therefore concluded that baptism was no less necessary to salvation than faith or repentance. Yet none of them ever assigned baptism the same role in justification as faith. The argument pressed is that whatever is a necessary condition of the new covenant is also a necessary condition of justification — for otherwise a person might be justified but then not saved for lack of that necessary condition. By a necessary condition of the new covenant they mean anything without which a person cannot be saved. But on this definition, repentance is as necessary as faith, and so equally a condition of our justification. The ambiguity of the word "condition" has introduced a great deal of confusion into this discussion in the writings of some people. Setting that aside for now, I note that final perseverance is a necessary condition of the new covenant — so by this

rule it is also a condition of justification. They respond that some conditions are absolute — such as faith, repentance, and a purpose of obedience — while others apply only conditionally, assuming a person remains alive in the world, such as a course of obedience, good works, and perseverance to the end. Very well: then I say that, on the condition that a person lives in this world, perseverance to the end is a necessary condition of their justification. And if so, no one can be justified while still in this world. For a condition suspends the thing it conditions from occurring until the condition is fulfilled. If no one is or can be justified in this life, then there is no point continuing to debate justification — yet how contrary this is to Scripture and to experience is well known.

If they say that final perseverance — which is so plainly a condition of salvation in the new covenant — is not a condition of our first justification but only of its continuation, then they have abandoned their main position: that whatever is a necessary condition of the new covenant is a necessary condition of justification. It is only what they call first justification that we are discussing here. That the continuation of our justification rests on the same causes as justification itself will be shown later. But it has not yet been proved — and never will be — that everything required in those who are to be justified is a condition on which their justification is directly suspended. We allow only that to be a condition of justification which has a causal influence on it — even if only the causality of an instrument. This we ascribe to faith alone. Because we do so, our opponents claim that we attribute more to ourselves in our justification than they do. For we attribute to our own faith the efficiency of an instrument in justification, while they say it is merely a condition, or a necessary antecedent, of our justification. But I

think serious and thoughtful men ought not to press the defense of their position so far, when they themselves know better. For after giving faith the impressive title of a condition and a necessary antecedent, they immediately bring all other graces and works of obedience into the same status and the same role in justification. And after this seemingly golden argument has been in the fire of disputation for a while, out comes the golden calf of a personal, inherent righteousness by which people are justified before God by virtue of the evangelical covenant. As for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us — it has gone to heaven, and they have no idea what to do with it.

Having given this brief account of the nature of justifying faith and its acts — sufficient, I trust, for my present purpose — I will not attempt to give a precise formal definition of it. What I think about it will be better understood from what has been said than from any exact definition I could offer. The truth is that definitions of justifying faith have been so multiplied by learned men, in such variety and with such obvious inconsistencies among them, that they have done more harm than good to the truth — creating new controversies and divisions as each person has defended the precision of his own definition. Meanwhile, a true believer may find it hard to recognize anything in those definitions that matches his own experience, and definitions of that sort hold no value for me. I know of no one who has labored more on the question of faith's nature than Dr. Jackson. Yet after all his work, he gives us a definition of justifying faith that few would subscribe to — though in its main thrust it is both godly and sound. He writes: "Here at last we may define the faith by which the just live, to be a firm and constant adherence to the mercies and loving kindness of the Lord —

or generally to the spiritual food exhibited in His sacred word, as something far better than this life itself and all the satisfactions it can offer — grounded on a taste or relish of their sweetness, worked in the soul or heart of a man by the Spirit of Christ." He adds: "The terms are for the most part David's own, not metaphorical as some may suppose, much less ambiguous, but proper and fitting to the subject being defined" (Volume 1, Book 4, Chapter 9). As for the vivid scriptural expressions of faith — receiving Christ, leaning on Him, casting ourselves or our burden upon Him, tasting that the Lord is gracious, and the like — which have lately been ridiculed and even blasphemed by many — I may have occasion to speak of these later. I will also show that these expressions communicate a better understanding of the nature, work, and object of justifying faith to spiritually enlightened minds than the most technically precise definitions that many claim to offer — some of which in fact destroy and exclude all such expressions.

CHAPTER 3: THE USE OF FAITH IN JUSTIFICATION; ITS SPECIAL OBJECT FURTHER CLEARED



The description of justifying faith given above makes its role in justification sufficiently clear. I will not add much in general to what may be observed from it on this point. But since this role has been described in various ways, with several conflicting accounts of it, these must be considered along the way. I will do so as briefly as possible, since these questions do not touch the heart of the controversy about the nature of justification — they are merely subordinate to larger questions about it. Once people have settled their views on the main disputed matters, they describe faith's role in terms that accommodate those views. Given what they assert about the nature of justification, they consider it necessary that faith's role be what they claim it to be. And if the distinctive substance of any position is disproved, its advocates cannot deny that their account of faith's role falls with it. This is true of all who say that faith is the instrument, or the condition, or the necessary antecedent, or the preparation and disposition of the subject, or a meritorious cause by fitness or suitability, in our justification. All these accounts of faith's role are shaped by and fitted

to people's views on the nature and primary causes of justification. No evaluation or judgment of their truth and accuracy can be made without first settling those causes and the whole nature of justification itself. Since it would be tedious and endless to rehearse the main disputed matter every time something related to it comes up — like claiming the whole estate every time a tenant cottage on the property is mentioned — I will briefly address these various accounts of faith's role in our justification, aiming more to understand what each one intends than to argue about its accuracy, since that accuracy depends on what the substance of the whole controversy is.

Until recently, Protestant theologians unanimously affirmed faith to be the instrumental cause of our justification. This is expressed in many of the public confessions of their churches. Their view on the nature and role of faith was opposed from the start by those in the Roman church. Later it was denied also by the Socinians as either false or improper, as seen in Socinus's *Miscellanies* and in works by Smalcius, Schlichtingius, and others. More recently, this expression has been rejected by some among ourselves, following Episcopius, Curcellaeus, and others of that school. Those who are moderate and careful tend to avoid this language as improper rather than reject it as untrue. Our safest course in such cases is to ask what the thing itself actually means. Once that is agreed upon, the person who drops the quarrel over precise wording before it even begins serves truth best. Insisting stubbornly on particular expressions will make our disputes endless, and anyone can always find a plausible-sounding argument to justify their preferred terminology. If our goal in teaching matches that of Scripture — to inform the minds of believers and convey the

knowledge of God in Christ — we must sometimes be willing to use expressions that may not survive the rigid tests of arbitrary rules and distinctions drawn from abstract academic disciplines. And those who simply dismiss the instrumentality of faith in justification as an unscriptural idea — as though they could with a single breath blow away the arguments of so many learned people who have defended it — would do well to reconsider the grounds of their confidence. The question is only about what the idea means, and it is not enough to point out that the precise word "instrument" does not appear in Scripture for this purpose. By that same logic we could reject the Trinity of persons in the divine being — yet not one line of Scripture can be rightly understood without acknowledging it.

Those who assert faith as the instrumental cause in our justification do so with two aims. First, they intend to explain the meaning of those Scripture expressions in which we are said to be justified — expressions that must denote either an instrument, a form, or a manner of action. Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith." Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:8; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 3:22, 30. The Greek phrases used are equivalent to "by faith," "from faith," or "through faith" — all of which we can only render as "by faith" or "through faith." Nowhere are we said to be justified "for our faith," as if faith were the ground or merit of justification. The question is what the most accurate, illuminating, and fitting way is to express the meaning of these phrases. Most Protestants judge the best explanation to be an instrumental cause. For these phrases plainly suggest some kind of causality — and the lowest and most modest form of causality is the instrumental. These phrases are used of faith in our justification before

God and of no other grace or duty whatsoever. They therefore point to faith's specific work or office in our justification. Indeed, in all of Greek literature — including the entire New Testament — the preposition "through" followed by a genitive case denotes at least instrumental efficiency. Even in the divine works of the Trinity, the operation of the second person — who is a principal efficient cause — is sometimes expressed by this construction, perhaps to indicate the order of operation in the Trinity corresponding to the order of subsistence, though the construction can also be applied to God absolutely or to the Father (Romans 11:35). Furthermore, justification "by the works of the law" and justification "through faith" are placed in direct opposition (Galatians 3:2). When it is said that a man is not justified by the works of the law, everyone acknowledges that this means to exclude all causal efficiency of any kind from such works. It follows that when, in contrast, we are said to be justified through faith, an instrumental efficiency is intended. I will not, however, make it my dispute that faith is technically a proper instrument or instrumental cause of our justification in some strict philosophical sense, thereby getting drawn into a pointless argument about the nature and kinds of instruments and instrumental causes as defined through a noisy chaos of scholastic terms and distinctions. But this I do hold: among all the concepts that can be drawn from common use and understanding to convey the meaning of those frequently used scriptural expressions, none is as fitting as the concept of an instrument or instrumental cause — since some kind of causality is included in those expressions, other kinds of causality are clearly excluded, and the instrumental is the only one that remains.

But it may be objected that if faith is the instrumental cause of justification, it must be either God's instrument or the believer's instrument. That it is not God's instrument is plain — it is a duty He prescribes to us, it is our own act, and it is we who believe, not God. No act of ours can be the instrument of His work. But if it is our instrument, and efficiency is attributed to it, then we are in some sense the efficient causes of our own justification — we are, in effect, justifying ourselves — which diminishes the grace of God and the blood of Christ.

I confess I do not place much weight on objections of this kind. For, first, despite what is said, Scripture plainly states that God justifies us by faith: "It is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith" (Romans 3:30). "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith" (Galatians 3:8). "He purified their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Therefore, faith may in some sense be called God's instrument in our justification — both as the means and way He has ordained on our part by which we shall be justified, and because He gives it to us and works it in us for the specific purpose of our justification: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). If anyone says that on these grounds — considering divine ordination and God's concurrent operation in our justification — faith is God's instrument in its place and manner (just as the gospel is in Romans 1:16, and ministers of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 1 Timothy 4:6, and the sacraments in Romans 4:11 and Titus 3:5, each in their respective place and kind), it may be that such a person will contribute as much to a right understanding of God's work in justification as those who deny it.

But what is primarily intended is that faith is the instrument of those who believe. Yet even so, they are not thereby said to justify themselves. For faith does not produce the effect of justification by any physical operation — nor could it, since justification is a purely sovereign act of God. Nor is it morally meritorious of justification. Nor does it dispose the subject for the introduction of an inherent formal cause of justification, since no such thing exists. Nor does it have any other physical or moral connection to the effect of justification beyond what arises purely from God's appointment and ordination. Therefore, affirming the instrumentality of faith gives no reason whatsoever to attribute the effect of justification to anyone other than God as the sole principal efficient cause — the One from whom it proceeds freely and sovereignly, ordering things and their relationships as He sees fit (Romans 3:24-25). It is therefore God's ordained rule of duty that we may be justified freely by His grace — and faith has its use and operation toward that end in the manner of an instrument, as we will see further shortly. As far as I can discern, those who deny that faith is the instrumental cause of our justification and substitute for it the concept of a condition, contribute nothing to a real understanding of the truth — unless they can show that "condition" is a more natural explanation of the scriptural phrases in question, which is the first thing to be established. For all we are doing in this matter is seeking a right understanding of scriptural statements and expressions — unless we intend to wander far afield and lose ourselves in a maze of uncertain speculation.

Second, they aimed to describe the role of faith in justification as expressed in Scripture by the concepts of apprehending and receiving Christ — or His righteousness and the forgiveness of sins

through Him. The Greek words used in Scripture to express this role mean taking or receiving what is offered, tendered, given, or granted to us — or laying hold of something to make it one's own. By faith we are said to receive Christ (John 1:12; Colossians 2:6), the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness (Romans 5:17), the word of promise (Acts 2:41), the word of God (Acts 8:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 2:13), the atonement made by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:11), the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; Acts 26:18), the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14), and the promises (Hebrews 9:15). There is therefore nothing that contributes to our justification that we do not receive by faith. And unbelief is expressed by not receiving (John 1:11; John 3:11; John 12:48; John 14:17). Therefore, the object of faith in our justification — the thing by which we are justified — is tendered, granted, and given to us by God. Faith's role is to lay hold of it, to receive it, so that it becomes our own. When we receive physical objects that are given to us, we do so with our hand — which is therefore the instrument of receiving, the means by which we apprehend or lay hold of anything in order to make it ours. This is the hand's particular office by nature among all the members of the body. The hand has other uses, and other members may serve the body equally well in other respects, but only the hand is the instrument of receiving and laying hold of what is given to us to be made our own and kept. Since the righteousness by which we are justified is God's gift tendered to us in the promise of the gospel, and since faith's role and office is to receive, apprehend, lay hold of, and appropriate this righteousness — I do not know how this can be better expressed than by the word instrument, nor what other concept would give our minds greater clarity. Some may prefer other con-

cepts for other aspects of faith's role, and that may be appropriate for those other uses. But the sole question here is how to describe faith as the thing that receives Christ, the atonement, and the gift of righteousness — which is faith's only role in our justification. Anyone who can express this better than by an instrument ordained by God for this end — an instrument whose entire operation depends on that divine ordination — will be doing truth a service. It is true that those who locate the formal cause or ground of our justification in ourselves or in our inherent righteousness — and who thereby directly or by logical implication deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our justification — cannot accept faith as an instrument in this work, and are not challenged by this consideration. For they do not acknowledge that we receive by gift a righteousness that is not our own by which we are justified, and so they have no room for any instrument by which it should be received. Since the righteousness itself is, as they put it, fictional, imaginary, a chimera, a fabrication, it can have no real qualities and nothing real can truly be predicated of it. Therefore, as stated at the outset of this discussion, the truth and appropriateness of describing faith's role in justification as instrumental depends on the substance of the doctrine itself — on the nature and primary causes of justification — with which it must stand or fall. If we are justified through the imputation of Christ's righteousness, which faith alone apprehends and receives, then describing faith as the instrumental cause of our justification will not be denied. But if we are justified by an inherent evangelical righteousness of our own, then faith may be the condition of its imputation, or a disposition for its introduction, or a deserving of it by fitness — but an instrument it cannot be. For the present, the instrumental concept has

this twofold advantage: first, it best and most precisely answers what Scripture says about faith's role in our justification, as the examples given demonstrate; and second, no other concept can be so stated without implying that faith must come before justification in time — which justifying faith cannot do, unless a person can be a true believer with justifying faith and yet not be justified.

Some argue that faith is the condition of our justification and that it cannot be conceived of in any other way. As I said before, I will not quarrel with anyone over words, terms, or expressions as long as what is meant by them is agreed upon. There is an obvious sense in which faith may be called the condition of our justification — meaning simply that it is the duty God requires of us in order that we may be justified. The whole of Scripture bears witness to this. And this does not prevent faith, in terms of its role, from also being the instrument by which we apprehend or receive Christ and His righteousness. But to assert faith as the condition of our justification — or to say that we are justified by faith as the condition of the new covenant — and then use a pre-loaded meaning of the word "condition" to assign faith a different role in justification that excludes the instrumental role — is not something easily to be accepted, because it presupposes an alteration in the very substance of the doctrine.

The word "condition" does not appear anywhere in Scripture in this connection — which I note not to press the argument further, but simply to observe that we have no certain rule or standard by which to fix its meaning. Therefore, it cannot be introduced in whatever sense people prefer and then have that sense pressed into service as an argument for other conclusions. For example, on the assumption that faith is granted to be a condition of our justifi-

cation, some elevate it into a subordinate righteousness imputed to us — apparently before, or as a condition of, any imputation of Christ's righteousness in any sense. And some who claim to reduce faith's role or significance in justification say it is merely a necessary antecedent — which leaves us just as uncertain about the nature and efficacy of this condition as we were before. Such concepts neither illuminate nor clarify the true meaning of things — they only obscure it.

When we introduce into religious discussion words not found in Scripture — as we may and must do when we intend to bring clarity and communicate proper understanding of the things Scripture contains — we may not import with them arbitrary pre-conceived meanings forged in legal or philosophical schools. The meaning of such words must be determined by their usage in the best recognized authors of the language to which they belong, and by their common everyday meaning among speakers of that language. Everyone knows the confusion that has been introduced into church doctrine by bringing in words without an agreed and settled rule for their meaning. For example, the word "merit" was introduced by some of the ancient writers — as is plain from the context of their discussions — to mean simply obtaining or acquiring something by any means whatsoever. But because there was no compelling reason to hold the word to that precise meaning, it gave rise to as great a corruption as has ever afflicted the Christian religion. We must therefore use the best means available to understand the meaning of the word "condition" and what is intended by it before accepting its use in this discussion.

The Latin word "conditio" is used in various ways by the best Latin writers, corresponding to several Greek terms — meaning status, fortune, dignity, cause, or a compact entered into. Which of these meanings it carries in the present discussion is not easy to determine. In common English usage it sometimes refers to a person's state or quality — their rank or situation — and sometimes to a valuable consideration for something to be done. And in practice it is applied to things in a great variety of ways. Sometimes the primary, procuring, purchasing cause is described this way — as when the condition on which one man lends another a hundred pounds is that the money be repaid with interest, or the condition on which a man transfers his land is that he receives a certain sum of money for it. In these cases, a condition means a valuable consideration. At other times, it refers to something added to the principal cause on which the effect is suspended — as when a man bequeaths a hundred pounds to someone on condition that they come to a certain place to collect it. This is not a valuable consideration, yet the effect of the primary cause — the testator's will — is suspended on it. And as for the degrees of connection between a condition and what it conditions — whether by purchase, procurement, valuable consideration, or merely necessary presence — the variety is endless. We therefore cannot arrive at any fixed meaning for the word "condition" apart from a specific explanation of what is intended by it wherever it is used. While this does not rule out using the word to describe the way and manner in which we are justified by faith, it does rule out imposing any precise fixed meaning on it beyond what the subject matter itself supplies. Without that, everything to which the word is applied is left ambiguous and uncertain.

For instance: it is commonly said that faith and new obedience are the conditions of the new covenant. But because of the ambiguous and varied use of the term "condition," we cannot be certain what this assertion means. If it only means that God in and through the new covenant indispensably requires these things of us — that is, the response of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Christ, in order to His own glory and our full enjoyment of all the covenant's benefits — this is unquestionably true. But if it means that these things are conditions of the covenant that we must fulfill prior to receiving any of its grace, mercy, or privileges — so that our faith and obedience are the consideration and procuring causes of those gifts, and all of them are, as some put it, the rewards of our faith and obedience — this is utterly false, contrary to the express testimony of Scripture, and destructive of the covenant's very nature. If it means that these things — though promised in the covenant and worked in us by the grace of God — are nonetheless duties required of us in order for us to participate in and fully enjoy the covenant's final end in glory, this is the truth. But if it means that faith and new obedience — that is, the works of righteousness we do — are conditions of the covenant in such a way that whatever God has ordained faith to accomplish as its means and end (such as justification), God has equally ordained our works of obedience to accomplish in the same way and with the same kind of efficacy, this is directly contrary to the whole scope and explicit design of the apostle on that subject. It will be said that a condition, in the sense intended when faith is called the condition of our justification, is merely a necessary antecedent — something without which the effect would not occur — which is easy enough to understand. Yet even this does

not bring us out of uncertainty into a clear understanding of what is intended. For necessary antecedents may be understood broadly or strictly and precisely. In the broader sense, they include all causes of any kind of efficiency or merit that are subordinate to the principal cause — causes that would accomplish nothing on their own but that, in conjunction with the principal cause, have a real effective influence, physical or moral, in producing the effect. If we take a condition to be a necessary antecedent in this broad sense, we are still left uncertain as to what its role, efficiency, or merit in our justification might be. If it is taken more strictly to mean something that must be present but has no causal role of any kind — not even as a receptive instrument — I cannot understand how it could be an ordinance of God. For everything God appoints for any moral or spiritual end has, by virtue of that appointment, either a symbolic and instructive power, an active efficiency, or a fitting connection that God rewards with respect to that end. Other things may be generally and remotely necessary to such an end — as it participates in the natural order of things — without being divine ordinances with respect to it, and thus without any kind of causal relation to it as something moral or spiritual. The air we breathe, for example, is necessary to the preaching of the word and is therefore in some sense a necessary antecedent to it — but it is not a divinely ordained instrument for that purpose. But everything God appoints for a particular spiritual end has an efficacy or operation through one of the channels mentioned. Such things either concur with the principal cause in its internal efficiency, or they operate externally by removing the obstacles and hindrances that oppose the principal cause in its work. This rules out all strictly understood "necessary antecedents" from having any place among divine

ordinances. God appoints nothing for an end that accomplishes nothing. His sacraments are not mere empty symbols — by virtue of His institution they convey the grace they do not contain in themselves. The preaching of the word has a real efficacy for all its ends; so do all the graces and duties He works in us and requires of us. Through all of these we are made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light, and our whole obedience, through His gracious appointment, has a fitness He rewards with respect to eternal life. Therefore: faith may well be called the condition of our justification if nothing more is meant than that it is what God requires of us in order that we may be justified. But to limit the description of faith's role in our justification to its being a condition — when even a settled meaning for the term cannot be agreed upon — serves nothing but the cause of unprofitable strife and dispute.

To close this discussion of faith and its role in our justification, something must also be said about its specific object. Although what has already been said in the description of faith's general nature and object is in principle sufficient to address its specific object as well, this question has been debated under a particular formulation and certain specific terms that must also be considered. The question is this: does justifying faith in our justification, or faith in its role in justification, regard Christ as King and Prophet as well as Priest — together with the satisfaction He made as Priest — and does it do so in the same way and to the same ends and purposes? I will be brief on this question, since it is a relatively recent controversy and its investigation may involve more curiosity than its resolution contributes to spiritual edification. Since it has not,

as far as I know, been formally stated in any of the public confessions of the Reformed churches, anyone is free to express their thinking on it. With that in mind, I say:

1. The faith by which we are justified — as it receives Christ — primarily regards His person for all the ends for which He is the ordinance of God. It does not, as faith in general, first regard His person in an absolute sense — since the formal object of faith as such is the truth of God in the proposition, not the thing proposed itself. Therefore faith regards and receives Christ as He is proposed in the promise, with the promise itself being the formal object of its agreement.

2. In receiving Christ through the promise, we cannot receive Him in a way that excludes consideration of any of His offices. He is never to be considered by us apart from all His offices, and any mental conception that aims to receive Christ as Priest but not as King or Prophet is not faith but unbelief — not receiving but rejecting Him.

3. When we receive Christ specifically for justification, our distinct and express aim is to be justified — nothing more or less. To be justified means to be freed from the guilt of sin, to have all our sins pardoned, to have a righteousness with which to appear before God so as to be accepted by Him, and to have a right to the heavenly inheritance. Every believer also has other aims in which they are equally concerned — the renewal of their nature, the sanctification of their person, and the ability to live to God in all holy obedience. But the things just mentioned are all that a believer aims at when turning to Christ or receiving Him specifically for justification.

4. Therefore, justifying faith — in that act or work by which we are justified — regards Christ in His priestly office alone, as the surety of the covenant, together with everything He did in discharging that office. The consideration of His other offices is not excluded, but it is not formally part of the object of faith as justifying.

5. When we say that Christ's priestly office — His blood and satisfaction — is the sole thing faith regards in justification, we do not exclude but actually include and comprehend in that statement everything that depends on it or concurs to make it effective for our justification. This includes: first, the free grace and favor of God in giving Christ for us and to us — through which we are frequently said to be justified (Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:7) — along with His wisdom, love, righteousness, and power, as already described. Second, everything in Christ Himself that was necessarily prior to His discharge of that office, or that followed from it, or necessarily accompanied it — such as His incarnation, His whole course of obedience, His resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and intercession. The consideration of all these is inseparable from the discharge of His priestly office, and justification is therefore attributed to them as well, either explicitly or implicitly (Genesis 3:15; 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:13-16; Romans 4:25; Acts 5:31; Hebrews 7:27; Romans 8:34). Yet wherever justification is so attributed to these things, they are not considered in an absolute sense but in relation to His sacrifice and satisfaction. Third, all the means by which the sacrifice and righteousness of the Lord Christ are applied to us are also included — such as the primary efficient cause, which is the Holy Spirit (through whom we are said to be justified "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of

our God," 1 Corinthians 6:11), and the instrumental cause on God's part, which is the promise of the gospel (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:22-23). It would therefore be unfair to claim that by this position we narrow or restrict the object of justifying faith as it justifies. We actually assign respect to the whole mediatorial office of Christ — not excluding His kingly and prophetic roles — but only excluding a conception of them that would bring not more of Christ but more of ourselves into our justification. And the position as stated can be proved.

1. Proof from the experience of all who are justified or who seek justification according to the gospel. For under the aspect of seeking justification — or seeking a righteousness unto justification — all such people considered and must consider themselves as guilty before God, exposed to His wrath under the curse of the law, as we established at the outset of this discussion (Romans 3:19). They were all in the same condition Adam was in after the fall — to whom God proposed the relief of Christ's incarnation and suffering (Genesis 3:15). To seek justification is to seek discharge from this wretched state and condition. Such people have, and rightly have, other desires as well. For the state they are in prior to justification is not only a state of guilt and wrath but also one in which the power of sin prevails — through the corruption of their nature — and their whole souls are defiled. They therefore seek not only to be justified but also to be sanctified. But with respect to the guilt of sin and the lack of a righteousness before God — which is what justification addresses — they look to Christ as set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood. In their seeking for sanctification, they look to Christ's kingly and prophetic offices in their particular exercise. But for their freedom from the guilt of sin, their ac-

ceptance with God, their justification in His sight — that they may be freed from condemnation, that they may not come into judgment — it is Christ crucified; it is Christ lifted up as the bronze serpent in the wilderness; it is the blood of Christ; it is the propitiation He was and the atonement He made; it is His bearing of their sins, His being made sin and the curse for them; it is His obedience, His putting an end to sin, and the everlasting righteousness He brought in — on these and these alone does faith fix and rest. If any person's experience is otherwise, I acknowledge I am not acquainted with it. I am not saying that conviction of sin is the only prior condition of actual justification — but it is what makes a sinner capable of being justified. No one, therefore, is to be considered as a candidate for justification unless they are actually under the power of the conviction of sin with all its necessary consequences. Consider then any sinner in the condition the apostle describes in Romans 3 — guilty before God, with their mouth stopped as to any pleas, defenses, or excuses. If that person seeks relief and deliverance from that condition — that is, seeks to be justified according to the gospel — they can take no other wise course than the one to which the same apostle directs them in verses 20-25: "By the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly

as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed."

From this I argue: whatever a guilty, condemned sinner — finding no hope or relief from the law of God, the sole rule of all obedience — turns to by faith in order to be delivered and justified, that is the specific object of justifying faith. And that is the grace of God alone through the redemption that is in Christ, or Christ as proposed as a propitiation through faith in His blood. Either this is so, or the apostle is not rightly guiding the souls and consciences of people in the very condition he himself places them in. It is the blood of Christ alone to which he directs the faith of all who would be justified before God — grace, redemption, propitiation, all through the blood of Christ. This, if I am not mistaken, is what those who have carefully observed the acts of their faith in their justification before God will confirm from their own experience.

2. Scripture plainly declares that justifying faith regards the priestly office and acts of Christ alone. In the great Old Testament representation of the church's justification through the atoning sacrifice — when all sins and iniquities were pardoned and persons were accepted by God — the act of their faith was restricted to the laying of all their sins on the head of the sacrifice by the high priest (Leviticus 16). "By His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). The sole thing faith regards in Christ for the justification of sinners is His bearing of their iniquities. Guilty, convicted sinners look to Him by faith as those bitten by fiery serpents looked to the bronze serpent — that is, as He was lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). Christ Himself expresses the nature and acts of faith in our justification

this way: Romans 3:24-25 — "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." As He is a propitiation, as He shed His blood for us, as we have redemption through it — in this regard He is the specific object of our faith with respect to our justification. See also Romans 5:9-10; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Ephesians 2:13-16; Romans 8:3-4. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What we seek in justification is a share in the righteousness of God — to become the righteousness of God, not in ourselves but in another, namely in Christ Jesus. And the only thing proposed to our faith as the means and cause of this is His being made sin for us — made a sacrifice for sin — in which all the guilt of our sins was laid on Him and He bore all our iniquities. This, therefore, is faith's specific object in justification. And wherever Scripture directs us to seek the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ, to receive the atonement, and to be justified through faith in Him as crucified, the object of justifying faith is fixed and defined.

But it may be objected against these passages that none of them actually states that we are justified by faith in the blood of Christ alone — so as to exclude consideration of Christ's other offices and their acts from being the object of faith in the same way and to the same ends as His priestly office and everything belonging to or derived from it.

Answer. This objection echoes the common argument against justification by faith alone — namely, that the exclusive word "alone" does not appear in Scripture or in any of the passages cited for justification by faith. But the sufficient reply is that while the

word itself may not appear in exactly that form for this purpose, there are exclusive expressions in Scripture equivalent to it, as we will see later. The same applies in this particular case. First, since our justification is expressly attributed to faith in the blood of Christ as the propitiation for our sins and to believing in Him as crucified for us — and nowhere is it attributed to our receiving Him as King, Lord, or Prophet — it is plain that the former expressions effectively exclude the latter consideration. Second, I am not saying that consideration of Christ's kingly and prophetic offices is excluded from our justification in the way that works are excluded in contrast to faith and grace. Works are excluded in such a way that we are to exercise a positive mental act of rejecting them, saying, as it were, "Be gone, you have no part or share in this matter." But regarding Christ's other offices in relation to the object of justifying faith, we say only that they are not included within it. To believe for justification by His blood while simultaneously exercising a deliberate mental act of excluding compliance with His other offices would be an impious notion.

3. Neither the consideration of Christ's other offices themselves, nor any of their particular acts, is suited to give the souls and consciences of convicted sinners the relief they seek in justification. Throughout this entire discussion we must not lose sight of the condition of the person to be justified — what they are seeking and what they ought to seek in justification. And that is pardon of sin and righteousness before God alone. Therefore, whatever is not suited to offer or provide that relief to such a person cannot be the object of justifying faith in that exercise of it on which justification depends. It will be said that this relief is found in Christ alone — and that is true, but under what consideration? The sinner's sole

concern is how he may be accepted by God, be at peace with Him, and have all His wrath turned away through a propitiation or atonement. This can only come about through someone acting toward God and with God on the sinner's behalf — for the question is about the turning away of God's anger and acceptance before Him. It is through the blood of Christ that those who were far off are brought near (Ephesians 2:13). It is through the blood of Christ that those who were enemies are reconciled (verse 16). It is through the blood of Christ that we have redemption (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 1:7; and others). This, therefore, is the object of faith.

All the acts of Christ's kingly and prophetic offices flow from God — that is, they come to us in God's name and authority. Not one of them acts toward God on our behalf in such a way that through them we could expect acceptance with God. They are all good, blessed, and holy in themselves, and powerfully directed toward God's glory in our salvation. Indeed, they are no less necessary to our salvation and the praise of God's grace than is the atonement and satisfaction He made for sin — for through them the way of life is revealed to us, grace is communicated, our persons are sanctified, and the reward is bestowed. And it is in the exercise of His kingly power that the Lord Christ pardons and justifies sinners. Not that He as King established the law of justification — for that was given and established in the first promise and He came to put it into effect (John 3:16) — but by virtue of His atonement and the righteousness imputed to sinners, He both pardons and justifies them. But it is the acts of His priestly office alone that act toward God on our behalf. Whatever He did on earth with God for the church — in obedience, suffering, and offering Himself up

— and whatever He does in heaven in intercession and appearing in the presence of God for us, all belongs entirely to His priestly office. And in these things alone does the soul of a convicted sinner find relief when seeking deliverance from sin and acceptance with God. In these alone, therefore, must the specific object of faith be located — the thing that will give the soul rest and peace. This last consideration is in itself sufficient to settle the dispute.

Several objections are raised against this position, which I will not discuss at length here since what is substantive in any of them will arise again in contexts where it can be addressed more appropriately. In general, it may be argued that justifying faith is the same as saving faith, and that Scripture never says we are justified by this or that part of faith, but by faith in general — that is, faith taken as the complete grace of faith in its essence. And saving faith in this comprehensive sense includes not only a regard to Christ in all His offices but obedience as well, as is evident in many Scripture passages. There is therefore no reason to limit the object of faith to the person of Christ acting in the discharge of His priestly office with its effects and fruits.

Answer. 1. Saving faith and justifying faith in any believer are one and the same — "saving" and "justifying" are simply external descriptions derived from its distinct operations and effects. Yet saving faith acts in a particular and unique way in justification that is unlike its activity in any other regard. Therefore, second, although saving faith as broadly described always includes obedience — not as its form or essence, but as the necessary effect is included in the cause and the fruit in the life-bearing sap — and is often described in terms of its exercise where Christ, His blood, and His righteousness are not expressly mentioned, since it is applied

to all the acts, duties, and ends of the gospel — this does not prove at all that faith lacks a specific object in its duty and role in our justification. If it could be shown that wherever justification is attributed to faith, faith has some other object assigned to it — something in which it rests for the pardon of sin and acceptance with God — this objection would carry some force. But this cannot be shown. Third, to affirm a specific object of justifying faith is not to say that we are justified by a part of faith and not by the whole grace of faith in its essence. We are justified by the entire grace of faith acting in a particular and specific way. But in truth, we need not dwell on this inquiry. For what is really being asked is not whether anything belonging to Christ is to be excluded from being the object of justifying faith, but whether anything in or of ourselves — under the label of receiving Christ as our Lord and King — is to be admitted as having causal or conditional efficiency in that work. Since it is granted that justifying faith is the receiving of Christ, anything belonging to the person of Christ, any of His offices, or any act in the discharge of any office that may be connected to any cause of our justification — whether the meritorious, procuring, material, formal, or manifesting cause — is freely admitted, so far as it does so, to belong to the object of justifying faith. Nor will I argue about the question as stated — "what of Christ is to be considered the object of justifying faith and what is not" — since that is not the real issue. What is actually intended is this: whether our own obedience — distinct from faith or included in it and functioning in the same way as faith — is the condition of our justification before God. That is the real question, and the

other formulation is simply a more plausible-sounding way to lead people toward accepting it. That question will be examined on its own terms.

CHAPTER 4: OF JUSTIFICATION, THE NOTION AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE WORD IN SCRIPTURE



To understand the nature of justification rightly, we must first examine the proper meaning and usage of the words "justification" and "to justify" in Scripture. Until that is settled, all our discussion of the thing itself will be tangled in ambiguity. When words are taken in different senses, anything that seems contradictory may actually be true — depending on which sense is assumed. This has in fact happened in this debate, as we will see more fully later. Some taking these words in one sense and others in another have appeared to teach opposite doctrines about justification before God, even while fully agreeing on what the words actually mean in their proper and definite sense. The true meaning of these words has therefore already been declared and defended by many writers. But since settling this is more important for resolving the central disputes about the doctrine than most people recognize — and since something remains to be added for the clarification and defense of these words' proper meaning in Scripture — I will give my own account of what I have observed, as carefully as I can.

The Latin derivation and construction of the word "justificatio" might seem to suggest an internal change from inherent unrighteousness to inherent righteousness, through a physical transformation — as the scholastic writers put it. Words of the same formation in Latin do typically carry this sense. So sanctification, mortification, vivification, and similar words all denote a real internal work in the subject. This is why throughout the entire Roman Catholic school, justification is understood as a making righteous — that is, making a person inherently righteous through the infusion of a principle or habit of grace, who was previously inherently and habitually unrighteous. As long as this is taken to be the proper meaning of the word, we cannot speak to the same point in our disputes with them about the cause and nature of the justification Scripture teaches.

This apparent sense of the word may have misled some of the ancient writers — Augustine in particular — to describe the doctrine of free, gratuitous sanctification, without reference to any works of our own, under the heading of justification. But neither he nor any of the other ancient writers ever conceived of a justification before God consisting in the pardon of sins and the acceptance of persons as righteous through any inherent habit of grace infused into us or acted out by us. Therefore, the scriptural use and meaning of these words must determine the subject matter before we can speak of it accurately or intelligibly. For if to justify in Scripture means to make people subjectively and inherently righteous, then we must acknowledge an error in what we teach about the nature and causes of justification. But if it means no such thing, then all their arguments about justification by the infusion of grace and consequent inherent righteousness fall to the ground.

All Protestants — and the Socinians agree with them here — affirm that the use and meaning of these words is forensic, denoting a legal act of judgment. The Socinians and some others, however, would have it consist in the pardon of sin alone — which the word does not signify at all. The sense of the word is to acquit, to clear, to declare and pronounce righteous following a trial — in which case the pardon of sin necessarily accompanies the verdict.

The Latin words "justificatio" and "justifico" are not native Latin terms, and no good classical author can be cited who ever used them to mean making someone inherently righteous by any means. Since these words were coined to express specific meanings, the only way to determine their sense is by examining the nature of the things they were invented to describe. Since in Latin they derive from "jus" and "justum," they must refer to an act of legal judgment rather than a physical operation or infusion. "Justificari" means to be regarded, counted, or adjudged as righteous. So by adoption, a person was made a legitimate son — "justus filius" — by the one who adopted him. As Budaeus explains, commenting on Gaius (Institutes, Book 2, concerning adoption): "In cases of arrogation, the adopting party is asked — that is, questioned — whether he wishes the one to be adopted to be his legitimate son. By legitimate I mean not merely genuine, as some think, but one who in every respect holds the place of a true son and stands in the position of a natural and lawful son." Therefore, just as adoption involves no internal inherent change in the person adopted — yet by virtue of it he is regarded and adjudged as a true son with all the rights of a legitimate son — so also by justification, in the meaning of the word, a person is simply regarded, declared, and pronounced righteous as if completely so. In fact, justification

and gratuitous adoption are in substance the same grace (John 1:12) — their different names simply reflect different effects or privileges that follow from the same gracious act.

But the true and genuine meaning of these words must ultimately be determined from the original biblical languages they represent. In Hebrew the root term is rendered in the Septuagint, for instance in Job 27:5; Job 13:18; and Proverbs 17:15. It means to show or declare someone righteous, to appear righteous, or to judge someone righteous. The sense can be seen clearly in Job 13:18: "Behold now, I have prepared my case; I know that I will be justified." His preparation of his case — that is, his cause ready to be judged — is his readiness for a verdict of either acquittal or condemnation. His confidence was that he would be justified — that is, acquitted, cleared, and declared righteous. The same sense is equally clear in the other passages. The Septuagint commonly renders this Hebrew root with a Greek term that will be discussed further.

Properly, this Hebrew verb denotes an action toward another — in the active causative form — and in the reflexive form it denotes a person's action on themselves. This alone determines the true meaning of these words. I affirm that in the active causative form, wherever this verb denotes an action toward another, it is always used in one sense only: to absolve, acquit, regard, declare, or pronounce righteous, or to impute righteousness — the forensic sense of the word we are arguing for. This is its constant use and meaning; it never once means to make inherently righteous, much less to pardon or forgive. The claim of some that justification consists only in the pardon of sin is therefore groundless, since the word does not carry that meaning in any passage of Scripture. In

almost every passage this forensic sense is beyond question, and there is at most one passage where any debate arises — and even that is so weak a case that it cannot undermine the word's consistent meaning everywhere else. Whatever infusion of inherent grace may be, and however it might be named, justification it is not and cannot be — the word never signifies any such thing. The Roman Catholic church therefore does not so much oppose justification by faith through the imputation of Christ's righteousness as deny that there is any such thing as justification at all. What they call first justification — consisting in the infusion of a principle of inherent grace — is not justification at all. And their second justification, which they locate in the merit of works with no place or role for acquittal or pardon of sin, is incompatible with evangelical justification, as will be shown later.

This word — whether expressing God's act toward people, people's acts toward God, or acts of people toward one another — is always used in a forensic sense and does not denote a physical operation, infusion, or transformation. In 2 Samuel 15:4, David says: "If any man has a suit or cause, let him come to me and I will do him justice" — I will justify him, judge his cause, and pronounce in his favor. Deuteronomy 25:1: "If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, the judges shall judge them — they shall justify the righteous" — that is, pronounce sentence in his favor. This is set in opposition to: "they shall condemn the wicked" — pronounce him wicked. The word for "condemn" means to judge, declare, and pronounce someone wicked, making them so judicially and in the eyes of the law — just as the other is made righteous by declaration and acquittal. The text does not say "they shall pardon the righteous" — which would overthrow both the

contrast and the purpose of the passage. Declaring someone wicked is no more a physical infusion of wickedness than declaring someone righteous is a physical infusion of righteousness. The same contrast appears in Proverbs 17:15: "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous." Not the one who makes the wicked inherently righteous, not the one who changes him inwardly from unrighteous to righteous — but the one who without any ground, reason, or basis acquits him in judgment or declares him to be righteous, is an abomination to the Lord. And although this speaks of human judgment, God's judgment also operates according to this same truth. For although God justifies the ungodly — those who are so in themselves — He does so on the ground and basis of a perfect righteousness made theirs by imputation. And by another act of His grace — that they may be fitting subjects of this righteous favor — He genuinely and inherently transforms them from unrighteousness to holiness through the renewal of their natures. These acts of God are unique and have no real human parallel. For the imputation of Christ's righteousness to a person who is in himself ungodly — for his justification, so that he may be acquitted, cleared, and declared righteous — is built on foundations and proceeds on principles of righteousness, wisdom, and sovereignty that have no counterpart in human actions, as will be explained later. Moreover, when God justifies the ungodly on the basis of the righteousness imputed to him, He simultaneously, by the power of His grace, makes him inherently and subjectively righteous and holy — which no human being can do for another. Therefore, while when a human being justifies the wicked he justifies them in their wicked ways, making them more

hardened in evil, when God justifies the ungodly, their personal change from unrighteousness and unholiness to righteousness and holiness necessarily and unfailingly accompanies it.

The same word is used to the same effect in Isaiah 5:23: "who justify the wicked for a bribe." And in Isaiah 50:8: "He who vindicates Me is near — who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who has a case against Me? Let him approach Me. Behold, the Lord God will help Me — who will condemn Me?" Here we have a full statement of the word's proper meaning: to acquit and pronounce righteous upon a legal proceeding. The same sense is fully expressed in the earlier contrast as well. 1 Kings 8:31-32: "If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes and makes an oath before Your altar in this house, then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his conduct on his own head, and justifying the righteous." The same words are repeated in 2 Chronicles 6:22-23. Psalm 82:3: "Vindicate the weak and fatherless" — that is, justify them in their cause against wrongdoing and oppression. Exodus 23:7: "I will not justify the wicked" — I will not absolve, acquit, or pronounce him righteous. Job 27:5: "Far be it from me that I should declare you righteous" — that is, pronounce sentence in your favor as if you were righteous. Isaiah 53:11: "By His knowledge My righteous Servant will justify the many" — and the reason is added: "for He will bear their iniquities," upon which they are absolved and justified.

Once the reflexive form is used, in which a reciprocal action is expressed — a person justifying themselves. Genesis 44:16: "Judah said, 'What can we say to my lord? What can we speak? And how

can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants." They could offer nothing to plead for their acquittal from guilt.

Once the participial form is used to denote the outward instrumental cause of others' justification — the only passage where any ambiguity about its sense arises. Daniel 12:3: "those who justify many" — meaning in the same sense that gospel preachers are said to save both themselves and others (1 Timothy 4:16). For people may be instrumental causes of others' justification no less than of their sanctification.

Therefore, although in the simple active form the Hebrew root can mean "to be righteous" or sometimes "to act righteously" — which may relate to inherent righteousness — wherever the word denotes an action toward another, it means nothing other than to regard, declare, pronounce, and adjudge a person as absolved, acquitted, cleared, and justified. There is therefore no other kind of justification so much as mentioned in the Old Testament.

The corresponding Greek word is used to the same end in the New Testament — and it alone is used for this purpose. This Greek word is not used in any good author to mean making a man righteous by any process that produces internal righteousness in him. It means either to acquit and clear, to judge, regard, and pronounce righteous — or, on the contrary, to condemn. So Suidas states it has two meanings: to punish, and to count as righteous. He confirms this meaning with examples from Herodotus, Appian, and Josephus. He also notes that when the word takes a direct object — that is, when it acts on and affects a person — it means either to condemn and punish, or to regard and declare righteous, and he gives strong examples of this latter sense immediately after.

Hesychius mentions only the first meaning. These lexicographers never considered any meaning for this word other than the forensic one. In older English as well, "to be justified" was commonly used to mean being judged and sentenced — as it is still used among the Scots. One of the articles of peace between England and Scotland at the surrender of Leith in the reign of Edward VI stated that if anyone committed a crime, he should be "justified" by the law upon his trial. In general, the Greek verb means to take one's right in court, and the related form means to judge, declare, and pronounce righteous — and how consistently it is set in opposition to "to condemn" throughout Scripture we shall see at once.

We may examine the use of this Greek word in the New Testament more specifically, just as we have done with the Hebrew term in the Old Testament. The question is whether this word is used in the New Testament in a forensic sense — denoting a legal act of judgment — or in a physical sense to express an internal change, the infusion of a habit of righteousness, with the person then called righteous as a result. Or whether it means the pardon of sin — but we may set that aside at once, since surely no one has been so bold as to claim that this Greek word means to pardon sin, yet it is the only word used to express our justification in the entire New Testament. If the word is used only in the forensic sense, then what the Roman Catholic church calls justification — whatever it may be, however good, useful, and necessary — is not justification and cannot be called so, since it is an entirely different kind of thing from what the word alone signifies. Matthew 11:19: "wisdom is justified by her children" — not made righteous, but approved and vindicated. Matthew 12:37: "by your words you will be justified" — not made righteous by them, but judged by them, as is

plain from the contrasting phrase: "by your words you will be condemned." Luke 7:29: "they justified God" — not by making Him righteous in Himself, but by owning, affirming, and declaring His righteousness. Luke 10:29: "he wanting to justify himself" — to demonstrate and maintain his own righteousness. Similarly, Luke 16:15: "you are those who justify yourselves before men" — they did not make themselves internally righteous, but approved of their own condition, as our Savior explains in the passage. Luke 18:14: "this man went down to his house justified" — that is, acquitted, absolved, and pardoned upon his confession of sin and plea for forgiveness. Acts 13:38-39; Romans 2:13: "the doers of the law will be justified." This passage directly describes the nature of our justification before God and puts the meaning of the word beyond question — for justification follows as the complete result of inherent righteousness according to the law, and therefore it is not the making of us righteous, which is conclusive. It is said of God in Romans 3:4: "that You may be justified in Your words" — to assign any other meaning to the word here would be blasphemy. The same word is used in the same sense in 1 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16; Romans 3:20, 26, 28, 30; Romans 4:2, 5; Romans 5:1, 9; Romans 6:7; Romans 8:30; Galatians 2:16-17; Galatians 3:11, 24; Galatians 5:4; Titus 3:7; James 2:22, 24-25. In not one of these instances can it bear any other meaning or denote the making of any person righteous through the infusion of a habit or principle of righteousness, or any internal transformation whatsoever.

Therefore, it is not merely in many places of Scripture — as Bellarmin concedes — that these words denote the declaration or judicial pronouncement of someone as righteous. In every single place where they are used, they admit of no other than a forensic

meaning. This is especially evident wherever justification before God is mentioned. Because I judge this one observation sufficient to demolish all the claims of the Roman Catholic church about the nature of justification, I will consider the objections raised against it and clear them out of the way.

Le Blanc, in his conciliatory work on the article of justification (his thesis on the use and meaning of the word "justifying"), grants to the Roman Catholics that the word does in several New Testament passages mean to renew, sanctify, or infuse a habit of holiness or righteousness, as they argue. There is every reason to think he has based this concession on the most relevant examples he could find. And it is unlikely that anyone else could present this concession in a more favorable light than he does. I will therefore examine every example he cites for this purpose and leave the decision to the reader's judgment. I will only state one preliminary demand that I consider reasonable: that if the meaning of the word in any or all of the passages he mentions should seem doubtful to anyone — though it does not to me — the uncertainty of a very few passages should not lead us to question the established meaning of a word whose sense is clearly and unquestionably settled in so many others. The first passage he cites is Romans 8:30: "Moreover, those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified." His argument that "justified" in this passage refers to an internal work of inherent holiness in those who are predestined is this and nothing more: it is unlikely, he says, that the apostle in this catalog of gracious privileges would omit sanctification — by which we are freed from the dominion of sin and endowed with true internal holiness

and righteousness. But sanctification is entirely absent unless it is included under the name of being justified, since it is absurd, as some claim, to refer it to glorification.

Answer. First, the grace of sanctification — by which our natures are spiritually washed, purified, and given a principle of life, holiness, and obedience to God — is unquestionably a great and excellent privilege, without which no one can be saved. Our redemption through the blood of Christ is of the same kind. And the apostle in countless other places declares, commends, and dwells on both of these. But that he ought to have introduced mention of them, or either of them, in this passage — seeing he has not done so — I would not presume to judge.

2. If our sanctification is to be included or intended in any of the privileges mentioned here, there is none — except predestination — under which it would more naturally fall than calling. In fact, sanctification seems to be expressly included in effectual calling. For effectual calling is the act by which a holy principle of spiritual life — or faith itself — is communicated to us. Our sanctification is therefore radically contained in it, the way an effect is contained in its full immediate cause. This is why we are said to be "called to be saints" (Romans 1:7), which is the same as being "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2). And in many other passages, sanctification is included in the concept of calling.

3. Since sanctification — consisting in the infusion of a principle of spiritual life and its ongoing activity increasing in holiness, righteousness, and obedience — is what makes us fit for glory, and is essentially of the same nature as glory itself (so that its growth in us is described as going "from glory to glory," 2 Corinthians 3:18, and glory itself is called "the grace of life," 1 Peter 3:7) — sanctifi-

cation is far more properly expressed by "being glorified" than by "being justified," which is a privilege of an entirely different kind. In any case, there is clearly no reason to depart from the consistent use and meaning of the word when nothing in the text compels us to do so.

The next passage Le Blanc interprets this way is 1 Corinthians 6:11: "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." He attempts to prove that justification here means the infusion of an inherent principle of grace making us inherently righteous, by three arguments. First, because justification here is attributed to the Holy Spirit — "you were justified by the Spirit of our God" — and the proper work of the Holy Spirit is to renew us. Second, he says it is clear that by justification the apostle means some change in the Corinthians by which they ceased to be what they were before. For they had been fornicators and drunkards — people who could not inherit the kingdom of God — but now they were changed, which proves that a real inherent work of grace is intended. Third, if justification here means nothing more than being absolved from the punishment of sin, then the apostle's argument will be weak and flat. For after stating something greater, as an intensification, he would then add something lesser — since to be washed is more than merely to be freed from the punishment of sin.

Answer. 1. None of these arguments proves that to be sanctified and to be justified are the same thing — which they would have to be if the meaning of the latter is what is being argued here. But the apostle makes an explicit distinction between them, and as this author himself notes, moves from one to the other in ascend-

ing order from the lesser to the greater. The infusion of a habit or principle of grace or evangelical righteousness — by which we are inherently righteous — which he uses to explain what "being justified" means in this passage, is our sanctification and nothing else. In fact, sanctification here is also distinguished from washing: "you were washed, you were sanctified" — so sanctification specifically denotes positive habits of grace and holiness in this context. And he cannot describe what he means by sanctification here in any way that differs from what he would have expressed by "being justified."

2. Justification is attributed to the Spirit of God as the principal efficient cause of applying the grace of God and the blood of Christ — through which we are justified — to our souls and consciences. He is equally the efficient cause of the working of the faith by which we are justified. Therefore, even though we are said to be justified by Him, it does not follow that our justification consists in the renewal of our natures.

3. The change and transformation that was made in these Corinthians — insofar as it was a physical, inherent effect (and such there was) — the apostle explicitly attributes to their washing and sanctification. There is therefore no need to suppose that this change is what is expressed by their being justified. The entire true work and nature of sanctification consists in that real change — the renewal of our natures. But because of the vicious habits and practices mentioned, these Corinthians had been in a state of condemnation, with no right to the kingdom of heaven. Through their justification they were transferred out of that state into one in which they had peace with God and a right to eternal life.

4. The third argument rests on a mistake — namely, that to be justified means only to be freed from the punishment due to sin. For justification includes both the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness, along with the privilege of adoption and the right to the heavenly inheritance, which are inseparable from it. Although it does not appear that the apostle in listing these privileges intended to move from the lesser to the greater — and it is dangerous for us to compare and rank the inexpressible effects of God's grace in Christ (such as sanctification and justification) — we may nevertheless say, following the guidance of Scripture and proper reflection on the things themselves, that in this life we can receive no greater mercy or privilege than what consists in our justification. The reader can see from this how impossible it is to produce even a single passage where the words "justification" and "to justify" mean a real internal work and physical operation. A learned man of more than ordinary insight, clarity, and judgment, who set out to prove it, could do no better than these examples — which give so little support to what he was trying to establish. He adds Titus 3:5-7: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, being justified by His grace, we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." The only argument he presses to prove that justification here refers to an infusion of internal grace is this: the apostle says first that God saved us according to His mercy through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, and then says that we are justified by

His grace. He therefore assumes it is necessary that we be regenerated and renewed before we can be justified — and if that is so, then justification includes and encompasses sanctification as well.

Answer. The plain truth is that the apostle says not a single word about the necessity of sanctification, regeneration, or renewal by the Holy Spirit prior to justification — the assumption of which constitutes the entire force of this argument. In fact, the apostle assigns regeneration, renewal, and justification — all the means of our salvation — equally to grace and mercy, in opposition to any works of our own. Nor does he suggest any order of priority or causal connection between the things he mentions, except between justification and adoption — with justification having logical priority: "that being justified by His grace, we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." All the things he mentions are inseparable. No one is regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit without at the same time being justified. No one is justified without at the same time being renewed by the Holy Spirit. And all of these are equally products of God's sovereign grace, in contrast to any works of righteousness we have performed. We insist on the freedom of God's grace in sanctification no less than in justification. But that it is necessary to be sanctified before being justified before God — who justifies the ungodly — the apostle does not say here, nor anything to that effect. And even if he did, it would not at all prove that the expression "to be justified" means "to be sanctified" or to have inherent holiness and righteousness worked in us. These passages would not have been produced to prove it — where these things are so clearly distinguished — unless there were no stronger or clearer ones to be found.

The last passage where Le Blanc grants this meaning to the word is Revelation 22:11: "He who is righteous, let him be justified still" — a verse appealed to by all the Roman Catholic writers. Our author says that few Protestants deny that the word here cannot be used in a forensic sense, and that "to be justified" must mean to continue and grow in piety and righteousness.

Answer. First, there is a significant textual objection standing in the way of any argument from these words — namely, a textual variant. Many ancient manuscripts do not read the word the Vulgate renders as "let him be justified still," but instead read "let him who is righteous do righteousness still" — as does the printed copy currently before me. This was the reading in the Complutensian edition's copy, which Stephens commends above all others, and in another more ancient copy he used. It is also the reading of the Syriac and Arabic translations published by Hutter, and of our own Polyglot. Cyprian reads it this way in his work on patience: "But let the righteous do more righteous things still, and likewise let the holy do more holy things." I have no doubt that this is the correct reading, with the variant having been introduced by someone seeking to harmonize it with what follows. This Greek phrase is distinctive to this apostle — it appears nowhere else in the New Testament, and perhaps not in any other author — except in his own first letter at 2:29 and 3:7, where similar words plainly express what is meant here. Second, if the Vulgate's reading is retained, "let him be justified more" — which is how it must be rendered — refers to an act of God that is neither commanded as our duty in its beginning or continuation, nor capable of increase in degrees, as will be shown later. Third, people are generally described from their inherent righteousness by a different Greek

term, and if the apostle had intended justification in this sense he would not have used the term he did. All these considerations favor the Complutensian, Syriac, and Arabic texts over the Vulgate reading of this passage. Even if the Vulgate reading is kept, the most that can be intended is that one who is righteous should continue working righteousness in a way that confirms their justified standing before themselves and demonstrates it before God and the world.

Now, the Greek words for "justify" and "justification" appear 36 times in the New Testament. These are all the passages where any objection has been raised against their forensic meaning. How weak these objections are is evident to any fair-minded reader.

Several additional considerations confirm the same conclusion. One is the consistent contrast between justification and condemnation found in Scripture: Isaiah 50:8-9; Proverbs 17:15; Romans 5:16, 18; Romans 8:33-34; and various other places noted in the earlier survey. Just as condemnation is not the infusing of a habit of wickedness into the condemned, nor the making of someone inherently wicked who was previously righteous, but the pronouncing of a sentence upon a person in view of their wickedness — so justification is not the transformation of a person from inherent unrighteousness to righteousness through the infusion of a principle of grace, but a declarative pronouncement that they are righteous.

Furthermore, justification is frequently expressed in Scripture by equivalent terms that absolutely exclude any sense of infusing a habit of righteousness. The apostle describes it as "the imputation of righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:6, 11) and calls it the blessedness that comes through the pardon of sin and the cov-

ering of iniquity in the same passage. It is called reconciliation with God (Romans 5:9-10): "having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him; for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." See also 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. Reconciliation is not the infusing of a habit of grace but the establishing of peace and love by the removal of all enmity and its causes. The language of "to save" and "salvation" is used for the same thing. "He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) is equivalent to "everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which you could not be justified through the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39). Galatians 2:16 — "we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law" — is equivalent to Acts 15:11 — "we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus." Ephesians 2:8-9 — "by grace you have been saved through faith, and not of works" — is the same as being justified. It is also expressed as the pardon or forgiveness of sins, which is its effect (Romans 4:5-6), as receiving the atonement (Romans 5:11), as not coming into judgment or condemnation (John 5:24), as blotting out sins and iniquities (Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 51:9; Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 18:23; Acts 3:19), as casting sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), and in various other equivalent expressions. The apostle, describing justification by its effects, says "many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19) — meaning those who, in a judicial proceeding in open court, are acquitted and declared righteous.

It may also be observed that everything about justification in Scripture is presented under a legal framework — a forensic trial and sentence. First, a judgment is assumed, concerning which the psalmist prays that it would not proceed on the terms of the law (Psalm 143:2). Second, the judge is God Himself (Isaiah 50:7-8; Romans 8:33). Third, the bench from which God judges is the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16): "Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice" (Isaiah 30:18). Fourth, there is a guilty person — the sinner, who is declared liable to God's judgment and whose mouth is stopped by conviction (Romans 3:19; Romans 1:32). Fifth, accusers are ready to press the charge against the guilty person: the law (John 5:45), conscience (Romans 2:15), and Satan (Zechariah 3:2; Revelation 12:10). Sixth, the charge is formally drawn up into a written indictment and presented before the judge's bench against the release of the offender (Colossians 2:14). Seventh, a plea is prepared in the gospel for the guilty person — the plea of grace through the blood of Christ, the ransom paid, the atonement made, and the eternal righteousness brought in by the surety of the covenant (Romans 3:23-25; Daniel 9:24; Ephesians 1:7). Eighth, to this alone the sinner turns, renouncing all other defenses and arguments (Psalm 130:2-3; Psalm 143:2; Job 9:2-3; Job 42:5-7; Luke 18:13; Romans 3:24-25; Romans 5:11, 16-19; Romans 8:1-3, 32-33; Isaiah 53:5-6; Hebrews 9:13-15; Hebrews 10:1-13; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 1:7). There is no other plea for a sinner before God. Whoever truly knows God and themselves will not prepare or resort to any other. Nor, I believe, would they trust any other defense even if they were sure of all the angels in heaven pleading on their behalf. Ninth, to make this plea

effective, we have an Advocate with the Father, who pleads His own propitiation for us (1 John 2:1-2). Tenth, the resulting verdict is acquittal on the basis of the ransom, blood, sacrifice, and righteousness of Christ — along with acceptance into favor as persons approved by God (Job 33:24; Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 3:23-25; Romans 8:1, 33-34; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13-14).

The value of laying out this whole process in the justification of a sinner has already been touched on to some degree. If many people would seriously consider that all of these things come together and are required for the justification of everyone who will be saved, perhaps they would not have such casual thoughts about sin and the way of deliverance from its guilt as they seem to have. It was from this understanding that the apostle learned that fear of the Lord which made him so earnest with people to seek reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

I would not have dwelt so long on the scriptural meaning of these words were it not that a right understanding of it not only excludes the Roman Catholic claim that an infused habit of charity is the formal cause of our justification before God, but may also prompt some people to ask where precisely their own personal inherent righteousness can be located in their justification before Him.

CHAPTER 5: THE DISTINCTION OF A FIRST AND SECOND JUSTIFICATION EXAMINED



Before we examine immediately into the nature and causes of justification, there are some matters that need to be addressed first, so that all ambiguity and misunderstanding about the subject may be prevented. I therefore affirm that the evangelical justification we are discussing is only one, and it is completed at once. We will not quarrel with anyone about any justification before God other than this one. Those who can find a second may attribute whatever they wish to it, or attribute it to whatever they wish. Let us therefore consider what has been put forward along these lines.

The Roman Catholic church grounds its entire doctrine of justification on a distinction between two justifications, which it calls the first and the second. The first justification, they say, is the infusion or communication to us of an inherent principle or habit of grace or charity. By this they say original sin is extinguished and all sinful habits are expelled. They say this justification is by faith, with the obedience and satisfaction of Christ as its only meritorious cause. They debate at length about preparations for it and dis-

positions toward it. Under those terms the Council of Trent included the scholastic doctrine of "merit of fitness," as both Hosius and Andradius admit in their defenses of that Council. As explained, these come to much the same thing — though the Council carefully avoided the word "merit" with respect to what it calls first justification. In their scheme, the role of faith — which for them is nothing more than a general agreement with divine revelation — is to play the leading part in these preparations. So to be justified by faith, according to them, is to have the mind prepared by this kind of believing to receive grace-making-acceptable — a habit of grace that expels sin and makes us acceptable to God. For upon this believing, along with the accompanying duties of contrition and repentance, it is fitting and consistent with divine wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness for God to give the grace by which we are justified. And this, according to them, is the justification the apostle Paul treats in his letters, from the procurement of which he excludes all works of the law. The second justification is an effect or consequence of the first. Its proper formal cause is good works proceeding from this principle of grace and love. These good works are therefore the righteousness by which believers stand righteous before God and by which they merit eternal life. They call this the righteousness of works and claim it is taught by the apostle James. This is the standard way they handle the apparent tension between Paul and James. Paul, they say, treats only of the first justification from which all works are excluded, since it is by faith in the manner described. But James treats of the second justification, which is by good works (Bellarmin, Book 2, Chapter 16 and Book 4, Chapter 18; Council of Trent, Session 6, Chapter 10). This distinction was invented for no other purpose than to introduce confu-

sion into the whole doctrine of the gospel. It empties justification through the free grace of God by faith in the blood of Christ of all meaning. It turns sanctification into a justification and corrupts it by making its fruits meritorious. The entire nature of evangelical justification — consisting in the free pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness, as the apostle explicitly states, and in the declaration of a believing sinner as righteous, as the word alone signifies — is utterly overthrown by it.

Others have also embraced this distinction, though not in exactly the same sense. The Socinians do. In fact, it must be accepted in some form by all who hold that our inherent righteousness is a cause of, or has any influence in, our justification before God. For they allow a justification that is logically prior to truly gracious and evangelical works. But following such works, they say there is a justification that differs at least in degree — if not in nature and kind — by virtue of its different formal cause, which is our new obedience rather than the former. They mostly claim that what they intend is only the continuation and increase in degree of our justification. But if they may be allowed to turn sanctification into justification and make progress in it — or an increase in it, whether in root or fruit — a new justification, they may just as well make twenty justifications as two for all I know. For the inner person is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16), believers go from strength to strength and are changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18), adding one grace to another in their exercise (2 Peter 1:5-8), increasing with the increase of God (Colossians 2:19), and growing up in all things into Him who is the Head (Ephesians 4:15). If their justification consists in this, they are newly justified every day. I will therefore do two things: first, show that this dis-

inction is both unscriptural and unreasonable; second, declare what the continuation of our justification consists in and on what it depends.

Justification by faith in the blood of Christ may be considered either in terms of its nature and essence, or in terms of its manifestation and declaration. Its manifestation is twofold: first, initial in this life; and second, solemn and complete at the day of judgment, which will be treated later. Its manifestation in this life relates either to the souls and consciences of those who are justified, or to others — that is, to the church and the world. Both of these may be called justification, though our real justification before God is always one and the same. A man may be truly justified before God and yet not have the evidence or assurance of it in his own mind. Therefore, that evidence or assurance is not part of the nature or essence of the faith by which we are justified, nor does it necessarily accompany justification. But when a person attains this awareness of their own justification — though it depends on various specific causes that are not absolutely necessary to one's justification before God — this is not a second justification. It is simply the application of the former justification to the conscience by the Holy Spirit. There is also a manifestation of justification with respect to others, which likewise depends on causes different from what is required for justification before God absolutely. Yet this is not a second justification either. It depends entirely on the visible effects of the faith by which we are justified, as the apostle James teaches us. It is simply our single justification before God, evidenced and declared — to His glory, the benefit of others, and the increase of our own reward.

Scripture also mentions two ways of justification before God. First, by the works of the law (Romans 2:13; Romans 10:5; Matthew 19:15-19). This requires absolute conformity to the whole law of God in our nature, in all the faculties of our souls, in all the principles of our moral actions, and in perfect actual obedience to all its commands in every instance of duty — both in what is done and in how it is done. For everyone is cursed who does not continue in all things written in the law to do them, and whoever breaks any one commandment is guilty of breaking the whole law. The apostle therefore concludes that no one can be justified by the law, because all have sinned. Second, there is justification by grace through faith in the blood of Christ, which is what we are discussing. These two ways of justification are contrary to each other — they proceed on directly contradictory terms and cannot be reconciled or made to serve each other. But as will be shown later, confusing both by mixing them together is precisely what this distinction between a first and second justification aims at. Whatever its other aspects, our justification before God — in His sight through Jesus Christ — is only one, and it is immediately full and complete. This distinction is a futile and foolish invention.

1. As the Roman Catholics explain it, this distinction greatly diminishes the merit of Christ. For it leaves His merit only one effect toward us: the infusion of a habit of charity. Once that is done, everything that remains for our salvation must be accomplished by ourselves. Christ has only merited the first grace for us, so that with it and through it we may merit eternal life. With His merit confined in its effect to the first justification, it has no direct influence on any grace, privilege, mercy, or glory that follows — all of those are effects of the second justification, which is purely by

works. But this is openly contrary to the entire teaching of Scripture. Although God has appointed an order in which we receive evangelical privileges — one before another — all of them are the immediate effects of the death and obedience of Christ, who "obtained eternal redemption" for us (Hebrews 9:12), is "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9), and "by one offering has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." Those who allow for a secondary — if not a full second — justification through our own inherent personal righteousness are also guilty of this error, though not to the same degree. For in attributing to that personal righteousness our acquittal from all charges of sin following the first justification — and a righteousness accepted in God's judgment as if complete and perfect, on which our final absolution and reward depend — it is clear that the direct efficacy of Christ's satisfaction and merit is bounded by the first justification. Whether this is taught in Scripture or not will be examined later.

2. By this distinction, more is attributed to ourselves — working through inherent grace, in terms of meriting and obtaining spiritual and eternal good — than to the blood of Christ. For Christ's blood only procures the first grace and the first justification for us. It is the meritorious cause of that alone — or, as others put it, we share in its effects only in the pardon of past sins. But by virtue of this grace, we ourselves then obtain, procure, or merit a second, complete justification, the continuation of God's favor with all its fruits, and eternal life and glory. In this way our works at least perfect and complete the merit of Christ — without which it is incomplete. And those who assign the continuation of our justification — with all the effects of God's favor and grace — to our own

personal righteousness, and treat that personal righteousness as the pleadable basis for our final justification before God, follow in these same steps as best I can understand. Such things may be argued over in theological disputes, and in debates of this kind it is almost incredible what power tradition, bias, clever invention, and argumentation have over people's minds — diverting them from honest reflection on the things they are debating in relation to themselves and their own condition. But if such people can be brought back to themselves and find opportunity to seriously consider how and by what means they will appear before the Most High God — to be freed from the sentence of the law and the curse due to sin, to have a pleadable righteousness at God's judgment seat before which they stand — especially if a genuine sense of these things is pressed upon their minds by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, then all their subtle arguments for the great efficacy of their own personal righteousness will sink in their minds like the tide going out, leaving nothing behind but mud and defilement.

3. This distinction between two justifications, as used and developed by the Roman Catholic church, actually leaves us no justification at all. Something in its parts resembles sanctification, but there is nothing of justification in it. Their first justification — the infusion of a habit or principle of grace to expel all habits of sin — is sanctification and nothing else. We have never argued that justification in that sense (if anyone insists on using that sense) consists in the imputation of Christ's righteousness. And this "justification," if anyone will call it that, admits of degrees — both of growth within itself and of exercise in its fruits, as just noted. But not only to call this our justification in some general sense of the

word, as a making of us personally and inherently righteous — but to argue that this is the justification through faith in the blood of Christ declared in Scripture — is to completely exclude the only true evangelical justification from religion. The second branch of the distinction closely resembles justification by the law but has nothing of what the gospel declares. So this distinction, instead of providing us two justifications according to the gospel, has left us none at all.

4. This distinction receives no support from Scripture. Scripture does, as noted earlier, speak of two kinds of justification: one by the law and one according to the gospel. But there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that either of these should be further subdivided into a first and second of the same kind — whether by the law or by the gospel. This supposed second justification is not at all applicable to what the apostle James discusses on the subject. He writes about justification, but says not a word about an increase of it, an addition to it, or a first and second. Beyond this, he speaks explicitly about someone who boasts of a faith that, being without works, is dead faith. But a person who has undergone the first justification, by our opponents' own admission, has a true living faith — a faith formed and enlivened by charity. And James uses the same testimony about the justification of Abraham that Paul does, and therefore does not intend a different justification but the same one, considered from a different angle. No believer learns anything about this distinction from their own experience. And without a deliberate aim to serve some other agenda, it would never have occurred to any sober reader of Scripture. It is a serious harm to spiritual truth when people invent arbitrary distinctions with no scriptural basis and impose them as if they belonged to the

doctrine being discussed. They serve no purpose other than to lead people's minds away from the substance of what they should attend to and to draw everyone into endless arguments and disputes. If the proponents of this distinction would simply work through the Scripture passages that speak of our justification before God and try to assign each one to the appropriate branch of their distinction, they would quickly find themselves in an impossible position.

5. What Scripture attributes to our first justification — if they insist on calling it that — leaves no room for their invented second justification. The entire basis and premise of this distinction is a denial of things to our justification through the blood of Christ that Scripture expressly assigns to it. Consider just some of what belongs to the first, and we will quickly see how little — indeed nothing — is left for the invented second justification. First, through it we receive complete pardon and forgiveness of our sins (Romans 4:4, 6-7; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 4:32; Acts 26:18). Second, through it we are made righteous (Romans 5:19; Romans 10:4). Third, we are freed from condemnation, judgment, and death (John 3:16, 19; John 5:25; Romans 8:1). Fourth, we are reconciled to God (Romans 5:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:21-22). Fifth, we have peace with Him and access into the grace in which we stand, along with all the advantages and comforts that flow from a sense of His love (Romans 5:1-5). Sixth, we receive adoption and all its privileges (John 1:12). Seventh, we receive a right and title to the full inheritance of glory (Acts 26:18; Romans 8:17). Eighth, eternal life follows from it (Romans 8:30; Romans 6:23). These matters will be addressed again shortly on another occasion. If anything remains for their second justification to accomplish, let them have it

— all of these things belong to us through the one justification we affirm. It is therefore clear that either the first justification makes the second unnecessary by completing everything, or the second destroys the first by taking away what essentially belongs to it. One or the other must go, for they are incompatible. What gives this distinction — and a great many others like it — its appeal is a dislike of the doctrine of God's grace and justification through faith in the blood of Christ, which some try to send quietly out of the way on a pointless errand while they dress up their own righteousness in its robes and exalt it into its place.

But there seems to be more substance and genuine difficulty in what is argued regarding the continuation of our justification. Those who are freely justified remain in that state until they are glorified. Through justification they are genuinely transferred into a new spiritual state and condition, and given a new relationship to God and Christ, to the law and the gospel. The question arises: what, on their part, sustains them in this state? Or, what is required of them to remain justified to the end? Some say it is not faith alone but also the works of sincere obedience. No one can deny that these works are required of all who are justified while they continue in their justified state on this side of glory, which immediately follows. But whether faith, once it has initially justified us before God, is immediately dismissed from its role and replaced by works — so that the continuation of our justification depends on our own personal obedience rather than on the renewed application of faith to Christ and His righteousness — is worth examining. I want the reader to note, however, that the necessity of personal obedience in justified people is agreed upon by all without exception. The apparent disagreement here does not touch the

substance of the doctrine of justification but only the manner of expressing our understanding of the ordering of God's grace and our duty — for our mutual edification. On this I will exercise my own liberty, as it is fitting that others exercise theirs. I will offer my thoughts in the observations that follow.

1. Justification is a work that is completed at once in all its causes and in the whole of its effect — though not in terms of the full possession of everything it gives a right and title to. First, all our sins — past, present, and future — were at once imputed to and laid upon Jesus Christ. The mode in which this happened will be examined later. "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isaiah 53:6-7). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). These statements are unlimited — without qualification or exception — and therefore function as universal claims. All our sins were upon Him; He bore them all at once, and therefore died for all once. Second, He therefore at once finished transgression, made an end of sin, made atonement for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24). At once He made atonement for all our sins, for "He Himself purified us from our sins" and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all; for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:10, 14). He will never do more than He has already done for the atonement of all our sins from first to last — "there remains no more

sacrifice for sin." I am not saying that our justification is therefore complete at that point, only that the meritorious and procuring cause of it was completed at once and will never be renewed or repeated. The remaining question is whether the renewed application of it to our souls and consciences comes through faith alone or through the works of righteousness we perform. Third, by actually believing with justifying faith — believing in Christ and in His name — we receive Him, and through this initial justification we become children of God (John 1:12) — joint heirs with Christ and heirs of God (Romans 8:17). Through this we have a right and share in all the benefits of His mediation, which is to be completely justified at once. "You are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10). By the faith that is in Him we receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among all who are sanctified (Acts 26:18), being immediately justified from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39). Indeed, God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). All of these things are absolutely inseparable from our first believing in Him, and therefore our justification is complete at once. Fourth, upon our believing, all our sins are forgiven: "He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions" (Colossians 2:13-15). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7) — which single passage answers all the petty objections of some against the consistency between the free grace of God in pardoning sins and the satisfaction of Christ in procuring that pardon. Fifth, there is therefore nothing to be charged against those who are justified in this way. "He who believes has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has

passed from death to life" (John 5:24). "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died" (Romans 8:33-34). "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1). Sixth, we have through this the blessedness that is possible in this life (Romans 4:5-6). From all of this it appears that our justification is complete at once. Seventh, it must be so, or no one can be justified in this world. No time can be set and no measure of obedience specified at which a person would supposedly come to be justified before God if they were not already justified at their first act of believing. Scripture nowhere assigns any such time or measure. To say that no one is fully justified in God's sight in this life is to overthrow at once everything Scripture teaches about justification — and along with it all peace with God and comfort for believers. But a person acquitted at their legal trial is immediately and completely discharged of everything the law had against them.

2. Upon this complete justification, believers are obligated to universal obedience to God. The law is not abolished but established by faith. It is neither repealed nor modified by any interpretation that would reduce its binding force in anything it requires — either in what it demands or in the degree and manner in which it demands it. Nor could it possibly be so. For the law is simply the rule of the obedience that the nature of God and of humanity makes necessary from the one toward the other. And it is an anti-nomianism of the worst sort — most dishonoring to the law of God — to claim that the law has been stripped of its power to require perfect obedience, so that what falls short of perfection shall (as if

in defiance of the law) be accepted as if it were perfect, for the very purpose the law requires perfection. There is no middle ground: either the law is entirely abolished — in which case there is no sin, for where there is no law there is no transgression — or it must be acknowledged to require the same obedience it required at its first institution, and to the same degree. And no person alive has the power to prevent their conscience from judging and condemning anything in which they are aware of falling short of the law's standard of perfection.

3. The commanding power of the law in its positive commands and prohibitions — to which justified persons remain subject — makes all their failures to conform to it no less truly and properly sins in their own nature than they would be if their persons were exposed to its curse. Justified persons are not exposed to the curse, and cannot be — for to be exposed to the curse of the law and to be justified are contradictory. But to be subject to the commands of the law and to be justified are not. It is subjection to the commanding power of the law — not exposure to its curse — that constitutes the nature of sin in its transgression. Therefore, the complete justification that occurs at once — while it dissolves the sinner's obligation to punishment under the law's curse — does not abolish the law's commanding authority over those who are justified, so that what is sin in others ceases to be sin in them. See Romans 8:1, 33-34.

Therefore, in the initial justification of believing sinners, all future sins are forgiven with respect to any actual obligation to the curse of the law — unless they were to fall into such sins as would immediately forfeit their justified standing and transfer them from the covenant of grace into the covenant of works. We believe that

in His faithfulness God will preserve them from such sins. And although sin cannot be actually pardoned before it is actually committed, the obligation to the curse of the law may be removed in principle from those future sins of justified persons that are consistent with a justified state — or with the terms of the covenant of grace — before those sins are actually committed. In this sense God at once forgives all their iniquities, heals all their diseases, redeems their life from destruction, and crowns them with loving kindness and mercy (Psalm 103:2-3). Future sins are not pardoned in such a way that when they are committed they would not be sins — that could not happen unless the commanding power of the law were abolished. But their connection to the law's curse — their power to obligate the justified person to that curse — is removed.

Nevertheless, the true nature of sin remains in every failure to conform to, or transgression of, the law by justified persons — and this requires daily actual pardon. For there is no one who lives and does not sin, and if we say we have no sin we are only deceiving ourselves. No one is more aware of the guilt of sin, more troubled by it, and more earnest in seeking pardon for it, than justified persons. For this is the effect of Christ's sacrifice applied to the souls of believers, as the apostle declares in Hebrews 10:1-4, 10, 14: it removes the conscience's accusation of the sinner with respect to the curse of the law. But it does not remove conscience's recognition of sin in the sinner — which, in view of all that they know of God and themselves, of the law and the gospel, calls for repentance on the part of the sinner and actual pardon on the part of God.

Since, then, one essential part of justification consists in the pardon of our sins, and sins cannot be actually pardoned before they are actually committed, the question before us is this: what

sustains the continuation of our justification despite the sins that occur after we are justified, so that those sins are actually pardoned and our persons continue in a state of acceptance before God with our right to life and glory uninterrupted? Justification is complete at once in the imputation of a perfect righteousness, the granting of a right and title to the heavenly inheritance, the actual pardon of all past sins, and the virtual pardon of future sins. But how, or by what means, on what terms and conditions this state is continued for those who are once justified — so that their righteousness is everlasting, their title to life and glory unassailable, and all their sins are actually pardoned — is the question to be examined.

In answer to this question, I say first that it is God who justifies, and therefore the continuation of our justification is also His act. On His part, this depends on the unchangeableness of His purpose, the inviolability of the everlasting covenant "ordered in all things and sure," the faithfulness of His promises, the efficacy of His grace, His delight in the propitiation of Christ and the power of His intercession, and the irrevocable gift of the Holy Spirit to those who believe — all of which are not the focus of our present inquiry.

2. Some say that on our part the continuation of our justified state depends on the condition of good works — that is, that good works have the same standing and role in this as faith itself. In justification itself there is, they will grant, something peculiar to faith. But as to the continuation of our justification, faith and works have the same influence. Indeed, some seem to attribute the continuation specifically to works, with only this qualification: that they be done in faith. For my part, I cannot see that the continuation of our justification depends on anything different from what our jus-

tification itself depends on. Just as faith alone is required for the one, so faith alone is required for the other — though its operations and effects in exercising its duty and office in both justification and its continuation differ from one another, as they must. To clarify this, two things need to be observed.

1. The continuation of our justification is the continuation of the imputation of righteousness and the pardon of sins. I continue to assume that the imputation of righteousness is part of our justification, even though we have not yet examined what righteousness it is that is imputed. But that God imputes righteousness to us in our justification is affirmed so explicitly by the apostle that it cannot be questioned. The initial act of God in imputing righteousness cannot be repeated. And the actual pardon of sin after justification is an effect and consequence of that imputation of righteousness. "If any man sin, there is a propitiation" — "Deliver him, for I have found a ransom." Therefore, for this actual pardon, nothing is required except the application of that righteousness which is its cause, and this is accomplished by faith alone.

2. The continuation of our justification stands before God — in His sight — no less than our initial justification does. We are not speaking here of our personal sense and assurance of it in terms of peace with God, nor of its evidence and manifestation to others through its effects, but of its continuance in God's sight. Whatever, therefore, is the means, condition, or cause of this, is pleadable before God and ought to be so pleaded. The question then is this:

The question is this: when a justified person is guilty of sin — as they are more or less every day — and their conscience feels the weight of it as the one thing that could threaten or interrupt their justified standing, their favor with God, and their title to glory —

what do they turn to, or ought to turn to, for the continuation of their justified state and the pardon of their sins? What do they plead to that end, and what is actually effectual for it? That this is not their own obedience, personal righteousness, or fulfillment of the conditions of the new covenant is evident from: first, the experience of believers themselves; second, the testimony of Scripture; and third, the examples of those whose cases are recorded in Scripture.

1. Ask the experience of those who believe — for their consciences are continually exercised in this very matter. What do they turn to? What do they plead before God for the continuation of the pardon of their sins and the acceptance of their persons before Him? Is it anything but sovereign grace and mercy through the blood of Christ? Are not all the arguments they bring to this end drawn from the resources of God's name, His mercy, grace, faithfulness, tender compassion, covenant, and promises — all of which are manifested and exercised in and through the Lord Christ and His mediation alone? Do they not place their only trust and confidence in these, that their sins may be pardoned and their persons — though in themselves entirely unworthy — may be accepted by God? Does any other thought enter their hearts? Do they plead their own righteousness, obedience, and duties for this purpose? Do they leave the prayer of the tax collector and resort to that of the Pharisee? And is it not faith alone — the grace by which they apply themselves to the mercy and grace of God through the mediation of Christ? It is true that faith, in doing this, works and expresses itself in and through godly sorrow, repentance, humiliation, self-examination, self-abhorrence, fervent prayer and supplication, humble waiting for God's answer of peace, and renewed

commitments to obedience. But it is faith alone that makes application to grace in the blood of Christ for the continuation of our justified state — expressing itself through those other ways and effects, from none of which a believing soul expects to receive the mercy it seeks.

2. Scripture explicitly declares this to be the only way the continuation of our justification is sustained. 1 John 2:1-2: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." It is required of those who are justified that they not sin — it is their duty not to sin. But it is not required of them in such a way that if in any respect they fail in their duty they immediately forfeit the privilege of their justification. Therefore, on the assumption of sin — "if anyone sins," since there is no one who lives and does not sin — what course is prescribed for such a person to take? What should they turn to, so that their sin may be pardoned and their acceptance with God continued — that is, for the continuation of their justification? The course directed by the apostle in this case is nothing other than the application of the soul by faith to the Lord Christ as our Advocate with the Father, on the basis of the propitiation He has made for our sins. Under the consideration of this twofold act of His priestly office — His sacrifice and His intercession — He is the object of our faith in our initial justification, and He is equally the object of our faith in its continuation. Our entire progress in our justified standing, in all its degrees, is thus attributed to faith alone.

Our inquiry is not about what God requires of those who are justified. Every duty and act of grace required by either the law or the gospel — both in substance and in the manner of performance — is binding on justified persons. When these duties are neglected, we acknowledge that the guilt of sin is incurred, sometimes with aggravations so serious that some are unwilling to even confess them before God. For this reason, the faith and grace of believers continually and deeply express themselves in godly sorrow, repentance, humiliation for sin, and confession of it before God, in response to their awareness of its guilt. These duties are necessary to the continuation of our justification in this sense: a justified state cannot coexist with the sins and vices that are directly opposed to those duties. The apostle affirms this: if we live according to the flesh, we will die (Romans 8:13). A person who does not carefully avoid fire, water, or other immediate threats to physical life cannot survive — but those are not what life itself depends on. In the same way, our best duties relate to the continuation of our justification only in this sense: through them we are kept from the things that are contrary to it and destructive of it. The real question is what the continuation of our justification depends on — not what duties are required of us in the path of obedience. If the claim is simply that God indispensably requires good works and obedience from all who are justified — so that a justified state is incompatible with neglecting them — that is readily granted, and I will not argue with anyone over how they choose to express that idea. But when the question is what we ourselves contribute, in the way of duty, to the continuation of our justified state — that is, the pardon of our sins and our acceptance with God — the answer is: faith alone. "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). Just as the apostle applies

this text to prove that our initial justification is by faith alone, he also applies it to the continuation of our justification — showing that it too depends on faith alone (Hebrews 10:38-39). "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." "But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." Drawing back to destruction includes the loss of a justified state, whether real or in profession. In contrast, the apostle places believing as the path to the saving of the soul — that is, to the continuation of justification to the end. This is how the just live by faith, and the only way this life is lost is through unbelief. Similarly, Paul writes: "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). The life we now live in the flesh is the continuation of our justification — a life of righteousness and acceptance with God, in contrast to a life based on the works of the law, as the very next verse makes clear. "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (Galatians 2:21). This life is lived by faith in Christ — in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us as a propitiation for our sins. Faith, then, is the only way, means, and cause on our part for the preservation of this life and the continuation of our justification. It is by faith that we are kept by the power of God to salvation. Furthermore, if the continuation of our justification depends on our own works of obedience, then the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us only with respect to our initial justification. This is, in fact, the doctrine of the Roman Catholic school. They teach that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us in this limited sense: on account of it, God grants us justifying grace and, in their under-

standing, the remission of sins — and for this reason they allow it to be the meritorious cause of our justification. But once that grace is received, they say, we are justified before God by the works we perform through that received grace. Some of them go so far as to say that this grace and the works it produces need no further reference to the righteousness of Christ in order to merit the second justification and eternal life — as Vasquez explicitly states (In 1.2, q. 114, Disp. 222, cap. 3). Yet many others among them maintain that our works are meritorious precisely because Christ's merit underlies them. Those who affirm that the continuation of our justification depends on our own works — setting aside the ambiguous term "merit" — hold essentially the same position. They say it is on account of the righteousness of Christ that our own works, or imperfect obedience, are accepted by God in such a way that the continuation of our justification depends on them. But the apostle gives us a different account in Romans 5:1-3. There he distinguishes three things: first, our access into the grace of God; second, our standing in that grace; and third, our glorying in that standing against all opposition. The first expresses our absolute justification; the second, our continuation in the state we have been admitted to; and the third, our assurance of that continuation despite every challenge we face. All three he attributes equally to faith, without mixing in any other cause or condition. Other passages could be cited to the same effect.

3. The scriptural examples of those who believed and were justified all bear witness to the same truth. The continuation of Abraham's justification before God is declared to have been by faith alone (Romans 4:3). The instance the apostle cites from Genesis 15:6 occurred long after Abraham's absolute justification.

If initial justification and its continuation did not depend on exactly the same cause, the apostle could not have used one as proof of the other — yet that is precisely what he does. David, too, as a justified believer, not only placed the blessedness of a person in the free remission of sins — in contrast to his own works generally (Romans 4:6-7) — but in his own particular case attributed the continuation of his justification and acceptance before God to grace, mercy, and forgiveness alone, which are received only through faith (Psalm 130:3-5; Psalm 143:2). All other works and duties of obedience accompany faith in the continuation of our justified state as necessary effects and fruits of faith — not as causes, means, or conditions on which that state depends. It is patient waiting through faith that brings in the full fulfillment of the promises (Hebrews 6:12, 16). There is therefore only one justification — and only one kind — that concerns us in this discussion. Scripture speaks of no other, and that is the justification of an ungodly person by faith. We will not consider any other. If there were a second justification, it would have to be either the same kind as the first or a different kind. If it is the same kind, then the same person is justified multiple times with the same kind of justification — which, by the same logic, would mean they ought to be baptized multiple times as well. If it is a different kind, then the same person is justified before God by two distinct kinds of justification, of which Scripture is completely silent. The continuation of our justification depends solely on the same causes as justification itself.

CHAPTER 6: EVANGELICAL PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, ITS NATURE AND USE; FINAL JUDGMENT AND JUSTIFICATION



Everything we have discussed about the first and second justification, and about the continuation of justification, has had one purpose: to clear away what does not necessarily belong to the main subject. Until everything that is either foreign to the topic or simply unnecessary is set aside, we cannot properly understand the true state of the question about the nature and causes of our justification before God. We have in view one justification only — the justification by which God freely and by His grace justifies a convicted sinner at once, through faith in the blood of Christ. Whatever else anyone wishes to call justification is not our concern here, nor is it the concern of the believing conscience. For the same reason, we must briefly consider what is commonly debated about our own personal righteousness and any justification based on it, as well as what is called the sentential justification at the day of judgment. We will not go further into these matters here than is necessary to show that they are not truly mixed up with the main subject — they simply do not belong to it.

The question of what role our own personal righteousness plays in our justification before God will be examined separately later. Here we will only consider the way that concept seems to interfere with our main topic and obscure a right understanding of it. On this matter too, I would say that the differences among us more likely belong to the realm of how we express our ideas about spiritual things — since our knowledge is partial — than to any disagreement about the substance of the doctrine itself. Such differences need not lead to any breakdown of charity, as long as there is mutual willingness to grant each other the freedom of mind without which charity cannot be maintained for a moment.

Some hold that there is an evangelical justification based on our evangelical personal righteousness. They distinguish this from the justification that comes by faith through the imputation of Christ's righteousness — at least as they understand that imputation. In their view, the righteousness of Christ serves as our legal righteousness, giving us pardon of sin and acquittal from the sentence of the law on the basis of His satisfaction and merit. But beyond this, they say, since personal inherent righteousness is required of us, there is also a justification by the gospel based on that righteousness. By our faith and its pleading, we are justified from the charge of unbelief; by our sincerity and its pleading, we are justified from the charge of hypocrisy; and so on for every other grace and duty — we are justified from the charge of the corresponding sins of commission or omission, insofar as such sins are incompatible with the terms of the covenant of grace. How this differs from the second justification before God — which others say we have by

works, on the assumption of pardon through Christ's satisfaction and the infusion of a habit of grace enabling those works — is explained by those who use this language.

Some add that this inherent personal evangelical righteousness is the condition on our part for our legal righteousness — that is, for the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our justification, or for the pardon of sin. Those who deny the satisfaction and merit of Christ make it the only and complete condition of our absolute justification before God. This is the consistent position of all the Socinians. They deny that our obedience to Christ is either the meritorious or efficient cause of our justification; they say it is only the condition — without which God has decreed that we will not share in its benefit. Socinus himself states this: "Our works — that is, the obedience we render to Christ, as was said — are neither the efficient nor the meritorious cause, yet they are (as they call it) the *sine qua non* cause of our justification before God and of our eternal life" (*De Justificatione*, p. 17). He also writes: "We must be careful not to believe that the holiness and innocence of our life is the effect of our justification before God, nor to affirm that it is the efficient or motivating cause of our justification before God; but only that it is the condition without which God has decreed that this justification will not come to us" (p. 14, among the *Opuscula*). Throughout all their writings on this subject, they assert that our personal righteousness and holiness — our obedience to the commands of Christ, which they treat as the very form and essence of faith — is the condition on which we obtain justification or the remission of sins. Given their view of the person of Christ and their rejection of His satisfaction and merit, it is impossible for them to form any other idea of justification. I cannot understand, however,

why some among ourselves would align with them on this point, when they are not compelled to do so by the Socinians' prior commitments about the person and mediation of Christ. For all the Socinian ideas about grace, conversion to God, justification, and related doctrines are simply the necessary conclusions of their hypothesis about the person of Christ.

For now, I will only examine that distinctive evangelical justification which is said to be the effect of our own personal righteousness, or to be granted to us on account of it. On this point we may observe the following.

1. God does require by the gospel a sincere obedience from all who believe, to be performed in their own persons — though through the aid of grace supplied to them by Jesus Christ. Indeed, He requires obedience, duties, and works of righteousness from all persons without exception. But any works performed before believing are excluded by all parties from having any causal role in our justification before God. Whatever anyone may argue about the necessity of such works as preparation for believing — a matter addressed earlier — no one brings them within the category of evangelical works or the obedience of faith, which would be a contradiction. That the works in question are necessary for all believers is agreed by all; the grounds and purposes of that necessity will be examined later, as declared in Ephesians 2:10.

2. It is likewise granted that believers are called righteous in Scripture on account of this obedience and these works of righteousness, and that they are personally and inwardly righteous (Luke 1:6; 1 John 3:7). Yet this designation is never given to them with respect to grace as a habit dwelling within them, but to its effects in actual works of obedience, as in the passages cited.

Zechariah and Elizabeth "were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord." The second clause gives the reason for the first — why they were considered righteous before God. Similarly, "he who practices righteousness is righteous" — the designation comes from doing. When Bellarmine attempted to prove that it is habitual rather than actual righteousness that is, as he put it, the formal cause of our justification before God, he could not produce a single scripture where anyone is called righteous because of habitual righteousness (*De Justificatione*, lib. 2, cap. 15). He was forced to try to prove it with the absurd argument that we are justified by the sacraments, which work habitual rather than actual righteousness in us. This is enough to expose the weakness of any claim for our own righteousness based on this designation — since the designation does not have in view the principal part of that righteousness.

3. This inherent righteousness — taking it as both habitual and actual — is the same thing as our sanctification; the two are not different realities but different names for the same thing. Sanctification is the inward renewal of our nature, expressing itself in newness of life — that is, in obedience to God in Christ and in works of righteousness. But Scripture consistently distinguishes sanctification from justification, whatever causal relationship one may have to the other. Those who confuse them, as the Roman Catholics do, are not really disputing about the nature of justification — they are effectively arguing that there is no such thing as justification at all. For what ought to be central to justification — namely, the pardon of sin — they locate instead in the removal and extinction of sin through the infusion of inherent grace, which has nothing to do with justification.

4. There are several ways in which we may be said to be justified by this inherent personal righteousness. First, in our own consciences — since it serves as evidence within us and to us that we have received God's grace in Christ Jesus and are accepted by Him, which is no small source of peace. The apostle speaks of this: "Our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world" (2 Corinthians 1:12). Yet he also disclaims any confidence in this as the basis of his justification before God: "For I am not aware of anything against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted" (1 Corinthians 4:4). Second, by this righteousness we may be said to be justified before other people — that is, acquitted of the evil charges laid against us and approved as righteous and blameless. The reality is that those who profess the gospel have always been, and always will be, spoken of as evildoers by the world. The rule given to them for clearing their name — so that in the end they may be vindicated in the eyes of all who are not completely blinded and hardened in wickedness — is a holy, fruitful life filled with good works (1 Peter 2:12; 3:16). This also applies within the church, so that we may not be judged as lifeless, fruitless professors but as those who have shared in the same precious faith as others — "Show me your faith by your works" (James 2). Third, this righteousness can be pleaded to our justification against all the charges of Satan, who is the great accuser of all who believe. Whether he presses his accusations privately within our consciences — as if before God, as he charged Job — or through his instruments in all kinds of slander and reproach (which some in this age have experienced in a notable way), this righteousness is a valid plea for our justification.

Given all of this — in which our personal righteousness is given its proper place and use (as will be more fully explained later) — I do not find that there is an evangelical justification by which believers are justified in the sight of God on the basis of this personal inherent righteousness. Nor does the imputation of Christ's righteousness for our absolute justification before God depend on it. The reasons are as follows.

1. No one possesses this personal righteousness without already being justified in the sight of God. This righteousness is entirely the obedience of faith — it proceeds from true and saving faith in God through Jesus Christ. As was noted earlier, works done before faith are by general agreement excluded from any role in our justification, and we have shown that they are neither conditions of it, preparations for it, nor dispositions toward it in any proper sense. But every true believer is justified immediately upon believing. There is no moment when a person holds the faith the gospel requires and is not yet justified. Through faith a person is united to Christ — which is the foundation of our justification by Him — and all of Scripture testifies that the one who believes is justified, or that God has ordained an unfailing connection between true faith and justification. Therefore this personal righteousness cannot be the condition of our justification before God, since it comes after justification, not before. Whatever objections might be raised from the notion of a second justification or from different causes for the beginning and continuation of justification has already been answered.

2. Justification before God is a release and acquittal from a charge brought before God — at least it includes this. The instrument that brings such a charge must be either the law or the

gospel. But neither the law nor the gospel, before God or in His sight, charges true believers with unbelief, hypocrisy, or the like. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect" who are already justified before Him? Such charges may be brought against believers by Satan, sometimes by the church in error, and by the world — as in Job's case — and against those charges this righteousness is a valid plea. But what is charged immediately before God is charged by God Himself, through the law or the gospel, and God's judgment is according to truth. If the charge comes by the law, we must be justified by the law. But a plea of sincere obedience will not justify anyone before the law. The law accepts nothing short of complete and perfect conformity to its demands. And where the gospel brings a charge against a person before God, there can be no justification before God — unless we are willing to say that the gospel is the instrument of a false charge. For what could justify someone the gospel condemns? And if this is supposed to be a justification by the gospel from the charge of the law, it renders the death of Christ without effect. A justification without any charge to answer is simply incoherent.

3. This kind of justification is entirely unnecessary and pointless. This is easily seen from what Scripture asserts about our justification in the sight of God by faith in the blood of Christ — which has already been addressed on another occasion. Let that be considered, and it will quickly become clear that there is no place or use for this additional justification based on personal righteousness — whether it is supposed to come before our justification by faith and support it, or to follow it and perfect it.

4. This proposed evangelical justification does not resemble any justification mentioned in Scripture — neither justification by the law nor justification provided in the gospel. Justification by the law is this: the person who does its works will live by them. This evangelical justification makes no such claim. And as for evangelical justification properly understood, this proposal is contrary to it in every way. In true evangelical justification, the charge against the person to be justified is true: he has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But in this proposed justification, the charge is false — that a believer is an unbeliever, a sincere person a hypocrite, a fruitful person utterly barren. And this false charge is supposed to be brought before God and in His name. In true evangelical justification, our acquittal comes through the pardon of sin; here it comes through a vindication of our own righteousness. In true evangelical justification, the person's plea is "guilty" — all the world is guilty before God — and acquittal comes through pardon. But here the person pleads "not guilty," which is followed by proofs and evidence of innocence and righteousness. This is a plea the law will not admit, and one the gospel disowns.

5. If we are justified before God on the basis of our own personal righteousness — pronounced righteous by Him on account of it — then God enters into judgment with us regarding something within ourselves and acquits us on that basis. For justification is a legal act within God's judgment, which is according to truth. But that God should enter into judgment with us and justify us based on what He examines in us, or on our personal righteousness, is something the Psalmist did not believe (Psalm 130:2-3; Psalm 143:2), nor did the tax collector (Luke 18).

6. Our personal righteousness cannot be called a subordinate righteousness that supports our justification by faith in the blood of Christ. For in that justification, God justifies the ungodly and credits righteousness to the one who does not work. Moreover, our own works are explicitly excluded from any consideration in our justification (Ephesians 2:7-8).

7. The personal inherent righteousness by which we are said to be justified in this evangelical justification is our own righteousness. Personal righteousness and our own righteousness are equivalent expressions. But our own righteousness is not the material cause of any justification before God. First, it is wholly unfit to be so (Isaiah 64:6). Second, it is directly opposed to the righteousness by which we are justified — being incompatible with it for that purpose (Philippians 3:9; Romans 10:3-4).

It may be objected that our own righteousness is the righteousness of the law, whereas this personal righteousness is evangelical. But first, it will be hard to prove that our personal righteousness is anything other than our own righteousness, which is explicitly excluded from any role in our justification in the passages cited. Second, a righteousness that is evangelical with respect to its efficient cause, its motivations, and some of its ends is still legal with respect to the formal reason for it and our obligation to it. For every duty that belongs to it carries with it, at a general level, an obligation grounded in the first commandment — to take the Lord as our God, acknowledging His essential truth and sovereign authority; we are thereby obligated to believe everything He reveals and to obey everything He commands. Third, the good works excluded from any role in our justification are the very works to which we were created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9), the works of right-

eousness we have done (Titus 3:5), and the works that concern the Gentiles who never sought righteousness through the works of the law (Romans 9:30). But it may still be objected: God requires an evangelical righteousness from all who believe. This righteousness is not Christ Himself, nor is it the righteousness of Christ. Christ may be called our legal righteousness, but He is not our evangelical righteousness. And insofar as we are righteous with any righteousness, we are justified by it. For we are to be examined according to this evangelical righteousness — if we have it we will be acquitted, and if we do not we will be condemned. There is therefore a justification according to it.

I answer. First, according to some who hold and defend this view, I do not see why Christ is not as much our evangelical righteousness as He is our legal righteousness. In their understanding, He is our legal righteousness not through a proper imputation of His righteousness to us, but through the communication to us of the fruits of what He did and suffered. By the same logic, He is our evangelical righteousness as well — for our sanctification is an effect and fruit of what He did and suffered for us (Ephesians 5:25-26; Titus 2:14).

2. No one possesses this evangelical righteousness unless they have already been justified — at least in the order of nature — before they actually have it. For it is what is required of all who believe and are justified on that basis. We hardly need to inquire how a person is justified after they are already justified.

3. God has not appointed this personal righteousness as the basis for our justification before Him in this life, though He has appointed it to serve as evidence of our justification before others — and even in His sight — as will be explained. He accepts it and ap-

proves it on account of the free justification of the person in and by whom it is worked. This is how He regarded Abel and his offering. But we are not acquitted by it from any real charge in the sight of God, nor do we receive the remission of sins on account of it. Those who make justification consist entirely in the remission of sins and treat this personal righteousness as its condition — as the Socinians do — leave no place for the righteousness of Christ in our justification.

4. If we are in any sense justified before God by this righteousness, then we have grounds for boasting before Him. We may not boast absolutely or with respect to merit, yet we would boast comparatively — in relation to others who cannot make the same plea for their justification. But all boasting is excluded. And it does not help to say that this personal righteousness is a free gift of God's grace to some and not others — for we must plead it as our own duty, not as God's grace.

5. Consider a person freely justified by the grace of God through faith in the blood of Christ, without any reference to his own works, obedience, or righteousness. We freely grant all of the following: first, that God indispensably requires personal obedience from him, which may be called his evangelical righteousness; second, that God approves and accepts in Christ this righteousness so performed; third, that through it the faith by which we are justified is evidenced, proved, and made visible before God and people; fourth, that this righteousness is a valid plea for acquittal against any charge from Satan, the world, or our own consciences; and fifth, that on the basis of it we will be declared righteous at the last day, and without it no one will be so declared. If anyone thinks it appropriate to call God's acceptance of our righteousness an evan-

gical justification, I will not quarrel with that language. And wherever the question is not how a sinner who is guilty of death and exposed to the curse will be pardoned, acquitted, and justified — which is by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him alone — but rather how a person who professes evangelical faith, or faith in Christ, will be examined, judged, and on what basis he will be justified as such, we grant that it is and must be by his own personal sincere obedience.

These things are said not to argue with anyone or to oppose particular opinions, but only to clear away from the main question what does not properly belong to it.

A very few words will also free our inquiry from any involvement with what is called the sentential justification at the day of judgment. Whatever its nature, the person about whom that sentence is pronounced will have already, first, been actually and completely justified before God in this world; second, received all the benefits of that justification, including a glorious resurrection — "it is raised in glory" (1 Corinthians 15); and third, for most believers, long before that day their souls will have enjoyed a blessed rest with God, fully discharged and acquitted from all their labors and all their sins. Nothing remains at the last day but the actual admission of the whole person into eternal glory. This final judgment therefore can be nothing more than a declaration — to the glory of God and the everlasting joy of those who believed. Without reducing it to a new justification (a term Scripture never applies to it), the purposes of that solemn judgment are evident: the manifestation of God's wisdom and righteousness in appointing salvation through Christ, just as in giving the law; the public conviction of those who transgressed the law and despised the gospel; the vindi-

cation of God's righteousness, power, and wisdom in His providential governance of the world — in which for the most part His paths in this life are hidden and His footsteps unknown; the glory and honor of Jesus Christ, triumphing over all His enemies who are then fully made His footstool; the glorious exaltation of grace in all who believed; and many other things that serve equally to display the ultimate glory of God in the creation and governing of all things.

This also shows how little force there is in an argument that some present as being of great weight in this discussion. They say: everyone will be judged by God at the last day in the same way and on the same grounds as they are justified by God in this life. But at the last day everyone will be judged by works, not by faith alone. Therefore, everyone is justified before God in this life by works, not by faith alone. The following replies expose this argument.

1. Scripture never says we will be judged at the last day "by works" (*ex operibus*); it says only that God will render to each person "according to works" (*secundum opera*). But God does not justify anyone in this life according to works — He justifies freely by His grace, and "not according to the works of righteousness which we have done." We are consistently said throughout Scripture to be justified in this life "by faith" (*ex fide, per fidem*), but never "for faith" or "according to faith" (*propter fidem, secundum fidem*) — we are justified through faith, not on account of faith as such, nor proportionally to our faith. We should not depart from Scripture's own careful and consistent phrasing on this distinction.

2. It is rather strange to argue that a person is judged at the last day and justified in this life in exactly the same way — that is, with respect to faith and works — when Scripture consistently at-

tributes our justification before God to faith apart from works, while the judgment at the last day is said to be according to works, with no mention of faith.

3. If justification and eternal judgment proceed on exactly the same grounds, reasons, and causes, then if people had not done what they will be condemned for at the last day, they would have been justified in this life. But many will be condemned solely for sins against the light of nature (Romans 2:12), having never had the written law or the gospel made known to them. If the argument holds, then for such people, abstaining from sins against the light of nature would have been sufficient for their justification — with no knowledge of Christ or the gospel required.

4. The idea that God pardons people their sins and grants them adoption as children with a right to the heavenly inheritance according to their works is not merely foreign to the gospel — it contradicts and destroys it, standing against every explicit testimony of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments wherever these matters are addressed. It is true, and affirmed in Scripture, that God will judge all people and render to all at the last judgment according to their works.

5. In our justification in this life by faith, Christ is considered as our propitiation and Advocate — the One who has made atonement for sin and brought in everlasting righteousness. But at the last day, in the final judgment, He is considered only as the Judge.

6. The goal of God in our justification is the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:6). The goal of God in the final judgment is the glory of His rewarding righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8).

7. The depiction of the final judgment in Matthew 7 and Matthew 25 concerns only the visible church. In that scene, the plea of faith — as a profession — is common to all and is made equally by all. On that basis, the question is put to the test: was this faith sincere and true, or merely dead and fruitless? This test is conducted entirely by the fruits and effects of faith — for in a public declaration to all, it can be conducted in no other way. Apart from this, the faith by which we are justified does not come into judgment at the last day (see John 5:24 with Mark 16:16).

CHAPTER 7: IMPUTATION AND ITS NATURE; THE IMPUTATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST



The first explicit record of the justification of a sinner is that of Abraham. Others were justified before him from the beginning, and enough is said about them to make clear that they were. But it was reserved for the father of the faithful that his justification — and the express way and manner of it — should be the first to be entered in the sacred record. This is in Genesis 15:6: "He believed in the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness." It was counted, reckoned, imputed. And it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us, to whom it will be imputed if we believe (Romans 4:23-24). Therefore, the first explicit declaration of the nature of justification in Scripture affirms that it is by imputation — the imputation of something to righteousness. And this was done in the very instance that was recorded as the pattern and example for all who would ever be justified. As Abraham was justified, so are we — and in no other way.

Under the New Testament, a fuller and clearer declaration of this doctrine became necessary. It is among the first and most important parts of that heavenly mystery of truth that the gospel was to bring to light. Moreover, there was from the beginning a powerful and dangerous opposition to it. This very matter of justification — its doctrine and everything that necessarily belongs to it — was what caused the Jewish church to break from God, to reject Christ and the gospel, and to perish in their sins, as Paul explicitly declares (Romans 9:31; 10:3-4). In the same way, a dislike of and opposition to this doctrine has always been and always will be a root cause of apostasy in any professing church that falls under the power and deception of those who oppose it — as happened afterward in the churches of Galatia. But in this situation the doctrine of justification was fully declared, set forth, and defended by the apostle Paul in a distinctive way. He does so especially by affirming and proving that the righteousness by which and with which we are justified comes to us by imputation — that is, our justification consists in the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of righteousness.

Yet, although the first recorded instance of justification — recorded precisely so that it might serve as the pattern for the justification of all who would be justified to the end of the world — is expressed in terms of imputation and imputed righteousness, and although the apostle expresses the doctrine in exactly the same way in the great crisis where the eternal salvation or ruin of the Jewish church was at stake, it has come about in our day that nothing in religion is more resented, more mocked, and more despised than the imputation of righteousness to us — an imputed righteousness. Some among us call it a fictitious righteousness, the

shadow of a dream, a fantasy, a farce, an imagination. Socinus calls it an opinion that is shameful, execrable, destructive, and detestable. Opposition to it rises every day from a wide variety of sources. And those who oppose and reject it cannot by any means agree on what to put in its place.

Nevertheless, the weight and importance of this doctrine is acknowledged by all sides, whether they believe it to be true or false. This is not a dispute about abstract notions, terms, and speculations that have little or no bearing on Christian practice — of which many are needlessly debated. It is a doctrine that has an immediate bearing on our whole present duty and on our eternal welfare or ruin. Those who reject the imputation of righteousness claim that this faith and doctrine undermines the necessity of gospel obedience, personal righteousness, and good works, and opens the door to antinomianism and moral license. On that view, believing this doctrine and living consistently with it must be destructive of salvation. On the other side, those who believe it judge it impossible that any person should be justified before God except through the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and accordingly judge that without it no one can be saved. A learned man recently concluded his discussion with this: "Thus far of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, without which no one was ever saved, nor can anyone ever be saved" (*Justificatio Paulina*, cap. 8). Those who hold this view do not think that everyone who fails to grasp or who denies the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness — as they explain it — is thereby excluded from salvation. But they do judge that those to whom that righteousness is not truly imputed are excluded — and they cannot think otherwise, since they make it the foundation of their own acceptance with God and eternal sal-

vation. These are very different things. To believe the doctrine or not believe it, as explained in this way or that, is one thing; to actually possess the reality it describes, or not possess it, is another. I have no doubt that many receive more grace from God than they understand or are willing to acknowledge, and that its work in them is greater than they believe. People may be truly saved by a grace they doctrinally deny, and they may be justified by the imputation of a righteousness they in theory deny is imputed. For faith in it is included in the general assent they give to the truth of the gospel, and an adherence to Christ may follow from that such that their mistaken understanding of how they are saved by Him will not deprive them of a genuine share in it. For my part, I must say that despite all the disputes about justification I read and encounter — some of which are deeply offensive and scandalous — I do not believe that their authors (if they are not outright Socinians who deny the whole merit and satisfaction of Christ) actually trust in their own works or obedience for the pardon of their sins and acceptance with God rather than in the mediation of Christ. Nor will I believe the contrary unless they state it plainly. As for the objection on the other side — concerning the supposed danger of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness for the necessity of holiness and good works — that must be addressed later.

The position of the Reformed churches on this matter is well known to all, and must be acknowledged honestly rather than perpetuated in futile disputes. The Church of England in particular is explicit in its doctrine concerning the imputation of the righteousness of Christ — both His active and passive obedience, as they are commonly distinguished. This has recently been so thoroughly demonstrated from the church's authoritative writings — the

Articles of Religion, the Books of Homilies, and other publicly authorized writings — that any further proof is unnecessary. Those who pretend to hold a different view are not worth contending with. There is no point in arguing with people who deny that the sun is shining while they cannot bear the heat of its rays. Whatever I offer on this subject, I will not depart in the slightest from the ancient doctrine of the Church of England. Indeed, my only aim is to declare and defend it, as God enables me.

There are certainly various differences among learned, careful, and orthodox thinkers — if that term gives no offense — in how they explain the doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Yet they all agree on its substance in every point where the grace of God, the honor of Christ, and the peace of human souls are most at stake. As far as possible, I will avoid getting drawn into those differences at present. What is the point of arguing about them when the substance of the doctrine itself is openly attacked and rejected? Why debate the arrangement and decoration of the rooms of a house while the whole building is on fire? When the fire is put out, we can return to discussing the best use of each room.

There are two main parties that oppose the doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness: the Roman Catholics and the Socinians. They proceed from different principles and toward different ends. The aim of the one is to exalt their own merits; the aim of the other is to destroy the merit of Christ. But beyond these two camps, there are many independent voices who borrow from both as they see fit. We will have to deal with all of them in the course of this discussion — not attacking persons or the way they express themselves, but engaging with their views in-

sofar as those views oppose the truth. It is something that wise people despise and good people lament: to see those who claim to be religious and pious picking at expressions, arguing about words, trying to pin on others views they do not hold, and then publicly vilifying each other as if it were some great achievement or victory. This is not how the truths of the gospel are taught, nor how the church is built up. But the importance of the cause to be defended, the strength of the opposition to the truth, and the deep concern for the souls of believers to be rightly instructed in it all call for a fresh declaration and defense of this doctrine. Whatever I attempt in this direction, I do so with this conviction: the life and continuance of any church on one side, and its apostasy and ruin on the other, depend in a significant way on whether this article of religion is preserved or rejected — and, I will add, as it has been professed, received, and believed in the Church of England in former days.

The first thing to consider is the meaning of the words "to impute" and "imputation." A plain explanation of these terms will show that many objections raised against the kind of imputation we are affirming are either empty and groundless — or that the objection itself is.

The Hebrew word used for this concept means to think, to esteem, to judge, or to assign a thing or matter to someone — to impute, or to be imputed, for good or ill (see Leviticus 7:18; 17:4; and Psalm 106:31: "it was counted, reckoned, imputed to him as righteousness"). It means to judge or esteem that this or that good or evil belongs to a person, that it is theirs. The Septuagint renders it with the Greek terms *logizomai* and *ellegeo*, as do the New Testament writers as well. These are rendered in Latin as *reputare*,

imputare, acceptum ferre, tribuere, assignare, ascribere. But there is a difference between these terms: in particular, being reputed righteous and having righteousness imputed differ as cause and effect. For a person to be reputed righteous — that is, to be judged or considered righteous — there must be a real basis for that reputation, or it is simply a mistake and not a sound judgment, just as a fool might be reputed wise, or a beggar reputed wealthy. Therefore, for a person to be reputed righteous, they must either have a righteousness of their own or have one imputed to them as the prior basis for that reputation. To impute righteousness to someone who has none of their own is therefore not to consider an unrighteous person as righteous while they remain unrighteous — it is to communicate a righteousness to them so that they may rightly and justly be considered, judged, and reputed righteous.

Imputare is a word the Latin language uses in the same sense that theologians employ. Seneca writes in his letter to Marcia: "You have deserved the best of the worst, to whom uncorrupted knowledge of things has come, credited to its great author." And Pliny writes in his defense of our common parent the earth (Natural History, lib. 18, cap. 1): "We burden her with our crimes and impute our own faults to her."

In their usage, to impute something to another means — if it is evil — to charge it to them, to lay it on them; as Pliny says, we impute our own faults to the earth, that is, we charge them to it. If it is good, it means to ascribe it to someone as their own, whether it was originally so or not — "credited to its great author." Vasquez attempts to explain the term (In Thomam, 22, Tom. 2, Disp. 132) but confuses it with reputare: "To impute or reckon something to someone is the same as to number and count it among those

things that are his and belong to him." But this is what *reputare* properly means; *imputare* includes a prior act before this accounting — the act of reckoning the thing as belonging to that person.

Since what can be imputed to us may in some cases be truly our own prior to that imputation, the word must have two distinct meanings, as the examples from Latin authors just cited demonstrate.

1. To impute to us what is truly our own — already inherent in us or performed by us — prior to that imputation involves two things. First, an acknowledgment or judgment that the thing imputed is truly and really ours, or present in us. When someone imputes wisdom or learning to a man, the first step is to acknowledge that he is wise or learned. Second, treating that person accordingly — whether the thing imputed is good or evil. So when a person is acquitted at trial because he is found righteous, he is first judged and considered righteous, and then treated as a righteous person — his righteousness is imputed to him. See this illustrated in Genesis 30:33.

2. To impute to us what is not our own prior to that imputation also involves two things. First, a grant or donation of the thing itself to us — making it ours — on some just ground and basis. For something must be made ours before we can rightly be treated according to what it requires. Second, a will to deal with us, or an actual dealing with us, according to what has thus been made ours. For in this matter, the holy and righteous God does not justify anyone — that is, absolve them from sin, declare them righteous, and grant them a right and title to eternal life — except on the basis of a true and complete righteousness being truly and completely made

the righteousness of those to be justified, in the order of nature prior to their justification. These points will be made still clearer by the examples that follow, as they need to be.

1. There is an imputation to us of what is truly our own — inherent in us and performed by us — prior to that imputation, and this applies whether it is evil or good. The rule and nature of this is expressed in Ezekiel 18:20: "The righteousness of the righteous person will be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked person will be on him." We have examples of both kinds. First, in the imputation of sin, when the person guilty of it is judged and reckoned a sinner and dealt with accordingly. Shimei sought to prevent this kind of imputation (2 Samuel 19:19): "He said to the king, 'Let not my lord impute iniquity to me'" — using the very same word employed in the expression of the imputation of righteousness in Genesis 15:6 — "nor remember what your servant did wrong; for your servant knows that I have sinned." He was guilty and acknowledged his guilt, but sought to prevent the imputation of it in a sentence that his sin deserved. Similarly, Stephen asked that the sin of those who stoned him — of which they were truly guilty — not be imputed to them (Acts 7:60): "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." On the other side, Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, who died in the same cause and the same manner as Stephen, prayed that the sin of those who killed him would be charged to them (2 Chronicles 24:22). Therefore, to impute sin means to charge it to someone and to deal with them according to what it deserves.

To impute what is good to a person is to judge and acknowledge it as truly theirs, and then to treat them — in whom it exists — according to how it stands in relation to the law of God. "The

righteousness of the righteous will be on him." Jacob arranged for his righteousness to answer for him in Genesis 30:33. And we have an example of God doing this in Psalm 106:31: "Then Phinehas stood up and executed judgment, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Although it might have seemed that he lacked sufficient warrant for what he did, God — who knew his heart and the guidance of His own Spirit working in him — approved his act as righteous and rewarded him in a way that testified to that approval.

Regarding this kind of imputation, it must be observed that whatever is ours prior to the imputation — which is an act of God responding to it — can never be imputed to us for anything more or less than what it actually is in itself. For this imputation consists of two parts: first, a judgment that the thing is ours, in us, or belonging to us; and second, a will to deal with us, or an actual dealing with us, according to it. Therefore, in imputing to us what is ours, God does not treat it as something other than it is. He does not regard an imperfect righteousness as if it were perfect — to do so would indicate either a mistaken assessment of the thing being judged, or a perversity in the judgment itself. So if, as some claim, our own faith and obedience are imputed to us as righteousness, then since they are imperfect they can only be imputed to us as an imperfect righteousness, not as a perfect one. For God's judgment is according to truth, and that is what is involved in this imputation. And the imputation of an imperfect righteousness — valued only as such — will be of little use to us in this matter. The legal fiction of acceptance that some propose — borrowing a device from human law to explain the mystery of the gospel — not only overturns all imputation but also the satisfaction and merit of Christ. It

must also be observed that this kind of imputation is a pure act of justice, with no mixture of grace, as the apostle declares in Romans 11:6. For it consists of these two parts: first, acknowledging and judging that something truly exists in us; and second, a will to deal with us accordingly — both of which are acts of justice.

The imputation to us of what is not our own prior to that imputation — at least not in the same way it is afterwards — takes various forms depending on the grounds and causes from which it proceeds. It must be observed that no imputation of this kind means accounting those to whom something is imputed as having personally done the very things being imputed to them. That would not be imputation but a mistake in judgment — and it would utterly overthrow the whole nature of gracious imputation. Rather, it is to make something ours by imputation — something that was not previously ours — so that it serves all the purposes it would have served had it been our own without any such imputation.

It is therefore a clear misunderstanding — one that some use as a basis for attacking the doctrine of imputation. They say: if our sins were imputed to Christ, then He must be regarded as having done what we did wrong, making Him the greatest sinner who ever lived. And on the other side, if His righteousness is imputed to us, then we must be regarded as having done what He did, and therefore as standing in no need of the pardon of sin. But this is contrary to the nature of imputation, which rests on no such judgment. The whole point is the opposite: we ourselves did nothing of what is imputed to us, and Christ did nothing of what was imputed to Him.

To explain more precisely the nature of this imputation, I will consider its various kinds — or rather, the various grounds from which it proceeds. The imputation to us of what is not our own prior to that imputation may arise from one of four grounds: (1) from justice (*ex justitia*); (2) from a voluntary undertaking (*ex voluntaria sponzione*); (3) from wrongful charging (*ex injuria*); or (4) from grace (*ex gratia*). Each of these will be illustrated in what follows. I distinguish them this way not as if they could never overlap in the same imputation — I will show that they can — but to trace each kind of imputation to its nearest cause.

1. Things that are not originally, personally, or inherently ours may still be justly imputed to us by the rule of righteousness (*ex justitia*). This may happen on the basis of one of two relations to those who originally did those things: first, a covenant relation; or second, a natural relation. First, what one person does may be imputed to others because of a covenant relationship between them. This is how Adam's sin was — and is — imputed to all his descendants, as will be explained more fully later. The basis is that we all stood in the same covenant as Adam, who was our head and representative in it. The corruption of nature that we inherit from Adam is imputed to us by the first kind of imputation — that of what is truly ours prior to the imputation. But his actual sin is imputed to us as something that becomes ours through the imputation, which it was not before. Even Bellarmine himself acknowledges this: "Adam's sin is imputed to all his posterity as though they had all committed the same sin" (*De Amissione Gratiae*, lib. 4, cap. 10). In saying this he actually gives us the true nature of imputation — the very thing he fiercely disputes against in his writings on justification. For the imputation of that sin to us as if we had committed it,

which he acknowledges, includes both the transfer of that sin to us and the treatment of us as if we had committed it — which is exactly the doctrine of the apostle in Romans 5.

2. There is also an imputation of sin to others by justice on account of a natural relationship between them and those who actually incurred the guilt. But this applies only to some outward and temporary consequences of it. God speaks of this concerning the children of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness: "Your children will be wanderers in the wilderness for forty years and will suffer for your unfaithfulness" (Numbers 14:33). Your sin will be charged to your children to this extent, because of their natural relation to you and your part in them: they will bear the consequences of it in a life of hardship in the wilderness. This was just, given the relation between them, and the same principle of divine justice appears frequently in other passages of Scripture. Thus, where there is a proper basis for it, imputation is an act of justice.

2. Imputation may also justly arise from a voluntary undertaking (*ex voluntaria sponsione*) — when someone freely and willingly takes on responsibility for another. A clear example of this is Paul's statement to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus (verse 18): "But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Paul assumed that Philemon might have two kinds of claims against Onesimus: first, a claim for wrong done — if Onesimus had acted unjustly toward him in a way that made him liable to punishment; and second, a claim for loss or debt — if Onesimus owed him anything, making him liable to payment or restitution. Paul stepped forward with a voluntary pledge on Onesimus's behalf: "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand; I will repay it." He did this by transferring both debts of Onesimus

to himself — for the offense was of a kind that could be answered for by a substitute, not being a capital crime. The imputation of those debts to Paul was made just by his voluntary undertaking of them. "Charge me as the one responsible," he says, "and I will make it good, so that nothing is charged against Onesimus." Similarly, Judah voluntarily pledged to Jacob for Benjamin's safety and bound himself to perpetual guilt if he failed: "I will be a guarantee for him; you may hold me responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, let me bear the blame before you forever" (Genesis 43:9). He expressed the same thing again to Joseph (Genesis 44:32). This is the nature and role of a surety: what he undertakes for can justly be required of him as if he had been personally and originally responsible for it. This voluntary undertaking was one of the grounds for the imputation of our sin to Christ. He took upon Himself the position of the whole church that had sinned, in order to answer for what they had done against God and the law. That imputation was therefore grounded in a covenant agreement and a voluntary undertaking (*ex compacto, ex voluntaria sponsione*). But given that undertaking, the imputation became an act of justice as well — for it was right that He should answer for and make good what He had voluntarily taken on, the glory of God's righteousness and holiness being deeply at stake.

3. There is an imputation by wrongful charging (*ex injuria*) — when a charge is laid against someone who is not guilty of it. Bathsheba says to David: "It will come about, when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that my son Solomon and I will be treated as offenders" (1 Kings 1:21) — dealt with as guilty persons, having sin imputed to us on some pretext and to our destruction.

"We will be treated as sinners" — regarded as such and dealt with accordingly. We can see in scriptural usage that the designation of "sinner" follows imputation just as much as it follows the actual presence of sin in a person — which sheds light on the apostle's statement that Christ "was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). This kind of imputation has no place in God's judgment. It is far from Him to treat the righteous as the wicked.

4. There is an imputation of pure grace and favor (*ex mera gratia*). This is when something that was in no way ours prior to the imputation — not inherent in us, not performed by us, something we had no right or title to — is granted to us and made ours, so that we are judged and treated according to it. This is precisely the imputation the apostle so vigorously defends and repeatedly asserts in Romans 4, in both its forms: negative, in the non-imputation of sin; and positive, in the imputation of righteousness. He both affirms the thing itself and declares that it is of pure grace, without any reference to anything within ourselves. If this kind of imputation cannot be fully illustrated by any other example but this one — the mediation of Christ — it is because the foundation of it in that mediation is unique, with nothing comparable to it in any other situation among human beings.

From what has been discussed about the nature and grounds of imputation, several things become clear that shed much light on the truth we are affirming — or at least on the right understanding and framing of the question under debate.

1. The difference is clear between the imputation of any of our own works to us, and the imputation of the righteousness of faith apart from works. The imputation of our own works to us — whatever they may be, including faith itself as an act of obedience in us

— is the imputation of what was already ours before the imputation. But the imputation of the righteousness of faith, or the righteousness of God that comes through faith, is the imputation of what is made ours by virtue of that imputation. These two kinds of imputation differ in their entire nature. The first is a judgment that something is in us which is indeed already in us and ours before that judgment is passed; the second is a communication to us of something that was not ours before. No one can make sense of the apostle's argument — that is, understand anything of it — unless they acknowledge that the righteousness he is discussing is made ours by imputation, and was not ours prior to it.

2. The imputation of works — of whatever kind, including faith itself as a work, and the whole obedience of faith — is by justice (*ex justitia*), not by grace. However much the granting of faith to us and the working of obedience in us may be of grace, the imputation of those things to us — as being in us and ours — is an act of justice. For this imputation, as was shown, is nothing other than a judgment that such and such things are in us or belong to us — which they truly and really are — together with treating us according to them. This is an act of justice, as the description of this kind of imputation makes plain. But the imputation of righteousness of which the apostle speaks is, with respect to us, of pure grace (*ex mera gratia*), as he fully declares. Moreover, he declares that these two kinds of imputation are incompatible and cannot be mixed together, as if something could be partly one and partly the other (Romans 11:6): "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace; but if it is on the basis of works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work." For example: if faith itself, as our work, is imputed to us, then — since

it was already ours before that imputation — the imputation is merely an acknowledgment that it is in us and ours, with an accounting of it for what it is. To account something to us for what it is not would not be imputation but error. This is an imputation by justice, of works — and therefore, by the apostle's rule, that which is of pure grace can have no place alongside it. So the imputation to us of what is in us is exclusive of grace, in the apostle's sense. On the other hand, if the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, it must be of pure grace — because what is imputed was not ours before the imputation, and it is communicated to us by means of it. Here there is no place for works, or any appeal to them. In the one case the foundation of imputation is in ourselves; in the other it is in another — and these are irreconcilable.

3. In this one thing both kinds of imputation agree: whatever is imputed to us is imputed for what it actually is, not for what it is not. If what is imputed to us is a perfect righteousness, it is regarded and judged as such, and we are to be treated accordingly — as those who have a perfect righteousness. And if what is imputed as righteousness to us is imperfect, or imperfect in some degree, then it must be judged as such when it is imputed; and we must be treated as those who have such an imperfect righteousness — not as having more. Therefore, since our inherent righteousness is imperfect — and those who think otherwise deserve pity or dismissal, not argument — if that is what is imputed to us, we cannot be accepted on its account as perfectly righteous without an error in judgment.

4. From all this, the true nature of the imputation we are affirming becomes clear — both negatively and positively — though so many either cannot or will not understand it. Negatively, first: it

is not a judging or considering of those to be righteous who truly and really are not so. Such a judgment cannot be traced to any of the grounds of imputation described above. It would have the character of wrongful charging (*ex injuria*) — a false charge — except that it differs in direction: the false charge is about evil, while this claim is about good. So the outcry of the Roman Catholics and others — who shout themselves hoarse insisting that we claim God regards the wicked, sinful, and polluted as righteous — is nothing but ignorance or spite. In fact, this charge falls heavily on those who argue that we are justified before God by our own inherent righteousness; for then a person is judged righteous who is in fact not so. The one who is not perfectly righteous cannot be righteous in God's sight with respect to justification. Second, negatively: it is not a bare declaration or announcement that someone is righteous without a just and sufficient foundation for the judgment of God expressed in it. God declares no one righteous except the one who is righteous — the whole question being how that person came to be so. Third, negatively: it is not the transfer or infusion of another's righteousness into those to be justified, so that they become perfectly and inherently righteous thereby. It is impossible for the righteousness of one person to be infused into another so as to become subjectively and inherently theirs. But it is a serious mistake to conclude from this that the righteousness of one person can therefore in no way be made the righteousness of another — for that would be to deny all imputation.

Positively, then: this imputation is an act of God of pure grace and love, by which — on account of the mediation of Christ — He effectively grants and donates a true, real, perfect righteousness,

even the righteousness of Christ Himself, to all who believe. Accounting it as theirs by His own gracious act, He both absolves them from sin and grants them a right and title to eternal life.

4. In this imputation, the thing itself is first imputed to us — its effects are not imputed to us independently, but become ours by virtue of that imputation. To say that Christ's righteousness — His obedience and sufferings — is imputed to us only as to its effects is to say that we receive the benefit of them, and nothing more; but imputation itself is thereby denied. This is precisely what the Socinians say, and they honestly acknowledge that they thereby overthrow all true and real imputation. Schlichtingius writes in his disputation for Socinus against Meisner: "For in order for us to be justified through the righteousness of Christ, it is not necessary that His righteousness become our righteousness; it is enough that Christ's righteousness is the cause of our justification. And to this extent we can grant you that Christ's righteousness is our righteousness — insofar as it overflows to our benefit and righteousness. But you mean it is properly ours, that is, attributed and ascribed to us" (*Disputatio pro Socino ad Meisnerum*, p. 250). It is not pleasant to see some among ourselves so confidently adopting the very language and reasoning of these men in their disputes against the Protestant doctrine — that is, the doctrine of the Church of England — on this matter.

To say that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as to its effects does have a sound meaning: the effects of it are made ours by reason of that imputation. It is so imputed and credited to us by God that He truly communicates all its effects to us. But to say that Christ's righteousness is not itself imputed to us — only its effects are — actually destroys all imputation. For the effects of Christ's

righteousness cannot properly be said to be imputed to us; and if His righteousness itself is not imputed, then imputation has no place here at all, and it becomes impossible to understand why the apostle asserts it so repeatedly in Romans 4. This is precisely why the Socinians — who explicitly oppose the imputation of Christ's righteousness and argue only for participation in its effects or benefits — wisely deny that Christ's righteousness consists in satisfaction and merit at all. For what they allow Christ's righteousness to consist in plainly cannot be imputed to us, whatever benefit we may receive from it. But I cannot understand how those who grant that Christ's righteousness consists principally in His satisfaction for us and in our place can conceive of an imputation of its effects to us without an imputation of the thing itself. For it is because that righteousness is made ours that we partake of its benefits. From the description of imputation and its examples, it is clear that nothing can be imputed unless the thing itself is imputed, and that no participation in the effects of anything is possible apart from an imputation of the thing itself as the foundation. Therefore in this matter, no imputation of Christ's righteousness exists unless the righteousness itself is imputed; and we can have no participation in its effects except on the basis and foundation of that imputation. The pointless objections that some have recently collected from Roman Catholic and Socinian sources — that if this is so, we are as righteous as Christ Himself, that we have redeemed the world and paid for the sins of others, that the pardon of sin is impossible, and personal righteousness unnecessary — will be addressed later, as much as they deserve.

All we are demonstrating at this point is simply this: either the righteousness of Christ itself is imputed to us, or there is no imputation in our justification at all. Whether there is such an imputation is a question to be addressed separately afterward. As was said, the effects of Christ's righteousness cannot properly be said to be imputed to us. For example, the pardon of sin is a great effect of Christ's righteousness — our sins are pardoned on account of it, and God for Christ's sake forgives us all our sins. But the pardon of sin itself cannot be said to be imputed to us, nor is it. Adoption, justification, peace with God, all grace and glory — these are effects of Christ's righteousness. But that these things are not imputed to us, nor can be, is evident from their very nature. We become partakers of all of them on account of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us — and in no other way.

This is sufficient to have said about the nature of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The grounds, reasons, and causes of it will be examined next. I have no doubt that our inquiry will show it to be no fiction — as those ignorant of these matters imagine — but on the contrary, an important truth woven into the most foundational principles of the mystery of the gospel, and inseparable from the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER 8: IMPUTATION OF THE SINS OF THE CHURCH UNTO CHRIST; HIS SURETYSHIP AND THE NEW COVENANT



Those who believe in the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers for the justification of life also unanimously affirm that the sins of all believers were imputed to Christ. They do so on the basis of many scriptural testimonies that directly support this, some of which will be cited and defended later. For now, we are only examining the general concept of these things and explaining the nature of what will be proved afterward. We will first inquire into the foundation of this arrangement of God and the justice of it — the grounds on which it rests — without an understanding of which the thing itself cannot be properly grasped.

The principal foundation of this is that Christ and the church, in this design, were one mystical person — a union they actually realize through the uniting work of the Holy Spirit. He is the head, and believers are the members of that one person, as the apostle declares (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Therefore, just as what He did is imputed to them as if they had done it, so what they deserved on

account of sin was charged to Him. A learned bishop expresses it this way: "He sustained our cause, He who had united our flesh to Himself, and being thus most closely bound to us, He made what was ours His own." And again: "What wonder if, placed in our person and clothed in our flesh, etc." (Montacutus, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*). The ancient fathers speak to the same effect. Leo writes (Sermon 17): "Therefore divine power joined itself to human weakness, so that while God made what was ours to be His, He might make what was His to be ours." He also writes (Sermon 16): "Our Lord Jesus Christ, transforming all the members of His body into Himself, cried out in the suffering of the cross, in the voice of His redeemed, what He had once uttered in the Psalm." Augustine speaks to the same point (Epistle 120, to Honoratus): "We hear the voice of the body from the mouth of the head. The church suffered in Him when He suffered for the church." Just as we have heard the voice of the church in Christ's suffering — "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" — so we have heard the voice of Christ in the church's suffering — "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" We may look a little further back and deeper into the understanding of the ancient church on this matter. Irenaeus writes: "Christ recapitulated in Himself all the nations scattered from Adam, and the whole race of humanity. For this reason Paul called Adam himself the type of the one to come" (*Against Heresies*, lib. 3, cap. 33). And again: "Recapitulating in Himself the entire human race from beginning to end, He also recapitulated death itself." In this concept of recapitulation he clearly had in mind the word used in Ephesians 1:10. Origen perhaps intended something similar, though obscurely, when he said that the soul of the first Adam was the soul of Christ — at least as the charge

against Him is to be understood. Cyprian writes, in his letter on the administration of the Eucharist (Epistle 63): "Christ bore all of us — He who also bore our sins." He bore us — that is, He suffered in our person — when He bore our sins. Athanasius therefore affirms, concerning the cry Christ made on the cross, that "we suffered in Him." Eusebius says many things to this effect (Demonstration of the Gospel, lib. 10, cap. 1). Expounding the words of the Psalmist — "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You" — and applying them to our Savior in His sufferings, he writes: "Because He took our sins to Himself, He communicated our sins to Himself, making them His own" — and he adds: "making our sins His own." Because in the words that follow he fully expresses what I intend to prove, I will quote him at length.

I have quoted this passage at length because, as I said, it fully sets out what I intend to prove in this discussion. He speaks as follows: "How then did He make our sins His own, and how did He bear our iniquities? Is it not from this: that we are said to be His body — as the apostle says, 'You are the body of Christ, and members individually' — and just as when one member suffers all the members suffer, so He, seeing the many members sinning and suffering, and being united to us all in the same nature, and taking on the form of a servant according to the laws of sympathy within the same body, took upon Himself the sorrows of the suffering members, made all their infirmities His own, and according to the laws of humanity in that same body, bore our grief and labor for us. The Lamb of God not only did these things for us, but He endured torment and punishment for us — punishment He was in no way liable to for His own sake, though we were by the multitude of our sins. He became the cause of the pardon of our sins because He

underwent death, stripes, and reproaches, transferring to Himself what we had deserved; and He was made a curse for us, taking upon Himself the curse that was due to us. For what was He but a substitute for us — a ransom price for our souls? In our person, therefore, the oracle speaks — while He freely united Himself to us and us to Himself, and made our sins and our sufferings His own — 'Lord, be merciful to me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.'"

That our sins were transferred to Christ and made His, that He thereupon underwent the punishment due to us for them, and that the ground and justice of this rests in the union between Him and us — all of this is fully expressed in this passage. The learned and moving author of the Homilies on Matthew 5 in the works attributed to Chrysostom (Homily 54, the last of them) says: "In His flesh He took on all flesh; crucified, He crucified all flesh in Himself." He is speaking of the church. Other fathers speak in similar terms frequently: that He bore us, that He took us with Him to the cross, that we were all crucified in Him. As Prosper writes: "He is not saved by the cross of Christ who is not crucified in Christ" (Response to the Articles of the Gauls, cap. 9).

This, then, is the foundation of the imputation of the church's sins to Christ: He and the church are one person. The grounds of that union must now be examined.

At this point various discussions and inquiries arise: what a person is, in what sense and in how many senses the word may be used, what the true concept of personhood is, what a natural person is, what a legal or civil or political person is — areas in which some have fallen into errors. If we were to enter that territory, we would find more than enough material for debate. But these things

do not belong to our present concern, and they do not illuminate the union of Christ and the church — they obscure it. Christ and believers are neither one natural person, nor a legal or political person, nor any kind of person that human law, custom, or convention recognizes or allows for. They are one mystical person. Although some imperfect resemblances to this union can be found in natural or political unions, the union itself — from which the designation is drawn — is of a nature and arises from causes that have no counterpart in any personal union among human beings. Because this union is beyond our weak understanding, which cannot grasp the depths of heavenly mysteries, it is compared in Scripture to unions of various kinds. It is represented by the union of husband and wife — not merely in the affections that give them a moral bond, but grounded in the creation of the first woman from the flesh and bone of the first man, and in God's institution of their lifelong companionship. The apostle explains this at length in Ephesians 5:25-32, concluding that by the union thus represented, we are "members of His body" (verse 30) — having the same relation to Christ that Eve had to Adam when she was made from his flesh and bone, and so became one flesh with him. The union is also compared to that of the head and members of a natural body (1 Corinthians 12:12), and to a political union between a ruling head and those it governs — though never to the exclusion of the natural head-and-members relationship expressed in the same language (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 2:19). It is also compared to things in nature, such as a vine and its branches (John 15:1-3), and it is illuminated by the relationship between Adam and his descendants established by God's institution and the law of creation (Romans 5:12). By representing the union between Christ and be-

lievers through such a variety of analogies — things that share only the general concept of union but arise from different grounds — the Holy Spirit sufficiently indicates that this union is not reducible to any one of those kinds. This will become even clearer when we consider the causes and foundations of the union. Since dealing with these at length would require more time than this occasion permits, I will only briefly outline the main points.

1. The first source and cause of this union — and the root of all the other causes — lies in the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son regarding the recovery and salvation of fallen humanity. Among the effects of this covenant, the assumption of our nature — which is the foundation of this union — was planned. I have explained the nature and terms of this agreement, counsel, and compact elsewhere, and will not repeat it here. But the relationship between Christ and the church, flowing from this source and being an effect of infinite wisdom in the Father and Son's eternal counsel, to be made real by the Holy Spirit, must be distinguished from all other unions or relationships whatever.

2. The Lord Christ, with respect to the nature He was to assume, was on this basis predestined to grace and glory. He was foreordained and predestined before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20) — that is, with respect to His office, and to all the grace and glory required for it and flowing from it. All the grace and glory of the human nature of Christ was the effect of free divine foreordination. God chose it from all eternity to receive in time all that it did receive. No other cause can be assigned for the glorious exaltation of that portion of our nature.

3. The grace and glory to which He was predestined was twofold. First, what was peculiar to Himself; and second, what was to be communicated through Him to the church. Of the first kind was the grace of the personal union — that singular effect of divine wisdom, for which there is no shadow or analogy in any other work of God in creation, providence, or grace — with which His human nature was filled: "full of grace and truth." All His personal glory, power, authority, and majesty as Mediator — expressed in His exaltation at the right hand of God — belong to this category. These things were peculiar to Him, and all of them are effects of His eternal predestination. But second, He was not predestined in this absolute sense alone; He was also predestined with respect to the grace and glory that was to be communicated to the church through Him.

1. He was predestined as the pattern and exemplary cause of our predestination. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29). Therefore He "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (Philippians 3:21), so that when He appears we will be fully like Him (1 John 3:2).

2. He was predestined as the means and cause of communicating all grace and glory to us. We were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy, and predestined to adoption as children through Him (Ephesians 1:3-5). He was appointed as the sole procuring cause of all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places for those chosen in Him.

3. He was foreordained as the head of the church, for it was God's design to sum up all things in Him (Ephesians 1:10).

4. All God's elect were, in His eternal purpose, and in the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son, entrusted to Christ to be delivered from sin, the law, and death, and to be brought into the enjoyment of God. "They were Yours, and You gave them to Me" (John 17:6). From this flows the love with which He loved them and gave Himself for them — a love that existed before any goodness or love in them (Ephesians 5:25-26; Galatians 2:20; Revelation 1:5-6).

5. In carrying out this divine design and fulfilling the everlasting covenant, Christ took on our nature in the fullness of time — He took it into personal union with Himself. The special relationship that resulted between Him and the elect children is explained at length by the apostle in Hebrews 2:10-17. I refer the reader to our exposition of that passage.

6. On these foundations He undertook to be the surety of the new covenant: "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant" (Hebrews 7:22). Of all the foundational considerations of the imputation of our sins to Christ, this is the one I will focus on here — specifically to address and correct some misunderstandings about the nature of His suretyship and its relationship to the covenant of which He was the surety. What I offer on this point is drawn, with very little change, from my exposition of this passage in the seventh chapter of Hebrews — not yet published — written without any anticipation of discussing our present subject.

The Greek word for surety (*enguos*) appears nowhere else in Scripture but this single place. But the objection some would draw from this — that since Christ is called a surety in only one place, it carries little weight — is both unreasonable and absurd. First, this one passage is divine revelation, and therefore carries the same au-

thority as twenty testimonies to the same effect. One divine testimony makes our faith no less obligatory, and no less secure from error, than a hundred would.

2. The meaning of the word is well established from its use in everyday life — no question can be raised about its sense and significance simply because it appears only once. The term itself removes the difficulty and ambiguity whenever it is encountered. Third, the thing itself that the term describes is so fully explained by the apostle in this passage, and so abundantly taught in other parts of Scripture, that the single use of this one word can only add clarity, not undermine it.

Something should be said about the meaning of the word, as this will shed light on what it signifies. The root word (*engyos*) comes from "the palm of the hand" — and from this comes the act of delivering something into another's hand. Being a surety was therefore expressed by striking hands (Proverbs 6:1): "My son, if you have become surety for your neighbor, if you have given a pledge for a stranger." This corresponds to the Hebrew term that the Septuagint renders in Proverbs 6:1; 17:18; 20:19; and by Nehemiah in Nehemiah 5:3. The original sense is "to mingle" or "a mixing together of things or persons." From this — because of the joining and intermingling between a surety and the one he stands for, by which they become, in a sense, one person for the purposes of the suretyship — the word came to mean a surety or to give surety. The one who became a surety was bound to answer for whatever befell the person he stood for. This is illustrated in Genesis 43:9 in the words of Judah to his father Jacob about Benjamin: "I will be a guarantee for him; from my hand you may require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before

you, then let me bear the blame before you forever." In undertaking to be surety for Benjamin's safety, Judah bound himself to answer for whatever might happen to him. On this basis he later appealed to Joseph to be taken as a servant in Benjamin's place so that Benjamin could go free and return to his father (Genesis 44:32-33). What is required of such a surety is that he bear and answer for everything the person he stands for is liable to — whether criminal or civil — as far as the suretyship extends. A surety is one who undertakes for another, and is therefore justly and legally bound to answer for whatever is owed by or to that person. The word is used in no other sense (see Job 17:3; Proverbs 6:1; 11:15; 17:11; 20:16; 27:13). Paul became a surety to Philemon for Onesimus in this exact sense (verse 17). The Greek term used here (*eggyos*) carries the sense of a pledge, a guarantee, an undertaking for a person or matter — from which an agreement follows. In some cases this took the form of pledges or an earnest payment (Isaiah 36:8): "Give surety, pledges, hostages for the true performance of the conditions." The same root is behind the word translated "pledge" or "earnest" in Ephesians 1:14. Therefore, a surety is one who voluntarily takes upon himself the cause or condition of another — to answer, bear, or pay what that person is liable for, or to ensure that it is done — and thereby becomes justly and legally bound to perform it. This is the sense in which the apostle uses the word here, for it has no other.

In examining the nature of Christ's suretyship, the whole matter comes down to this one question: was the Lord Christ made a surety only on God's side toward us — assuring us that the promises of the covenant on God's part would be fulfilled — or was He also, and primarily, an undertaker on our side, responsible for

what is required with respect to us, so that the promise might be accomplished? The first of these is vigorously asserted by the Socinians, who are followed by Grotius and Hammond in their annotations on this passage.

Schlichtingius writes: "Jesus is called the guarantee of the covenant because He pledged in God's name to us — that is, He assured us that God would keep the promises of the covenant. He did not pledge to God on our behalf or take on Himself the payment of our debts. For we did not send Christ — God did. It was in God's name that Christ came to us, established a covenant with us, pledged that its promises would be fulfilled, and took that responsibility upon Himself. Therefore He is not called simply a surety, but the surety of the covenant. And Christ guaranteed the truth of the divine covenant not only by continually testifying in words that it was firm and certain, but also by confirming the credibility of His mission through the greatest possible evidence: through a perfectly blameless and holy life, through the clearly divine works He performed, and through the endurance of the brutal death He underwent for the truth of His teaching." He follows this with a lengthy discussion of the evidences we have of Christ's trustworthiness. This gives us a concise summary of the Socinian view of the mediation of Christ. Grotius writes: "Christ guaranteed — that is, He assured us of the promise — not merely by words, but by a life of constant holiness, by the death He endured for it, and by many miracles," which is a condensed version of Schlichtingius. Dr. Hammond explains it to the same effect: that Christ was a sponsor or surety on God's part, to confirm the promises of the covenant.

On the other hand, the great majority of expositors — ancient and modern, from both the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions — affirm that the Lord Christ, as surety of the covenant, was properly a surety and undertaker to God for us, not a surety and undertaker to us for God. Because this is a matter of great importance, deeply affecting the faith and consolation of the church, I will dwell on it a little.

First, consider the argument offered to prove that Christ was only a surety from God to us. This argument is drawn neither from the name or nature of the office and work of a surety, nor from the nature of the covenant of which He was surety, nor from the nature of the office He held. The only argument put forward is this: that we do not give Christ as surety to God — God gives Him to us. Therefore, they say, He is a surety for God and the fulfillment of His promises, not for us in paying our debts or answering what is required of us.

But this argument has no force. It is not relevant to the nature of a surety who may design or appoint him to that office and work. All that is required is the surety's own voluntary acceptance of the office and its responsibilities, however he may come to take it on. Whoever willingly and voluntarily undertakes for another — on whatever grounds or for whatever reasons — is that person's surety. This is precisely what the Lord Christ did on behalf of the church. When it was plain that sacrifices, burnt offerings, and sin offerings were not what God would have or accept as sufficient to make the atonement He required — so that the covenant could be established and made effective for us — Christ said: "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10:5-6). He willingly and voluntarily, out of His own abundant goodness and love, took

upon Himself the work of making atonement for us — and in doing so He was our surety. This undertaking is accordingly attributed to the love He exercised in it (Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16; Revelation 1:5). There is also this: He took on our nature — the seed of Abraham — in which He was our surety. So although we neither did nor could appoint Him to this work, He took from us that in which and by which He was our surety — which amounts to the same thing as if we had designated Him to it, as far as the true basis of His being our surety is concerned. Therefore, despite the eternal transactions between the Father and the Son in this matter, it was His voluntary commitment to be our surety and His taking of our nature for that purpose that was the formal basis of His being established in that office.

It is weak and contrary to all common experience to say that no one can be a surety for others unless those others designate and appoint him as such. The most significant examples of suretyship in the world have been cases of voluntary undertaking by those who were not sought out or hired by the persons they stood for. In such undertakings, the one to whom the pledge is made is no less in view than the one for whom it is made. When Judah voluntarily became a surety for Benjamin, he had as much regard for satisfying his father as for his brother's safety. Similarly, when the Lord Christ undertook to be surety for us, He had regard for the glory of God before our safety.

1. Consider the arguments that demonstrate He neither was nor could have been a surety to us for God, but was rather a surety for us to God.

1. A surety is one who undertakes for another where that other is deficient — in reality or in reputation. Whatever form that undertaking takes — words of promise, depositing real security with an arbitrator, or any other personal pledge of life and body — it addresses the deficiency of the person being represented. Such a person is called a sponsor or guarantor in all standard usage and common speech. If a person's own credit and reputation are beyond question, there is no need for a surety — unless the matter involves mortality. The words of a surety on behalf of someone whose ability or reputation is in doubt are: "I take this on myself; he will perform, or I will." When the related word is used as an adjective, it means "liable to pay on behalf of others who cannot pay."

2. God therefore can have no surety in any proper sense, because no deficiency on His part is conceivable. There may indeed be a question whether some particular word or promise is a word or promise of God. To assure us of this is not the work of a surety but of a witness — someone who gives evidence that this is indeed the case. But once it is granted that something is God's word or promise, there is no conceivable fear of any deficiency on His part in fulfilling it, and therefore no need of a surety for its performance. God does make use of witnesses to confirm His word — to testify that He has made such promises and that He will fulfill them. The Lord Christ served as God's witness in this sense: "You are My witnesses, says the Lord, and My servant whom I have chosen" (Isaiah 43:10). But not all His witnesses were His sureties. Christ Himself declared that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37) — that is, to the truth of God's promises, for He was a servant of the circumcision for the sake of the truth of God's promises to the fathers (Romans 15:8). But a

surety for God, properly so called, He was not and could not be. The difference between a witness and a surety is wide enough. A surety must have greater ability, credit, or reputation than the one he stands for — otherwise there is no point to his suretyship — or at least he must add to that person's credit and make it stronger than it would be without him. No one can do this for God — not even the Lord Christ Himself, who in His entire work was the Father's servant. The apostle does not use this word in some broad, improper sense for anyone who in any way gives assurance about something, for in that sense he would have attributed nothing distinctive to Christ. All the prophets and apostles would then have been sureties for God, and many of them confirmed the truth of His word and promises with their very lives. But the kind of surety the apostle has in mind is one who undertakes to do for others what they cannot do for themselves — or at least what they are not considered capable of doing.

3. The apostle had already explained at length who and what was God's own guarantee in this matter of the covenant, and how impossible it was for Him to have any other. This guarantee was God Himself alone, interposing by His own oath. In this matter, because there was no one greater by whom He could swear, He swore by Himself (Hebrews 6:13-14). So if God were to give any surety beyond Himself, it would have to be someone greater than He — which is entirely impossible. Therefore He swears by Himself alone. He may and does use many means to declare and confirm His truth to us, so that we may know and believe it to be His word — and the Lord Christ in His ministry was the chief witness to the truth of God. But no surety other than Himself is possible. And therefore,

4. When God would have us reach not only full assurance of faith concerning His promises but also strong consolation in them, He grounds it entirely in the immutability of His counsel, as declared by His promise and oath (Hebrews 6:18-19). God is therefore incapable of having a proper surety, and we do not need one on His part to bring our faith to its highest level of assurance.

5. We, on the other hand, stand in need of a surety for us and on our behalf in every respect. Without the intervention of such a surety, no covenant between God and us could be firm and stable — could never be an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. In the first covenant made with Adam there was no surety; God and humanity were the immediate parties. And although we were then in a condition fully capable of performing all the terms of the covenant, it was broken and annulled. If this happened through a failure on God's part, then on making a new covenant He would need a surety to answer for Him so that the new covenant could be stable and everlasting. But this is false and blasphemous to imagine. It was humanity alone who failed and broke that covenant. Therefore, when the new covenant was established — with the explicit design that it should never be annulled as the first was — a surety and undertaker for us was necessary. For if the first covenant could not remain firm and stable because there was no surety to answer for us, despite the full ability we then had to meet its terms, how much less could any covenant be stable now that our natures are corrupted and sinful? We alone were therefore capable of needing a proper surety, we alone needed one, and without one the covenant could not be firm and inviolable on our side. The surety of this covenant is therefore one who stands with God on our behalf.

6. It is the priesthood of Christ that the apostle is discussing in this passage — and only that. Therefore Christ is a surety as He is a priest and in the exercise of that office, and is therefore surety with God on our behalf. Schlichtingius notices this and sees the problem it creates for his position, which he tries to address. He writes: "Someone might find it surprising that the divine author, having discussed Christ's priesthood both before and after this verse, would suddenly call Him the guarantee of the covenant rather than the priest. Why did he not say 'Jesus has become the priest of a better covenant'? For the whole flow of the argument seems to require that. It is plausible that the priesthood of Christ is also included in the word 'guarantee.' For it is not the role of a surety merely to make a promise in another's name and to pledge his word on their behalf, but also — if the situation demands it — to fulfill what he has pledged in another's name. In human affairs, the surety must perform when the one he guaranteed fails to do so. In this case, however, for the opposite reason — since the former situation cannot apply here — namely, insofar as the one for whom Christ pledged delivers His promises to us through Christ Himself: and in this, the priesthood of Christ is primarily expressed."

In answer to Schlichtingius: First, it may indeed seem strange to someone who understands Christ's suretyship the way he does, why the apostle would use this term and introduce it in his description of Christ's priestly office as something belonging to it. But grant what the proper work and duty of a surety actually is, and acknowledge who the Lord Jesus was a surety for, and it becomes clear that nothing more fitting or relevant could have been said when he was describing that office. Second, Schlichtingius himself acknowledges that his interpretation of Christ's suretyship

— making Christ a surety for God — contradicts the ordinary meaning of the word surety among people. He grants that such a surety acts only where there is a deficiency or inability in the one he represents — undertaking to pay what they owe and to do what they cannot do. If this is not what the word means here, then the apostle has used a word found nowhere else in all of Scripture to teach something it never means in ordinary usage — which is improbable and absurd. The very reason the apostle used this word was so that from its common meaning in other contexts we could understand what he intends by it and what he is attributing to the Lord Jesus under this title. Third, Schlichtingius has no way to resolve the apostle's use of "surety" in his description of Christ's priestly office except by destroying the nature of that office as well. To support his strange notion that Christ as a priest was a surety for God, he would have us believe that the priesthood of Christ consists in making God's promises effective to us — in effectively communicating the promised blessings to us. The error of this idea, which actually destroys the priesthood of Christ, I have exposed and refuted at length elsewhere. Therefore, since the Lord Christ is surety of the covenant as a priest, and since all priestly acts of Christ have God as their immediate object and are performed with God on our behalf, He was a surety for us.

The Lord Christ was a surety, guarantor, and pledger for us — by His voluntary undertaking, out of His great grace and love — to do, answer, and perform all that is required on our part, so that we might enjoy the benefits of the covenant: the grace and glory prepared, offered, and promised in it, in the manner determined by divine wisdom. This may be reduced to two heads. First, His answering for our transgressions against the first covenant. Second,

His purchase and procurement of the grace of the new covenant. He was made a curse for us, so that the blessing of Abraham might come upon us (Galatians 3:13-15).

1. As surety of the covenant, He undertook to answer for all the sins of those who are to be, and are, made partakers of its benefits. This meant bearing the punishment due to their sins — making atonement for them by offering Himself as a propitiatory sacrifice for the expiation of their sins, and redeeming them by the price of His blood from their state of misery and bondage under the law and its curse (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10; Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 3:25-26; Hebrews 10:5-8; Romans 8:2-3; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Galatians 3:13). This was absolutely necessary for the grace and glory prepared in the covenant to be communicated to us. Without this undertaking and its fulfillment, the righteousness and faithfulness of God would not permit sinners — those who had turned away from Him, despised His authority, and rebelled against Him, and had thereby fallen under the sentence and curse of the law — to be received again into His favor and made partakers of grace and glory. This, therefore, is what the Lord Christ took upon Himself as the surety of the covenant.

2. He also undertook that those who were to be brought into this covenant would receive grace enabling them to meet its terms, fulfill its conditions, and yield the obedience God requires. By God's appointment, He procured — and by merit and design did procure — for them the Holy Spirit, and all the necessary supplies of grace to make them new creatures, enabling them to yield obedience to God from a new principle of spiritual life, and to continue faithfully in that obedience to the end. In this way He was the

surety of this better covenant. All the details of this will be handled fully in the exposition of this passage from which, as I said, these points are drawn, in what will be appropriate for that occasion.

But some hold a different view of these things. They say that Christ, by His death and the obedience He rendered in it — by which He offered Himself as a sacrifice of sweet-smelling aroma to God — procured for us the new covenant. As one writer puts it, all that we have from the death of Christ is that we owe the covenant of grace to it. In their view, Christ did and suffered what God freely appointed Him to do and suffer. God's justice did not require this with respect to the sins of those for whom He died and in whose place He suffered; it was simply what divine wisdom and sovereignty freely ordained for Him. On this basis, God was pleased to set aside the terms of the old covenant and enter into a new covenant with humanity on terms suited to our reason, possible for our abilities, and fully advantageous to us. These terms are faith and sincere obedience — an assent to divine revelation that is effective in producing obedience to God's will, motivated by the promises of eternal life and future reward held out in it. On the fulfillment of these conditions, our justification, adoption, and future glory depend — for they constitute that righteousness before God on the basis of which He pardons our sins and accepts our persons as though we were perfectly righteous. By Christ's procuring the new covenant for us — which is what they attribute to His death — they mean the abolition of the old covenant or the law, or at least such a modification of it that it no longer obligates us to sinless obedience or to punishment, and no longer requires a perfect

righteousness for our justification before God. In its place stands a new law of obedience adapted to our present state and condition, upon whose observance all the promises of the gospel depend.

Others say that in the death of Christ there was real satisfaction made to God — not to the law, or to God according to what the law required, but to God absolutely. That is, He did what God was well pleased and satisfied with, without reference to His justice or the curse of the law. They add that on this basis the whole righteousness of Christ is imputed to us to the extent that we are made partakers of its benefits. Furthermore, the way those benefits are communicated to us is through the new covenant that Christ procured by His death. For the conditions of this covenant are established within the covenant itself — faith and obedience — and God will bestow all the benefits and effects of the covenant upon us when those conditions are met. Therefore, what Christ has done for us is accepted as our legal righteousness to this extent: that God, upon our faith and obedience in response to it, releases and pardons all our sins of omission and commission. Upon this pardon, no additional positive perfect righteousness is needed for our justification or salvation; our own personal righteousness is accepted by God in its place, by virtue of the new covenant that Christ procured. This is the position as stated by Curcellaeus and those who follow him.

Several things in these views deserve examination, and most, if not all, of them will come up as we continue. The one point that directly concerns us here — in light of what we have said about Christ as surety of the covenant, and which is the foundation of everything asserted in these views — is this: that Christ by His death

procured the new covenant for us. As one writer says, this is all that we receive from His death — which, if proven false, leaves us with nothing from it at all. These matters must be examined.

1. The language of "procuring the new covenant" is ambiguous. As far as I know, no one has yet explained how the Lord Christ procured it — whether He did so by His satisfaction and obedience as the meritorious cause, or by some other kind of causality. Until this is settled, we have no idea what relationship between the new covenant and Christ's death is actually intended. To say that we owe the new covenant to His death does not clarify matters but only makes the terms more ambiguous. Nor is it made clear whether the establishing of the covenant, or the communication of its benefits, is what is meant. The general statement that God was so pleased with what Christ did that He therefore made and entered into a new covenant with humanity is equally vague. Those who deny the whole satisfaction and merit of Christ could accept that formulation. If they mean that the Lord Christ by His obedience and suffering meritoriously procured the making and establishing of the new covenant — and that this was the whole effect of His death — the claim can be understood, but it destroys the entire nature of Christ's mediation.

2. This view faces a serious problem: in a matter so fundamental to our religion, and so closely related to the eternal welfare of the church, it is not mentioned anywhere in Scripture. Is it not remarkable that if this is, as some say, the sole effect of Christ's death — while many other things are frequently attributed to it in Scripture as its effects and fruits — this supposed sole effect is nowhere mentioned, neither in plain words nor in any language that admits of this meaning by any fair inference? Our redemption,

the pardon of sins, the renewal of our natures, our sanctification, justification, peace with God, eternal life — all of these are assigned to the death of Christ, jointly and individually, in places almost too numerous to count. But Scripture nowhere says that Christ by His death merited, procured, or obtained the new covenant, or that God should enter into a new covenant with humanity. Indeed, as we shall see, what is frequently asserted in Scripture is contrary to and inconsistent with this claim.

3. To clarify the truth on this matter, we must consider the various aspects and causes of the new covenant, and the true relationship of Christ's death to each of them. The covenant is presented to us in several distinct ways.

1. The new covenant appears as the design and preparation of its terms and benefits in the counsel of God. Although this has the character of an eternal decree, it is not the same as the decree of election, as some suppose. The decree of election properly concerns the subjects and persons for whom grace and glory are prepared. This counsel concerns the preparation of that grace and glory with respect to the way and manner of their communication. Some learned men think that this counsel and purpose of God's will — to give grace and glory in and through Jesus Christ to the elect, by the means He prepared — is formally the covenant of grace, or at least contains its substance. But it is certain that more is required to complete the full nature of a covenant. Nor is this purpose or counsel of God called the covenant in Scripture; it is presented only as the spring and source of it (Ephesians 1:4-11). To complete the nature of the covenant of grace, the declaration of this counsel of God's will is required, accompanied by the means and powers for its accomplishment, and the prescription of the

ways by which we are to be drawn into it and made partakers of its benefits. But when inquiring into the procuring cause of the new covenant, this is the first consideration. For nothing can be the procuring cause of the covenant that is not also the procuring cause of this spring and source of it — this design in the mind of God, this preparation of its terms and benefits. But Scripture nowhere attributes this to the death or mediation of Christ, and to ascribe it to them would overthrow the entire freedom of eternal grace and love. Nothing that is absolutely eternal, as this decree and counsel of God is, can be the effect of or procured by anything external and temporal.

2. The new covenant may be considered with respect to the covenant transactions between the Father and the Son concerning the fulfillment of God's eternal counsel. What these transactions were and what they consisted in, I have explained at length elsewhere (*Exercitations*, Vol. 2). I do not call this the covenant of grace absolutely, nor is it so called in Scripture. Some refuse to distinguish between the covenant of the Mediator and the covenant of grace, on the grounds that the promises of the covenant absolutely are said to have been made to Christ (*Galatians* 3:16), and He is the primary recipient of all its grace. But in the covenant of the Mediator, Christ stands alone for Himself and undertakes for Himself alone — not as the representative of the church. In the covenant of grace, by contrast, He stands as the representative of the church. The covenant of the Mediator is the arrangement by which the covenant of grace received its designed establishment — with all the ways, means, and ends of its fulfillment ordered so that it would accomplish the eternal glory of God's wisdom, grace, righteousness, and power. Therefore the covenant of grace could

not be procured by any means or cause other than what was the cause of the covenant of the Mediator — the agreement between God the Father and the Son as He undertook the work of mediation. As this is nowhere attributed to the death of Christ in Scripture, to assert it would also be contrary to all spiritual reason. Who can conceive that Christ by His death procured the agreement between God and Himself that He should die?

3. The covenant may be considered with respect to its declaration by special revelation. We may call this God's making or establishing it, if we like — though in Scripture, the making of a covenant refers primarily, if not exclusively, to its execution or actual application to persons (2 Samuel 23:5; Jeremiah 32:40). This declaration of God's grace, and the provision made in the covenant of the Mediator for rendering it effective to God's glory, is most commonly called the covenant of grace. And this is twofold.

1. First, as an unconditional and absolute promise — this was how it was first declared and established with Adam, and afterward with Abraham. The promise is the declaration of God's previously mentioned purpose — the free determination and counsel of His will regarding how He would deal with sinners after the fall and their forfeiture of their first covenant standing. The grace and will of God was the only cause of this (Hebrews 8:8). The death of Christ could not be the means of procuring it, since Christ Himself, and all that He was to do for us, was the very substance of that promise. This promise — as it declares the purpose and counsel of God's will for the communication of grace and glory to sinners, in and through the mediation of Christ, according to the ways and terms prepared in His sovereign wisdom and pleasure — is formally the new covenant, though something further remains to be

added for its application to us. Now the substance of the first promise — in which the whole covenant of grace was virtually contained and directly expressed — was the giving of Christ for the recovery of humanity from sin and misery by His death (Genesis 3:15). Therefore, if Christ Himself and all the benefits of His mediation — His death and all its effects — are contained within the promise of the covenant, that is, within the covenant itself, then His death was not the procuring cause of that covenant, and we do not owe the covenant to it.

2. Second, the covenant may be considered as the added prescription of the way and means by which God wills that we shall enter into a covenant relationship with Him and share in its benefits. This is virtually included in the absolute promise itself — for every promise of God tacitly requires faith and obedience on our part — and it is expressed in other passages as the condition required of us. This is not the covenant itself, but the constitution of the terms on our part by which we are made partakers of it. Nor is the constitution of these terms an effect of Christ's death or procured by it. It is a pure act of God's sovereign grace and wisdom. The actual things bestowed on us, communicated to us, and worked in us by grace are all effects of Christ's death. But the appointment of those things as the terms and conditions of the covenant is an act of pure sovereign wisdom and grace. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to die — not in order that faith and repentance might become the means of salvation, but so that all His elect might believe, and that all who believe might not perish but have eternal life. Yet it is acknowledged that the constitution of these covenant terms does relate to the covenant transaction between the Father and the Son, in which

they were ordered to the praise of the glory of God's grace. So although the constitution of those terms was not procured by Christ's death, it would not have been established apart from reference to it. Therefore, the sole cause of God's making the new covenant was the same as the cause of giving Christ Himself to be our Mediator: the purpose, counsel, goodness, grace, and love of God, as Scripture everywhere expresses.

Fourth, the covenant may be considered as its actual application of grace, benefits, and privileges to specific persons — by which they truly become partakers of them and are taken into covenant with God. This alone is what Scripture means by God making a covenant with someone. It is not a general revelation or declaration of the terms and nature of the covenant — which some call a universal conditional covenant, on what grounds best known to themselves, since the very formal nature of making a covenant with someone includes their actual acceptance of it and participation in its benefits. Rather, God's making His covenant with someone means communicating the grace of it, accompanied by a prescription of obedience — as every scriptural instance of it demonstrates.

The question may therefore be asked: what relationship does the covenant of grace have to the death of Christ, or what bearing does His death have on it?

I answer: building on what has been said about His suretyship, the covenant of grace stands in a threefold relationship to His death.

1. The covenant — as the grace and glory of it were prepared in God's counsel, as its terms were fixed in the covenant of the Mediator, and as it was declared in the promise — was confirmed, ratified, and made irrevocable by Christ's death. The apostle dwells on this at length in Hebrews 9:15-20. He compares Christ's blood in His death and self-offering to the sacrifices and their blood by which the old covenant was confirmed, purified, dedicated, and established (verses 18-19). Now those sacrifices did not procure the old covenant or persuade God to enter into it — they only ratified and confirmed it. In the same way, the new covenant was confirmed and ratified by the blood of Christ.

2. By His death Christ underwent and accomplished everything that God's righteousness and wisdom required, so that the effects, fruits, benefits, and grace intended, designed, and prepared in the new covenant could be effectively fulfilled and communicated to sinners. Therefore, although He did not procure the covenant itself for us by His death, He was — in His person, mediation, life, and death — the only cause and means by which the whole grace of the covenant is made effective for us.

3. All the benefits of the covenant were procured by Him. That is: all the grace, mercy, privileges, and glory that God prepared in the counsel of His will, fixed as to their manner of communication in the covenant of the Mediator, and offered in its promises — all of these were purchased, merited, and procured by His death. They are also effectively communicated and applied to all the covenant people by virtue of His death and His other mediatorial acts. This is a far more significant procurement of the new covenant than what is claimed about procuring its terms and conditions. For if He had procured nothing more than this — if all we owe to His me-

diation is that God would grant and establish the rule and promise that whoever believes shall be saved — it would have been possible that no one would be saved by it. Indeed, given our actual state and condition, it would have been impossible that anyone was saved that way.

To sum up: the question is which of these aspects of the new covenant is meant when it is said that Christ procured it by His death. If it means the actual communication of all the grace and glory prepared in the covenant and offered to us in its promises — that is absolutely true. All the grace and glory promised in the covenant was purchased for the church by Jesus Christ. In this sense, He did procure the new covenant by His death. The whole of Scripture, from the first promise to the end, bears witness to this. For it is in Him alone that God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Let all the good things mentioned or promised in the covenant — whether explicitly or by sound inference — be enumerated, and it will not be difficult to show, of every one of them jointly and individually, that they were all procured for us by the obedience and death of Christ.

But this is not what is intended by those who hold this view. Most of them actually deny that the grace of the covenant in conversion, the remission of sins, sanctification, justification, adoption, and the like are effects or procurements of Christ's death. What they intend instead is God's making of the covenant — that is, the devising of its terms and conditions, together with their proposal to humanity for recovery. But this view fails, for the following reasons.

1. The Lord Christ Himself, and the whole work of His mediation as God's ordained means for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, is the first and principal promise of the covenant. His coming in the flesh, His mediatorial work, and our deliverance through it were the subject of that first promise — which virtually contained the whole covenant. He was also the subject of the renewal of the covenant to Abraham when it was solemnly confirmed by God's oath (Galatians 3:16-17). And Christ did not by His death procure the promise of His death, or of His coming into the flesh, or of His coming into the world to die.

2. The making of this covenant is attributed throughout Scripture — as is also the sending of Christ to die — to the love, grace, and wisdom of God alone. It is never attributed to the death of Christ, as the actual communication of all grace and glory is. Let all the passages be examined where the giving of the promise, the sending of Christ, or the making of the covenant are mentioned — either explicitly or implicitly — and in none of them are these things assigned to any cause other than the grace, love, and wisdom of God alone, all to be made effective for us through the mediation of Christ.

Third: attributing the sole purpose of Christ's death to procuring the new covenant — in the sense some contend for — actually empties both Christ's death and the covenant itself of all their power. The covenant they describe is nothing more than the establishment and offer of new terms and conditions for life and salvation to all people. But since accepting and fulfilling those conditions depends on human will, with no guarantee of effectual grace, it was possible that despite everything Christ accomplished through His death, not a single sinner might be saved — and God's

entire purpose in it might come to nothing. Furthermore, the supposed advantage of these new conditions is that God will now accept, for Christ's sake, an obedience inferior to what the law required — so that Christ's grace does not raise everything up into conformity with God's holiness and will, but instead adjusts everything down to our present condition. Nothing could be more dishonoring to Christ and the gospel than this. What does it amount to except making Christ the agent of sin by annulling the holiness that the law demands, without providing anything to take its place — except something incomparably less worthy? It is also inconsistent with God's wisdom, goodness, and unchanging nature to give mankind a law of obedience, place them all under its severe penalty for transgressing it, and then turn around and give them a law whose requirements can coexist with many failures and sins — when He could have done that from the beginning. For if God can do that now, He could have done so before — and how far that reflects on the glory of the divine attributes is not hard to show. Nor does this empty notion agree with the scriptural testimonies that the Lord Christ came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, that He is the end of the law, and that faith does not nullify the law but establishes it.

Finally, the Lord Christ was the Mediator and Surety of the new covenant, through whom it was ratified, confirmed, and established. Therefore He did not procure its constitution — for all the acts of His office belong to that mediation, and it is difficult to understand how acts of mediation for establishing the covenant and making it effective could at the same time be what procured it.

But to return from this digression: all the preceding grounds of the union between Christ and believers — by which they become one mystical person and which form the complete foundation for the imputation of their sins to Him and His righteousness to them — come together and are made complete in the communication of His Spirit. The same Spirit that dwells in Christ is given to believers, to dwell in them, animate them, and guide the whole mystical body and all its members. This subject has been treated so extensively in recent times that I will do no more than mention it here.

On the basis of these considerations — by which the Lord Christ became one mystical person with the church, or bore the person of the church in what He did as Mediator — through the holy and wise arrangement of God as the author of the law, the supreme Ruler and Governor of all mankind in their temporal and eternal concerns, and by Christ's own consent, the sins of all the elect were imputed to Him. This has been the faith and language of the church in every age, derived from and grounded in the plain testimony of Scripture, along with all the promises and foreshadowings of His coming in the flesh from the very beginning. It therefore cannot now be openly denied without embarrassment. The Socinians themselves grant that our sins may be said to be imputed to Christ and that He underwent their punishment in the sense that everything evil and painful that happened to Him in this life, including the death He died, was occasioned by our sins. For if we had not sinned, there would have been no need and no occasion for His suffering. Yet despite this concession, they explicitly deny His satisfaction — that is, that He properly underwent the punishment due to our sins — and in doing so they deny all real imputation of our sins to Him. Others say our sins were imputed to

Him as to liability for punishment (*quoad reatum poenae*), but not as to liability for the fault itself (*quoad reatum culpae*). I must confess that to me this distinction is nothing but empty sound without meaning. Feuarentius presses this distinction at length (*Dialog.* 5, p. 467) and others have followed him. His point is that the Lord Christ did not present Himself before the throne of God bearing our sins so as to answer for them to God's justice. Now guilt (*reatus*) may mean either the worthiness of punishment or the obligation to punishment, as Bellarmine distinguishes (*de Amiss. Grat. lib.* 7, *cap.* 7) — and with respect to Christ, they will only allow the latter. Their main argument is this: if our sins were imputed to Christ as to the guilt of the fault, as they put it, then He would be polluted by them and rightly called a sinner in every sense. This would be true if sin could be transferred to Christ by infusion so as to become inherently and subjectively His. But their being imputed to Him in no way supports that conclusion. In any case, there is such a thing as legal uncleanness where there is no inherent moral defilement — as when the priest who offered the red heifer for atonement, and the one who burned her, were said to be unclean (*Numbers* 19:7-8). Yet on that basis they say Christ died and suffered by the special command of God — not because His death and suffering were in any way due on account of our sins or required by justice. This is simply to overthrow the satisfaction of Christ.

The purpose of this distinction, then, is to deny the imputation of the guilt of our sins to Christ — and I cannot understand in what tolerable sense our sins could be said to be imputed to Him at all on such a view. But we are not bound by arbitrary distinctions or by whatever meaning someone chooses to impose on their terms. I

will therefore first examine the meaning of the words "guilt" and "guilty," so that we can judge what this distinction actually intends.

The Hebrew language has no separate word for guilt or guilty — the same word is used for sin, the guilt of it, the punishment due to it, and a sacrifice offered for it. When speaking of the guilt of bloodshed, Hebrew writers do not use a word meaning guilt — they simply say that the blood is "on him." So David prays, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness" (Psalm 51:14) — meaning his liability for the punishment attached by God's law to the shedding of blood. The Hebrew word for guilt (*ascham*) appears nowhere in the Old Testament simply to mean guilt in an abstract sense; it always signifies the relationship of a sin to its punishment. Other meanings will be sought in vain.

In the New Testament, the guilty person is described as liable to judgment or punishment for sin (Romans 3:19) — the one on whom "vengeance will not allow to go unpunished" (Acts 28:4). A similar term appears in 1 Corinthians 11:27 with the same meaning. Once the idea is expressed as owing or being indebted to justice (Matthew 23:18). In summary: to be guilty is to be exposed and liable to God's justice, punishment, and vengeance for sin — He being the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of all.

In Latin, *reus* (guilty) has a broad range of meaning. One is called *reus* who is exposed to a charge (*crimini obnoxius*), or to punishment for a crime (*poenae propter crimen*), or who owes a vow, a promise, or an obligation from a pledge. In law, every surety is called *reus*. The legal principle runs: "When a slave has made an agreement to purchase his freedom and has provided a surety for it, even if the slave is freed by someone else, the surety

remains bound." Anyone who binds himself on behalf of another, as to the substance of that obligation, is called *reus*. The same usage appears in the best Latin authors. Livy writes (*de Bello Punic.*, lib. 5): "Strategic positions should be assigned to commanders, each being *reus* — answerable — for the defense of his portion; so that if anything went wrong, it would be charged to him." The same author writes again that those who were connected to a king by kinship or marriage were put to death as *reus* of another's fault — guilty by imputation and made to suffer for it. So in Latin usage, one is *reus* who is answerable to punishment or payment, either for himself or for another.

Reatus is a word of later origin in Latin, formed from *reus*, as Quintilian notes in his discussion of obsolete and new words (lib. 8, cap. 3): "What are now old words were once new; some are quite recent in use." He reports that Messalla was the first to use *reatus*, and Augustus the first to use *munerarius*, along with *piratica*, *musica*, and several other words then newly in use. But *reatus* at its original invention did not carry the meaning now commonly attached to it. I mention this only to show that we have no reason to be bound by people's arbitrary use of words. Some lawyers later used it to mean a crime — a fault that exposes one to punishment. But its original and long-established meaning was to describe the outward state and condition of a person who had been formally charged in a criminal case, before he was either acquitted or condemned. Among the Romans, those made *rei* by a public accusation adopted a humble, disheveled appearance — mourning clothes, a sorrowful face, hair and beard left unkempt — to move the people who would judge their case to compassion. Milo actually contributed to his own sentence of exile by refusing to submit

to this custom, which he felt displayed a cowardly and base spirit. This state of grief and distress, so outwardly expressed, was what they called *reatus* — nothing more. Later, when popular government gave way to imperial rule, the word came to describe the condition of those held in custody awaiting trial — since public displays of mourning had lost their purpose. If this word has any useful application to our present argument, it is to describe the state of people after conviction of sin and before their justification. That is their *reatus* — the condition in which even the proudest person cannot avoid showing inward sorrow and anxiety through outward signs. Beyond this we are not bound by the word's usage, but must consider the thing itself that we now intend to express by it.

In Scripture, guilt is the relationship of sin to the sanction of the law — the relationship by which the sinner becomes liable to punishment. To be guilty is to be exposed and answerable to punishment for sin, from God as the supreme Lawgiver and Judge of all. Guilt (*reatus*) is therefore rightly defined as the obligation to punishment on account of a fault — whether that fault is personally committed or imputed, justly or unjustly. So when Bathsheba told David that she and her son Solomon would be considered sinners — that is, treated as guilty and liable to punishment for some charge laid against them (1 Kings 1:21) — this captures the meaning exactly. The distinction between worthiness of punishment and obligation to punishment is really the same thing stated two ways. Both simply express the relationship of sin to the law's sanction. And if they can be distinguished at all, they are inseparable — for there can be no obligation to punishment where there is no desert of punishment.

There is even less substance in the distinction between *reatus culpae* (guilt of the fault) and *reatus poenae* (guilt of the punishment). *Reatus culpae* is nothing but the desert of punishment on account of the fault. Sin has other aspects — its formal nature as a transgression of the law, and the stain or defilement it brings on the soul — but its guilt is nothing other than its relation to punishment under the law's sanction. So *reatus culpae* and *reatus poenae* are actually the same thing: the guilt of sin is its desert of punishment. And where there is no *reatus culpae*, there can be no punishment properly speaking — for punishment is retribution owed to sin. Therefore there can be no punishment, and no *reatus poenae*, where there is no *reatus culpae* — no sin considered with its guilt. Any so-called *reatus poenae* that exists apart from the guilt of sin is nothing but the kind of exposure to painful consequences on the occasion of sin that the Socinians admit with respect to Christ's suffering — while simultaneously denying His satisfaction.

If this distinction is meant to describe guilt in terms of its formal relationship to sin and punishment, then both parts of the distinction must carry the same meaning — otherwise there is an equivocation in the subject. But *reatus poenae* is liability and exposure to punishment according to the law's sentence — the condition that makes a sinner answerable. By the same logic, *reatus culpae* would have to mean liability or exposure to sin itself, which is absurd. There is therefore no imputation of sin where there is no imputation of its guilt. A guilt of punishment that has no relation to the desert of sin is a pure fiction — there is no such thing in reality. There is no guilt of sin except its relation to punishment.

What we affirm, then, is this: our sins were transferred to Christ in such a way that He became answerable to God — liable in God's justice to suffer punishment for them. He was answerable for the fault of others (*alienae culpa reus*). Perfectly innocent in Himself, He took our guilt upon Him — our liability to punishment for sin. In this way He can rightly be called the greatest debtor in the world, even though He never borrowed or owed a single thing on His own account — because He became surety for the greatest debt of others. So Paul became a debtor to Philemon by undertaking for Onesimus, though before that Paul owed Philemon nothing.

Two things together brought about this imputation of sin to Christ. First, God's act of imputing it. Second, Christ's own voluntary act of undertaking it and accepting the charge.

First, God's act in imputing the guilt of our sins to Christ is expressed in Scripture as laying all our iniquities on Him, making Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, and similar language. As the supreme Governor, Lawgiver, and Judge of all — whose responsibility it was to ensure that His holy law was observed or its transgressors punished — God accepted, upon the transgression of that law, the sponson and suretyship of Christ to answer for the sins of men (Hebrews 10:5-7). To this end, He placed Christ under the law — giving the law authority over Him to demand and inflict on Him the penalty due to the sins of those for whom He undertook (Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5). In order to declare the righteousness of God in setting forth Christ as a propitiation and as the one who would bear our iniquities, the guilt of our sins was transferred to

Him by an act of God's righteous judgment — accepting and treating Him as the guilty party, as is done with public sureties in every case.

Second, the Lord Christ's voluntary assumption of the role of surety — His willingness to stand before the throne of God's justice on behalf of the church and answer for whatever was laid to their charge — was also required. And this He did fully and freely. His own will concurred in and consented to all those divine acts by which He and the church were constituted one mystical person. Of His own love and grace, as our surety, He stood in our place before God where God made inquisition for sin, and He took upon Himself the punishment that sin deserved. It therefore became just and right that He should suffer — the just for the unjust — that He might bring us to God. For if this is not so, I would like to know what has become of the guilt of the sins of believers. If it was not transferred to Christ, it either remains on them still, or it is simply nothing. It will be said that guilt is removed by the free pardon of sin. But if that is so, there was no need for any punishment at all — which is indeed what the Socinians argue, but which others do not accept. For if punishment is not for guilt, it is not punishment.

But it is fiercely objected that if the guilt of our sins was imputed to Christ, then He was made a sinner by it — for it is the guilt of sin that makes someone truly a sinner. Bellarmine presses this (lib. 2, de Justificat.) — not because it is his own real concern, but to disprove the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. He argues: if we are made righteous and children of God through the imputation of Christ's righteousness, then by the imputation of our guilt and unrighteousness to Him, He was made a sinner — and,

shuddering to even think it, a child of the devil. Others press the same objection with further consequences that, for many reasons, I wish had been left unsaid. But I will answer.

First: nothing is more absolutely true, nothing more sacredly and firmly believed by us, than that nothing Christ did or suffered, nothing He undertook or endured, could or did make Him subjectively, inherently, and therefore personally a sinner or guilty of any sin of His own. To bear the guilt of another's fault — to be answerable for it (*alienae culpa reus*) — does not make a person a sinner, unless they undertook the role unwisely or irregularly. But that Christ should take on anything of sin in Himself is absolutely inconsistent with the hypostatic union, and would render Him unfit for all the other duties of His office (Hebrews 7:25-26). I will confess that it has always seemed deeply troubling to me that Socinus, Crellius, and Grotius grant that in some sense Christ suffered for His own sins — and then attempt to prove this from the very passage that positively denies it (Hebrews 7:27). This must be held as sacred and fixed, and not a word said nor a thought entertained about any possible alternative, on any supposition whatsoever.

Second: no one has ever imagined a transfer or propagation of sin from us to Christ like the transfer from Adam to us. Adam was a common representative for us — we are not the same for Christ. Rather, He is that for us. The imputation of our sins to Him is a singular act of divine appointment, from which no harmful consequences can follow.

Third: to imagine such an imputation of our sins to Christ that they thereby ceased to be our sins and became His absolutely is to overthrow the very thing being affirmed. On that assumption, Christ would not be suffering for our sins — because they would

have ceased to be ours before He suffered. What actually happened is that their guilt was transferred to Him so that, through His suffering for it, it might be pardoned to us.

With these points established, I proceed.

First: sin involves both a transgression of the law's precept and a liability to punishment from the law's sanction. It is the first — actual transgression of the precept — that gives sin its formal character. Where that is not found subjectively in a person, no one can be formally constituted a sinner. A person may be called a sinner for some specific purpose, but without actual transgression of the precept, no one is formally a sinner — regardless of what is imputed to them. Conversely, where actual transgression is present, no non-imputation of punishment can free the person from being formally a sinner. When Bathsheba told David that she and her son Solomon would be regarded as sinners by having charges laid to their account, or when Judah told Jacob he would be a sinner before him forever if any harm came to Benjamin — meaning the fault would be charged to him — neither of them could be constituted a formal sinner by that. On the other side, when Shimei asked David not to impute sin to him — and so escaped immediate punishment — that non-imputation did not free him from being formally a sinner. Sin understood as transgression of the law's precept cannot be transferred from one person to another except through the propagation of a corrupted and depraved principle or habit. And even then, the personal sin of one person, as it inheres in him, can never become the personal sin of another. Adam by his personal sin communicated a corrupt and depraved nature to all his descendants, and beyond that, the guilt of his actual sin is imputed to them as if each one had committed it. But his particular

personal sin never did and never could become the personal sin of any of them, except by the imputation of its guilt. Therefore our sins cannot be imputed to Christ in such a way that they become subjectively His, as transgressions of the law's precept. A physical transfer or infusion of sin is naturally and spiritually impossible — and yet the horrid consequences the objectors mention depend entirely on that impossible supposition. But the guilt of sin is an external relationship — a relation to the law's sanction only. This can be separated from the sin itself; if it could not be, no sinner could ever be pardoned or saved. Guilt can therefore be made another's by imputation without rendering that other person formally a sinner. This is what was imputed to Christ, and by it He became liable to the curse of the law. For the law can pronounce no one accursed except the guilty — nor would it (Deuteronomy 27:26).

Second: there is an important difference between the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and the imputation of our sins to Christ — so that He cannot be said to be made a sinner by the latter in the same way we are made righteous by the former. Our sin was imputed to Christ only temporarily, in His role as our surety, for the specific purpose of taking it away, destroying and abolishing it. It was never imputed to Him in a way that changed His personal state and condition absolutely. But His righteousness is imputed to us to remain with us always — to be ours permanently and to bring about a total change in our state and condition in relation to God. Our sin was imputed to Him only for a time, not absolutely but in His capacity as surety, and for the specific end of destroying it — and was taken on Him on the condition that His righteousness would be made ours forever. Everything is different with the imputation of His righteousness to us: it applies to us ab-

solutely and not under a temporary capacity, abides with us forever, transforms our state and relationship to God, and is the fruit of superabounding grace.

But it will be objected: if the guilt of our sins was imputed to Christ, then God must have hated Christ — since He hates the guilty. I am not entirely sure why I bother mentioning things like this, which I regard as mere quibbles of the sort that people can multiply at will against any part of the gospel's mysteries. But since the objection has been raised, I will address it.

First: it is certain that the Lord Christ's taking on Himself the guilt of our sins was an act of the highest obedience to God (Hebrews 10:5-6), and it was precisely for this that the Father loved Him (John 10:17-18). There was therefore no reason why God should hate Christ for taking on our debt and undertaking its payment as an act of perfect obedience to His will. Second, God in this matter acts as Ruler, Governor, and Judge. A strict judge is not required, simply as judge, to hate the guilty person — even when that person is genuinely guilty by actual fault rather than by imputation. The judge's role is simply to recognize the guilt and pronounce the sentence of punishment. Third, suppose a person of heroic generosity became a surety for another — for a friend, for a good man — willing to answer for him with his life, as Judah undertook to be responsible for Benjamin's liberty (which when lost leaves a man civilly dead). Would even the most cruel tyrant under heaven, in taking such a person's life, hate him for it? Would he not rather admire his nobility and virtue? It was in exactly this capacity that Christ suffered, and in no other. Fourth, the entire force of this objection rests on the ambiguity of the word "hate." It can mean either an aversion and detestation of mind, or simply a will

to punish — which is most often how it applies to God. In the first sense, there was no basis for God to hate Christ on account of the guilt imputed to Him, by which He became answerable for another's fault and not His own. Inherent sin renders the soul polluted, abominable, and the proper object of divine aversion. But for One who was perfectly innocent, holy, harmless, and undefiled in Himself — who did no sin and in whose mouth no deceit was found — to take upon Himself the guilt of others' sins, in order to accomplish God's purpose for displaying His glory and infinite wisdom, grace, goodness, mercy, and righteousness, and to achieve the certain expiation and destruction of sin: nothing could have made Christ more glorious and lovely in the sight of God or man. As for God's will to punish where sin is imputed — no one can deny that without openly rejecting the satisfaction of Christ.

A brief survey of several of the arguments that confirm the truth we have asserted will close this discussion.

First: unless the guilt of our sin was imputed to Christ, sin was not imputed to Him in any sense. The punishment of sin is not the same as sin itself, and those who think otherwise cannot explain what part of sin they believe was imputed. But Scripture is plain that God laid on Him the iniquity of us all and made Him to be sin for us — and this could not have happened except by imputation.

Second: there can be no punishment except in relation to guilt — whether guilt personally incurred or guilt imputed. Guilt alone is what gives something materially painful and afflictive the formal character of punishment. Those who understand the logical structure of these positions clearly, and who speak freely, consistently recognize that if one is denied, the other must be denied as well, and if one is affirmed, both must be affirmed together. If the guilt

of sin was not imputed to Christ, then — as they rightly argue — He could not have undergone the punishment of sin. He might have done and suffered much on account of sin, but He could not have undergone the punishment properly due to sin. Conversely, if the guilt of sin was imputed to Him, they cannot deny that He underwent its punishment; and if He underwent its punishment, they cannot deny that its guilt was imputed to Him — for these two are inseparably linked.

Third: Christ was made a curse for us — the curse of the law — as is expressly stated in Galatians 3:13-14. But the curse of the law has reference only to guilt. Where there is no guilt, the curse cannot apply in any sense; and where there is guilt, the curse inseparably follows (Deuteronomy 27:26).

Fourth: the plain scriptural testimonies on this point cannot be evaded without openly twisting their words and meaning. God is said to make all our iniquities to meet upon Him — and He bore them as a burden, which is what the word signifies (Isaiah 53:6). God laid on Him the iniquity — that is, the guilt — of us all (Isaiah 53:11), and their sin or guilt He shall bear. This is the force of the Hebrew word that, when joined with any other term denoting sin in these passages, indicates guilt specifically: "You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5) — that is, its guilt, which is the only thing removed by pardon. Scripture also says His soul was made an offering for the guilt of sin, that He was made sin, that sin was condemned in His flesh, and so on.

Fifth: all of this was represented in all the sacrifices of old — especially in the great annual sacrifice on the day of atonement, with the ordinance of the scapegoat — as has been explained earlier.

Sixth: without this doctrine, it cannot be understood how the Lord Christ suffered in our stead or as our substitute — unless we accept the interpretation offered by a recent writer, who in listing the various things Christ did in our stead explains that phrase as simply meaning "to be of benefit to us." If he can invent anything more senseless and empty than that, he has a singular talent for it.

CHAPTER 9: THE FORMAL CAUSE OF JUSTIFICATION; THE RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WHICH BELIEVERS ARE JUSTIFIED



The principal disagreements about the doctrine of justification can be reduced to three heads. First, its nature: does it consist in an inward change in the person justified through the infusion of a habit of inherent grace or righteousness, or is it a forensic act — the judging, regarding, declaring, and pronouncing a person to be righteous, thereby absolving him from all his sins and granting him a right and title to life? On this question we deal only with the Roman Catholic church, since all others — both Protestants and Socinians — agree on the forensic meaning of the word and the nature of the thing it describes. I have already addressed this as much as our present purpose requires, and I hope with enough clarity and evidence that it cannot easily be refuted. Nor should it be assumed we have spent too long on this, as if it were an outdated opinion long since adequately answered. I think quite the opposite, and those who avoid engaging the Roman Catholics on these controversies will give more evidence of fear than of confidence. For when all is said and done, if free justifica-

tion through the blood of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness cannot hold its ground in people's minds, the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification will return to the world — with all its accompaniments and consequences. As long as any knowledge of the law or the gospel remains among us, human consciences will at some point — in life or in death — be genuinely burdened with a sense of sin in its guilt and danger. From this will follow such trouble and disturbance of mind as will force people — however unwilling they may be — to seek some relief and satisfaction. And what will people not attempt when they are brought to the condition described in Micah 6:7-8? Therefore, when consciences are pressed, if the true and only relief for distressed souls — for sinners who are weary and heavy laden — is hidden from their eyes; if they have no understanding of or trust in the one thing they may place between God's justice and their souls, the one shelter from the storms of the wrath that rests on those who do not believe; then they will grasp at anything that confidently offers them immediate ease and relief. This is why many people who live their entire lives in ignorance of the righteousness of God are so often, on their sickbeds and in their dying hours, converted to confidence in the ways of rest and peace that Rome imposes on them. For it is in just such moments of vulnerability that they lie in wait — to what they suppose is the credit of their own zeal, but is in truth a scandal to Christian religion. Whenever they find consciences troubled and ignorant of, or disbelieving in, the heavenly relief provided in the gospel, they are ready with their remedies — carrying with them the pretended endorsement of many centuries of experience and countless devout souls. Such is their doctrine of justification — supplemented by confession, absolution, penances or substitutes for them, help

from saints and angels (especially the blessed Virgin), all heated by the fire of purgatory — and confidently administered to people sick with ignorance, darkness, and sin. Let no one take comfort in despising these things. If the truth concerning evangelical justification is once disbelieved or erased from people's minds by any means, they will sooner or later turn to exactly these things. As for the new schemes and proposed alternatives for justification that some are currently promoting, they are in no way suited or able to give relief or satisfaction to a conscience genuinely troubled by sin and seriously asking how it may find rest and peace with God. I will therefore venture to say, whatever offense it may cause: if we lose the ancient doctrine of justification through faith in the blood of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness to us, public religious profession will quickly end in Roman Catholicism, atheism, or at least something very close to it.

The second principal controversy concerns the formal cause of justification, as framed and debated by the Roman Catholic church. Under these terms, some Protestant theologians have agreed to debate the matter. I will not get involved in a dispute over terminology. The Roman Catholics will call it what they wish. Some on our side say the righteousness of Christ imputed is the formal cause of our justification; others say it is the imputation of the righteousness of Christ; and still others say there is no formal cause of justification strictly speaking, but that the righteousness of Christ fills the role that a formal cause would fill. I will not concern myself with these distinctions, though I judge the last formulation to be the most precise and meaningful.

The substance of the inquiry — which alone concerns us — is this: what is the righteousness by which and with which a believing sinner is justified before God? That is, on what basis is he accepted by God, has his sins pardoned, is received into grace and favor, and is granted a title to the heavenly inheritance? I will frame the inquiry in no other way, knowing that this is the substance of what convicted sinners actually look for in and through the gospel.

On this point, all agree — the Socinians alone excepted — that the procuring cause of the pardon of our sins and acceptance with God is the satisfaction and merit of Christ. It cannot be denied, however, that some, while retaining these terms, appear to reject or disbelieve the realities they express. But there is no need to take notice of that until they are willing to state their views more plainly. Regarding the righteousness itself under inquiry, there appears to be a difference among those who all deny that it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. The Roman Catholics say plainly that upon the infusion of a habit of grace — with the expulsion of sin and the renewal of our natures through it, which they call the first justification — we are actually justified before God by our own works of righteousness. On this they dispute about the merit and adequacy of those works, and their worthiness of the reward of eternal life. Others, like the Socinians, openly disclaim any merit in our works — though some, out of respect (I suppose) for the ancient term and sheltered by its ambiguity, have made faint attempts at accommodation with it. But in the substance of what they are asserting, my best understanding is that they all agree. For what the Roman Catholics call the righteousness of works, these others call a personal inherent evangelical righteousness — which we have already discussed. And whereas the Roman

Catholics say that this righteousness of works is not absolutely perfect and is not in itself able to justify us before God — owing all its worth for that purpose to the merit of Christ — these others affirm that this evangelical righteousness is the condition on which we enjoy the benefits of Christ's righteousness in the pardon of our sins and the acceptance of our persons before God. As for those who recognize no other righteousness as the basis of our justification before God, the substance is the same whether we say that on the condition of this righteousness we share in the benefits of Christ's righteousness, or that it is the righteousness of Christ that makes our righteousness acceptable to God. But these matters must be examined more closely later.

3. The third point of disagreement is this: given that the one to be justified must in some way be granted a share in the righteousness of Christ, what is required of us to that end? Some say faith alone; others say both faith and works, with the same kind of necessity and role. This second question is what we are now undertaking. Indeed, this is where the heart of the entire controversy about our justification before God lies, and the answer to every other related question depends on how this one is resolved.

This, then, is what I affirm: the righteousness of Christ — in His obedience and suffering for us — imputed to believers as they are united to Him by His Spirit, is the righteousness on the basis of which they are justified before God, on account of which their sins are pardoned and a right to the heavenly inheritance is granted to them.

This statement plainly and fully expresses the substance of the doctrine in this important article of evangelical truth that we are defending. I have chosen to frame it this way in particular because

it is the thesis in which the learned Davenant set out the common doctrine of the Reformed churches whose defense he undertook. This is the shield of truth in the whole matter of justification. As long as it is kept safe, we need not be troubled by the differences among learned men about the most precise formulation of its lesser aspects. This is the refuge — the only refuge — of troubled consciences, where they may find rest and peace.

To confirm this affirmation, I will do three things: first, note what is needed for its explanation; second, answer the most important general objections against it; and third, prove its truth by arguments and testimonies from Holy Scripture.

As to the first of these — what is needed for the explanation of this affirmation — it has been sufficiently addressed in the preceding discussions. I will only briefly revisit the main points.

1. The foundation of the imputation affirmed is union. There are many grounds and causes for this union, as has been explained. But what we immediately have in view as the foundation of this imputation is the union by which the Lord Christ and believers actually coalesce into one mystical person. This union is formed by the Holy Spirit dwelling in Christ as the head of the church in fullness, and in all believers according to their measure, making them members of His mystical body. That such a union exists between Christ and believers is the faith of the catholic church in every age. Those who in our day seem to deny or question it either do not understand what they are saying, or their thinking has been shaped by the doctrine of those who deny the divine persons of the Son and the Spirit. Once this union is granted, reason itself

will allow that the imputation we are affirming is reasonable — or at least that it has a unique basis unlike anything that can be illustrated from natural or political relationships among people.

2. The nature of imputation has been fully discussed earlier, and I refer the reader to that discussion for an understanding of what is meant by it here.

3. What is imputed is the righteousness of Christ. By this I mean, in brief, His whole obedience to God in everything He did and suffered for the church. This, I say, is imputed to believers so as to become their only righteousness before God for the justification of life.

If, beyond these points, any expressions have been used to explain this truth that have given rise to differences or debates, I will not involve myself in defending them — even if they may be true and defensible against objections. The substance of the truth as stated is what I have undertaken to defend, and where that substance is granted or agreed to, I will not contend with anyone over their way of expressing it, nor defend particular terms and phrases others have used. For example: some have said that what Christ did and suffered is so imputed to us that we are judged and regarded in God's sight as having done and suffered it ourselves in Him. I will not involve myself in that formulation. Although a sound meaning can be given to it, and it is used by some of the ancient writers, yet because it gives offense, and the substance of the truth we are defending is better expressed in other ways, it should not be argued over. For we do not say that God judges or regards us as having done and suffered in our own persons what Christ did and suffered, but only that He did it and suffered it in our place.

On that basis, God makes a grant and donation of it to believers upon their believing, for their justification before Him. The same may be said of many other similar expressions.

With these points in place, I proceed to the general objections raised against the imputation we are affirming. I will address only the most important ones — those into which all other objections can be resolved — for it would be endless to address every objection a person's ingenuity might suggest. We must also keep some general considerations in mind.

1. The doctrine of justification is a part — indeed an eminent part — of the mystery of the gospel. It is no surprise, therefore, if it does not readily conform to ordinary human reason the way some would like. Something more is required for a true spiritual understanding of such mysteries. Indeed, unless we intend to abandon the gospel, it must be affirmed that human reason as it is corrupted — and the human mind without divine supernatural revelation — rejects every such truth and rises in hostility against it (Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14).

2. This is why the minds and ingenuity of people are remarkably fertile in manufacturing objections against evangelical truths and raising quibbles about them. They rarely lack for an endless stream of sophisticated objections which, having nothing better, they themselves judge to be unanswerable. For fallen reason, once set loose under the false pretense of pursuing truth, to act boldly against spiritual mysteries, is clever in its arguments and prolific in inventing them. How endless, for example, are the Socinians' sophistries against the doctrine of the Trinity, and how they triumph in them as though they cannot be answered. Sheltered by these, they disregard the force of the clearest scriptural testi-

monies, multiplied on every occasion. They deal with the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction in the same way that the Pelagians of old dealt with the doctrine of grace. Therefore, anyone who is unsettled by the appearance of clever or plausible objections against clearly revealed and sufficiently attested gospel mysteries is unlikely to achieve much stability in their profession of them.

3. Most of the objections leveled against the truth in this matter arise from a failure to grasp the proper order of God's work of grace and our corresponding obedience — as was noted earlier. They consist in treating as contradictory things that, in their proper place and order, are not only compatible but mutually supportive of each other — as those who truly believe find in their own experience. Examples of this were given earlier, and more will come up shortly. Keeping these considerations in view, we can see both the origin and the actual force of these objections.

4. Consider that all the objections against the truth we affirm are drawn from certain supposed consequences of accepting it. This approach is the surest way to make controversies endless, since consequences can always be disputed. Moreover, in my observation, every person who argues this way frames the question to the disadvantage of those he opposes in order to make the supposed consequences appear more absurd — a way of proceeding that I am surprised good people are not either tired of or ashamed of.

1. It is objected that the imputation of Christ's righteousness destroys all remission of sins on God's part. This is argued by Socinus (*De Servatore*, lib. 4, cap. 2-4) and others as well. This charge may seem bold to those who are firmly convinced that without this imputation there could be no remission of sin. But they ar-

gue: a person who has a perfectly righteous imputed to them as their own has no need of pardon, no sin to be forgiven, and can never need forgiveness. Since this objection will come up again in connection with one of the arguments that follows, I will address it only briefly here.

1. Let Grotius answer this objection. He writes: "When we have said that Christ procured two things for us — freedom from punishment and a reward — the ancient church attributed the one specifically to His satisfaction and the other to His merit. Satisfaction consists in the transfer of sins [from us to Him]; merit consists in the imputation to us of the most perfect obedience He performed for us" (Preface to the book *On Satisfaction*). In his view, the remission of sins and the imputation of righteousness were as compatible with each other as the satisfaction and merit of Christ — as indeed they are.

2. Had we not been sinners, we would have had no need for the imputation of Christ's righteousness to make us righteous before God. Since we are sinners, the first purpose for which it is imputed is the pardon of sin — without which we could not be righteous even through the imputation of the most perfect righteousness. These two things are therefore consistent: Christ's satisfaction being imputed to us for the pardon of sin, and Christ's obedience being imputed to us to render us righteous before God. Not only are they consistent — neither alone would be sufficient for our justification.

2. The same author and others also argue that the imputation of Christ's righteousness destroys all necessity for repentance for sin in connection with its pardon — that it renders repentance entirely needless. For what need of repentance does a person have

who, through the imputation of Christ's righteousness, is regarded as completely just and righteous before God? If Christ satisfied for all sins in the person of the elect; if as our surety He paid all our debts; and if His righteousness becomes ours before we repent — then repentance is entirely unnecessary. The same author develops these points at length in the passage cited.

In answer: First, it must be remembered that we require evangelical faith — in the order of nature — prior to our justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and that faith is also the condition for the continuation of our justification. Therefore, whatever is necessary for believing is equally required of us in preparation for it. Among these is sorrow for sin and repentance of it. For whoever is convicted of sin in a proper way — so as to genuinely grasp its evil and guilt, both in how it contradicts the moral commands of God's holy law and in its necessary consequences of God's wrath and curse — cannot but be troubled in mind that they have brought themselves into such a condition. That state of mind will be accompanied by shame, fear, sorrow, and other distressing feelings. From this follows a resolve to abstain from sin in the future, with sincere efforts toward that end — leading, given time and opportunity, to a reformation of life. A genuine sense of sin, sorrow for it, fear concerning it, abstaining from it, and reforming one's life together constitute a repentance that is true in its kind. This repentance is commonly called legal because its motivations are drawn primarily from the law; but it also requires the temporary faith in the gospel that was described earlier. As it often produces profound effects in confession of sin, humiliation for it, and changed behavior — as with Ahab and the Ninevites — it ordinarily precedes true saving faith and justification. Therefore, the neces-

sity of repentance is in no way weakened by the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness — it is in fact strengthened and made more effective by it. For without repentance, according to the order of the gospel, an interest in that imputation is not to be obtained. This is what the Old Testament so often presents as the means and conditions for averting the judgments and punishments threatened for sin. This repentance is genuine and true in its kind — and in fact the Socinians themselves require no other kind of repentance for justification. As they deny true evangelical repentance in all its distinctive causes, the only repentance they require is this kind that precedes faith in the order of nature. This objection, therefore, as they press it, is a groundless pretense.

2. Justifying faith includes within its very nature the entire principle of evangelical repentance — so that it is utterly impossible for a person to be a true believer without being, at that very same moment, truly penitent. This is why Scripture so frequently joins the two together as a single simultaneous duty. Indeed, the gospel's call to repentance is a call to faith expressing itself through repentance. The sole reason that the call to repentance in Acts 2:38, to which forgiveness of sins is attached, is followed immediately by the promise in verse 39 — the object of faith. The thoughts and feelings a person has about sin — along with sorrow for it and repentance of it, arising from legal conviction — are enlivened and made evangelical when faith enters as a new principle motivating them and providing new reasons for them. It is therefore impossible for faith to exist without repentance. So although the first act of faith, and its only proper exercise in relation to justification, is directed toward the grace of God in Christ and the way of salvation through Him as offered in the promise of the gospel,

this is not conceived as preceding, in time, its expression in self-displeasure, godly sorrow, and whole-hearted turning from sin to God — nor can it be, since faith virtually and fundamentally contains all of these within itself. Therefore, while evangelical repentance is not a condition of our justification in the sense of having any direct role in it — we are nowhere said to be justified by repentance, it is not directed toward the proper object the soul rests in for justification, it is not a direct giving of glory to God for His wisdom and grace in Christ but rather follows from it, and it is not the reception of Christ that is explicitly and solely required for justification — it is nonetheless present in the root, principle, and readiness of mind for its exercise in every person at the moment of their justification. Repentance is especially presented in connection with the forgiveness of sins as something without which it is impossible to have any true sense or comfort of forgiveness in the soul — but not as any part of the righteousness on account of which our sins are pardoned, nor as the means by which we have a share in that righteousness. All of this is clear from the divine method of our justification and the order of duty prescribed in the gospel, as well as from the experience of those who truly believe. Therefore, given the necessity of legal repentance for believing, the transformation of the affections exercised in it through faith (making them evangelical), and the nature of faith as including within itself a principle of whole-hearted turning to God — and especially the repentance that has as its chief motive the love of God and of Jesus Christ and the grace flowing from it — all of which are included in the doctrine we are defending, the necessity of true repentance is permanently and securely grounded.

3. As for what was said in the objection about Christ suffering in the person of the elect — I am not certain whether anyone has used that exact expression or not, and I will not argue about it. He suffered in their place, which writers of all kinds — ancient and modern — express by saying that in His suffering He bore the person of the church. The meaning is what was explained before. Christ and believers are one mystical person — one spiritually animated body, head and members. I assume this will not be denied; to deny it would be to overthrow the church and its faith. Therefore, what He did and suffered is imputed to them. It is granted that as the surety of the covenant He paid all our debts and answered for all our sins, and that His righteousness is truly communicated to us. Why then, say some, is repentance needed? Everything has already been done for us. But why should we accept one part of the gospel while rejecting another? Was God not free to appoint whatever way, method, and order He chose for communicating these things to us? Or, given the design of His wisdom and grace, were these two things not both necessary?

1. The righteousness of Christ was to be communicated to us and made ours in such a way that He Himself would be glorified in it — since He has ordered all things in this entire economy to the praise of the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:6). This was to be accomplished through faith on our part. That is how it is, and it could not be otherwise. For the faith by which we are justified is our giving to God the glory of His wisdom, grace, and love. Whatever does that is faith, and nothing else is.

2. Since our nature was so corrupted and depraved that, remaining in that condition, it was incapable of receiving the righteousness of Christ or any benefit from it in a way that glorifies God

and truly serves our own good — it was equally necessary that our nature be renewed and changed. Without this, God's purpose in the mediation of Christ — the complete recovery of us to Himself — could not be achieved. Therefore, just as faith in its formal nature was necessary for the first purpose (giving glory to God), it was necessary for this latter purpose that faith be accompanied by — indeed that it contain within itself the seeds of — all the other graces that constitute the divine nature, of which we are to be made partakers. Therefore, not only the thing itself — the communication of Christ's righteousness to us — but also the way, manner, and means of it all depend on God's sovereign order and arrangement. So although Christ did make satisfaction to God's justice for all the sins of the church — and as a common representative person, for no sane person can deny that a mediator and surety is in some sense a common person — and although He did pay all our debts, yet each individual's personal share in what He did and suffered depends on the way, means, and order that God has appointed for that purpose. This and this alone gives the true foundation and necessity for all the duties required of us, with their proper order and ends.

3. It is objected that the imputation of Christ's righteousness as we defend it actually destroys the necessity of faith itself. This hits closer to home. The design of all these objections is to make something stick. But those who raise this objection have their reasons. They say: on our supposition, the righteousness of Christ is ours before we believe. For Christ satisfied for all our sins as if we had satisfied in our own persons. And the one who is regarded as having satisfied for all his sins in his own person is acquitted from them all and counted just — whether he believes or not. There is

therefore no ground or reason why he should be required to believe. If, therefore, Christ's righteousness is truly ours because God regards us as having worked it in Him, then it is ours before we believe. If this is not the case, then it is plain that the righteousness itself can never be made ours through believing — only its fruits and effects can be suspended on our believing, so that we may receive them. Indeed, if Christ made any such satisfaction for us as is claimed, it is actually ours without any further imputation. For being performed for us and in our place, it would be the height of injustice for us not to be accounted pardoned and acquitted — without any further imputation on God's part or faith on ours. I have reproduced these arguments from Socinus (*De Servatore*, lib. 4, cap. 2-5) — which I would not have done except that I find others have already done the same, though for different purposes. He concludes with a confidence that others appear to have partly learned from him, saying of the satisfaction of Christ and its imputation to believers: "This opinion of yours and your colleagues is so shameful and execrable that I do not believe a more pestilential error has ever arisen among the people of God since the beginning of humanity." Indeed, Socinus's serpentine wit was fertile in inventing sophistries against all the mysteries of the gospel. Nor did any one of them oblige him to contradict himself in opposing the others — since by denying the deity of Christ, His satisfaction, sacrifice, merit, and righteousness, and by overthrowing the entire nature of His mediation, nothing stood in his way that he wanted to oppose. I am somewhat puzzled, however, how others can make use of his inventions in this way — for if they thought carefully about where they naturally lead, they would find them to be absolutely destructive of what those same people claim to affirm. So it

is with this objection against the imputation of Christ's righteousness: if it has any force — which it does not — it is to prove that the satisfaction of Christ was impossible. That was indeed Socinus's intent. But the objection is easily answered.

I answer, first in general: the entire fallacy of this objection lies in setting one part of the design and method of God's grace in the mystery of our justification against another — or in treating one part of it as if it were the whole, when its efficacy and completeness depends on something else as well. We warned the reader of this in earlier discussions. For the whole objection rests on the assumption that the satisfaction of Christ, if it exists, must take its full effect without any believing on our part — which is contrary to the entire declaration of God's will in the gospel. I will address the objection primarily as it is used by those who do accept the satisfaction of Christ.

1. When the Lord Christ died for us and offered Himself as a propitiatory sacrifice, God laid all our sins on Him (Isaiah 53:6). He then bore them all in His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He suffered in our place and made full satisfaction for all our sins — for He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26), and by one offering has perfected forever those who are sanctified (Hebrews 10:14). Whoever's sins were not actually and fully satisfied for in that one offering of Christ will never have them expiated. For He dies no more — there remains no further sacrifice for sin. Any repetition of a sacrifice for sin, which would require crucifying Christ again, overthrows the very foundation of the Christian faith.

2. Yet despite this full and complete satisfaction once made for the sins of all who will be saved, all people continue to be born by nature as children of wrath — and while they do not believe, the wrath of God remains on them (John 3:36), that is, they are liable to and under the curse of the law. Therefore, from the mere making of that satisfaction alone, no one for whom it was made in God's design can be said to have suffered in Christ, or to have a personal share in His satisfaction, or to be made a partaker of it in any way prior to a further act of God in imputing it to them. For this is only one part of God's purpose of grace regarding our justification by the blood of Christ — that He by His death should make satisfaction for our sins. This must not be separated from everything else that belongs to the same purpose of God. Therefore, from the fact of Christ's satisfaction, no argument can be drawn against the consequential act of its imputation to us — and therefore none against the necessity of our faith in believing and receiving it, which is no less God's appointment than that Christ should make that satisfaction.

3. What the Lord Christ paid for us is as truly paid as if we had paid it ourselves — as He says in Psalm 69:5. He restored to God the glory that had been taken from Him by our sin. What He endured and suffered, He endured and suffered in our place. Yet the act of God in laying our sins on Christ did not immediately convey to us an actual right and title to what He did and suffered. Those things are not immediately ours, nor regarded as ours, by virtue of that act alone — because God has appointed something else not only prior to that conferral but as its very means, for His own glory. These things — both their reality and their order — depend on God's free ordination.

4. It cannot be said, however, that this satisfaction was made for us on a condition that absolutely suspended its outcome and left it uncertain whether it would ever benefit us at all. Such an arrangement might be just in the case of monetary payments. A person may pay a large sum for another's release on a condition that is never fulfilled — in which case, on the condition failing, the money may and should be returned, and the payer has suffered no real loss. But in the case of penal suffering for crimes and sins, no just arrangement can make the outcome and efficacy of it depend on an absolutely uncertain condition that may never be fulfilled. For if the condition fails, no compensation can be made to the one who has suffered. Therefore, the application of Christ's satisfaction to those for whom it was made is certain and secure in God's purpose.

5. God has appointed an immediate basis for the imputation of Christ's satisfaction and righteousness to us — on account of which we may be said to have done and suffered in Him what He did and suffered in our place, through that grant, donation, and imputation of it to us — so that we may have a share in it and it may be made ours. This is all we are arguing for. And this basis is our actual union into one mystical person with Him through faith. The necessity of faith originates here. If we add to this the necessity of faith for that distinctive glory of God which He intends to exalt in our justification through Christ, and also for all the ends of our obedience to God and the renewal of our natures into His image — its necessity is amply secured against all objections. Our actual share in Christ's satisfaction depends on our actual incorporation into His mystical body through faith, according to God's appointment.

4. It is also objected that if the righteousness of Christ is made ours, we could be said to be saviors of the world as He was, or to save others as He did — for He was that and did that by His righteousness, and by nothing else. This objection is of the same kind as those already answered — a mere sophistical quibble.

1. The righteousness of Christ is not infused into us so as to become inherently and subjectively ours as it was in Him — which is what would be required in order to save others by it. Whatever we may do, or be said to do, in relation to others by virtue of a power or quality inherent in ourselves, we cannot be said to do anything for others by virtue of what is imputed to us — which is imputed only for our own benefit. For any righteousness of ours to benefit another, it is absolutely necessary that we ourselves have performed it.

2. Even if the righteousness of Christ could be infused into us and made inherently ours, we still could not be — nor could we be called — saviors of others by it. For our human nature in our individual persons is not capable of receiving and sustaining a righteousness that is effective for that purpose. This capacity was given to Christ's human nature specifically by virtue of the hypostatic union, and by nothing else. The righteousness of Christ Himself, as performed in human nature, would not have been sufficient for the justification and salvation of the church had it not been the righteousness of His person — who is both God and Man. For God redeemed His church with His own blood.

3. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, in terms of its ends and use, is determined in scope by God's will and purpose in that imputation. And that purpose is simply this: that it should

be the righteousness of those to whom it is imputed — nothing more and nothing less.

4. We do not say that the righteousness of Christ — as made absolutely for the whole church — is imputed collectively to every believer. Rather, His satisfaction for each one of them individually, according to God's will, is imputed to them — not with respect to its general scope, but according to each person's particular share in it. Every believer has their own portion of this bread of life, and all are justified by the same righteousness.

The apostle declares — as will be proved later — that just as Adam's actual sin is imputed to us leading to condemnation, so the obedience of Christ is imputed to us for the justification of life. But Adam's sin is not imputed to any person in such a way that he thereby becomes the cause of sin and condemnation to every other person in the world — only that he himself becomes guilty before God. The same logic applies on the other side. Just as we are made guilty by Adam's actual sin, which is not inherent in us but only imputed to us, so we are made righteous by the righteousness of Christ, which is not inherent in us but only imputed to us. And it is imputed to us because He Himself was righteous with it — not for Himself but for us.

It is also argued that if we insist on the personal imputation to every believer of what Christ did, or if any believer is personally righteous in the very individual acts of Christ's righteousness, many absurdities will follow. But as was observed earlier, when people want to oppose an opinion by showing its supposed consequences, they tend to state that opinion in a way that makes those consequences appear as damaging as possible — often without intending to misrepresent. Even the most careful and honest people

sometimes fall into this in the heat of argument. I fear that has happened here. As for "personal imputation" — I do not quite understand the phrase. All imputation is to a person and is the act of a person — whatever its content or kind — but neither of those facts makes it properly called "personal imputation." And if some imputation is allowed that is not directed to persons — that is, in this case, to all believers individually — its nature has not, to my knowledge, been explained.

I am not aware that anyone has expressed the imputation we are defending by saying that every believer is personally righteous in the very individual acts of Christ's righteousness. I have neither read nor heard anyone express it that way. Perhaps some have, but I will not undertake their defense. For that formulation seems to suppose not only that Christ performed every specific act that is required of us in any given instance, but also that those acts become inherently ours — both of which are false and impossible. What we are actually defending in this imputation is simply this: that what the Lord Christ did and suffered as the mediator and surety of the covenant in answer to the law — for them and in their place — is imputed to every one of them for the justification of life. This is fully sufficient for that purpose, without any such suppositions, for three reasons. First, from the dignity of the person who yielded His obedience — which made it both satisfactory and meritorious, and capable of being imputed to many. Second, from the nature of the obedience itself — a perfect compliance with, a fulfillment of, and full satisfaction to the whole law in all its demands. Given the sovereign act of God by which a representative of the whole church was appointed to answer the law, this is the ground of His righteousness being made theirs, and being fully sufficient

for their justification. Third, from God's appointment that what was done and suffered by Christ as a public person and our surety should be reckoned to us as if done by ourselves. So the sin of Adam — while he acted as a public person representing all his descendants — is imputed to us all as if we had committed that actual sin. Bellarmine himself frequently acknowledges this: "We sinned in the first man when he sinned, and his transgression was also our transgression. For we would not truly be constituted sinners by Adam's disobedience unless his disobedience were also our disobedience" (*De Amissione Gratiae et Statu Peccati*, lib. 5, cap. 18). And elsewhere he acknowledges that the actual sin of Adam is imputed to us as if we had all committed that same actual sin — that is, as if we had broken the whole law of God. This is precisely how the apostle illustrates the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers, and the same charge of absurdity could be leveled against the one as against the other. We are therefore not saying that God judges us to have in our own persons performed the very acts and endured the very penalty that the Lord Christ performed and endured — for that would overthrow all imputation. Rather, what Christ did and suffered is imputed by God to believers for the justification of life as if it had been done by themselves; and His righteousness as a public person is made theirs by imputation — just as the sin of Adam while a public person is made the sin of all his descendants by imputation.

None of the supposed absurdities — those that are genuinely absurd — actually follow from our position. It does not follow that Christ in His own person performed every specific act that we in our circumstances are obligated to perform — nor was there any need for Him to do so. As I have shown, this imputation rests on

other foundations. Nor does it follow that the righteousness of every saved person before God is numerically and identically the same as Christ's in His public capacity as Mediator. In fact, this objection destroys itself by affirming that as His righteousness, it was the righteousness of the God-man — and therefore has a distinctive nature in relation to His person. It is the same righteousness that Christ in His public capacity worked and accomplished. But there is a wide difference in considering it as His absolutely and as made ours. It was formally inherent in Him; it is only materially imputed to us. It was actively His; it is passively ours. It was wrought in the person of the God-man for the whole church; it is imputed to each individual believer only in terms of their own concern. Adam's sin as imputed to us is not the sin of a representative — though it is the sin of the one who was representative — but becomes the particular sin of each one of us. But this objection must be addressed further when it recurs later. Nor does it follow that on this supposition we are accounted as having done what was done long before we were in any position to do anything. For what is done for us and in our place before we were capable of any such action may be imputed to us, as is the case with Adam's sin. And yet there is a meaningful sense in which people may be said to have done what was done for them and in their name before they existed — so there is no absurdity here. As for the added point that Christ did not do and suffer the identical thing we were obligated to — since He did what the law required and suffered what the law threatened to the disobedient, which is the entirety of what we owe — this will not be easily proved, nor will the arguments confirming the contrary be quickly answered. That Christ was a surety, or the surety of the new covenant, Scripture so expressly states that it

cannot be denied. And that a surety may stand in criminal as well as civil and monetary matters has already been demonstrated. Whatever else is urged about the uniqueness of Christ's obedience as Mediator proves only that His righteousness, as formally and inherently His own, was peculiar to Himself — and that the characteristics attaching to it by reason of its being inherent in His person are not communicable to those to whom it is imputed.

It is also urged that if the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, it would follow that every believer is justified by the works of the law. For Christ's obedience was a legal righteousness, and if that is imputed to us, then we are justified by the law — which contradicts many plain statements of Scripture. In answer: first, I know nothing more common in the writings of some learned men than to say that the righteousness of Christ is our legal righteousness — and yet they are presumably able to answer this objection themselves. Second, if this objection actually holds — in the true scriptural sense of being justified by the law or its works — then one can only pity those who see no other way to escape the obligation to be justified by the law except through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Third, the Scripture that affirms no one can be justified by the deeds of the law equally affirms that through faith we do not nullify the law but establish it; that the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us; that Christ came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it and is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe. And we will prove later that the law must be fulfilled before we can be justified. Fourth, we are not on this basis justified by the law or its works in the only scriptural sense of that statement — and to invent new senses for it is not safe. Its meaning in Scripture is that only the doers of the law will be justified (Romans

2:13), and that the one who does the things of it will live by them (Romans 10:5) — namely, in his own person, through personal obedience, which is all the law requires. But if we, who have not fulfilled the law through inherent personal obedience, are justified by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, then we are justified by Christ and not by the law. But it is said this does not resolve the matter. For if His obedience is so imputed to us that God in judgment regards us as having done what Christ did, then it amounts to the same thing — we are as much justified by the law as if we had in our own persons rendered a sinless obedience to it. This I confess I cannot follow. The nature of this imputation is being represented in the way I have rejected as ours — and only from that misrepresentation does the inference follow, which in my judgment does not actually follow from the truth. For grant an imputation of another's righteousness to us — of whatever nature — and all justification by the law and its works in the scriptural sense is gone forever. Imputation removes from the law all power to justify, since the law can only justify on the basis of a righteousness that is originally and inherently one's own — "The man who does them shall live by them." If the righteousness that is imputed is the ground and foundation of our justification, and is made ours by that imputation — however you frame it — that justification is of grace and not of the law. As for the claim that we are accounted by God in judgment to have personally done what Christ did — I know of no one who actually says this, and it may carry a false meaning, namely, that God should judge us in our own persons to have performed acts we never performed. What Christ did for us and in our place is imputed and communicated to us as we are united into one mystical person with Him through faith — and on

that basis we are justified. This absolutely rules out all justification by the law or its works, even though the law is established, fulfilled, and accomplished so that we may be justified.

Nor can anyone, given a properly stated understanding of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, be said to merit their own salvation. Satisfaction and merit are properties of Christ's righteousness as formally inherent in His own person — and as such, they cannot be transferred to another. Therefore, as it is imputed to individual believers, the righteousness does not carry with it those properties that belong only to its existence in the person of the Son of God. But this was addressed earlier, as was everything that needed to be repeated here.

I have noted these objections here because the answers to them help further clarify the truth whose confirmation through arguments and scriptural testimonies I will now proceed to.

CHAPTER 10: ARGUMENTS FOR JUSTIFICATION BY THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS



There is a justification of convicted sinners upon their believing. Their sins are pardoned, their persons accepted by God, and a right is granted them to the heavenly inheritance. This state they are immediately taken into upon faith — upon believing in Jesus Christ. And it is a state of actual peace with God. I take these things for granted at present; they are the foundation of everything I will argue in this section. I mention them because some appear, as best I can understand, to deny any real and actual justification of sinners upon believing in this life. They treat justification as only a general conditional sentence declared in the gospel whose execution is deferred to the day of judgment. Since the whole condition has not yet been fulfilled in this life, they say, no one can partake of it or be actually and fully justified before death. This means there is no real state of assured rest and peace with God through Jesus Christ for anyone in this life. I will not dispute this at present, because it seems to me to overthrow the entire

gospel, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all the comfort of believers — matters about which I hope we are not yet called to contend.

Our inquiry is this: how do convicted sinners obtain, upon their believing, the remission of sins, acceptance with God, and a right to eternal life? And if this can be accomplished in no other way than through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them, then they are justified before God by that alone. This assertion rests on the assumption that a righteousness is required for the justification of any person. For when God justifies a person, He declares that person acquitted from all charges laid against them and pronounces them as standing righteous in His sight — and this must be on the basis of some righteousness that grounds that acquittal and declaration. God's judgment is according to truth. We have already established this sufficiently in our examination of the forensic procedure by which Scripture represents the justification of a believing sinner. If there is no other righteousness by which we can be so justified except the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, then we must be justified by that or not at all. If there is some other righteousness, it must be our own — inherent in us and worked out by us. For these two kinds — inherent and imputed righteousness, our own and Christ's — divide the whole field of righteousness as it relates to the end in question. I will prove first that there is no such inherent righteousness, no righteousness of our own, by which we can be justified before God. I will do so first from explicit scriptural testimonies and then from the nature of the matter itself. Two preliminary points need to be established.

1. I will not consider our own righteousness in isolation, but as it may be understood to be enhanced and elevated by its relationship to the satisfaction and merit of Christ. Many will concede that our inherent righteousness is not in itself sufficient to justify us before God. But taken as having worth and value communicated to it from the merit of Christ, they say, it is accepted for that purpose and judged worthy of eternal life. We could not merit life and salvation, they argue, unless Christ first merited for us the grace by which we do so, and also merited that our works should have such dignity in relation to their reward. We will therefore allow whatever worth can reasonably be thought to be communicated to this righteousness from its relationship to the merit of Christ.

2. Since people of all parties and persuasions assign a role in our justification to our own righteousness in various different ways — with no two parties agreeing and often no two members of the same party agreeing, as could easily be shown among the Roman Catholics, Socinians, and others — I will aim, as far as possible, to address all of them in the arguments that follow. For my purpose is to prove that our own righteousness has no such role in our justification before God that the righteousness of Christ should not be regarded as the only righteousness on the basis of which we are justified.

First, let us consider some of the many scriptural testimonies that may be cited for this purpose. Psalm 130:3-4: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." These words contain an inquiry into how a person — any person — may be justified before God; how they may stand in God's presence and be accepted by Him; how they will stand in judgment, as Psalm 1:5 explains it:

"The wicked will not stand in the judgment" — they will not be acquitted at their trial. The first thing that presents itself for this purpose is one's own obedience. The law requires it in the first place, and every person's own conscience calls for it. But the Psalmist plainly states that no one can successfully plead this for their justification. The reason is that even in the best obedience of the best of people, iniquities are found before the Lord their God. And if people come to trial before God to be justified or condemned, those iniquities must also be heard and taken into account. When they are, no one can stand — no one can be justified, as it is expressed elsewhere. Therefore, the wisest and safest course in our justification before God is to abandon this plea entirely and not insist on our own obedience, lest our sins also appear and be heard. No one can give any reason why they should not be heard. And if they are, the best of people will be condemned in their trial, as the Psalmist declares.

Two things are required for a sinner to stand in this trial. First, that their iniquities not be charged against them — for if they are, they are lost forever. Second, that a righteousness be produced and pleaded that can endure the trial, since justification comes on the basis of a justifying righteousness. For the first, the Psalmist tells us it must come through pardon and forgiveness: "But there is forgiveness with You" — our only relief against the condemning sentence of the law for our iniquities — that is, through the blood of Christ, for "in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Ephesians 1:7). The second — a justifying righteousness — cannot be our own obedience, because of our iniquities. The same Psalmist directs us to this in Psalm 71:16: "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of

Your righteousness, of Yours only." The righteousness of God, not his own — indeed in direct contrast to his own — is the only plea he will make in this case.

If no one can stand trial before God on the basis of their own obedience and be justified before Him — because of their own personal iniquities — and if our only plea in that case is the righteousness of God and of God alone and not our own, then there is no personal inherent righteousness in any believer that could serve as the basis for their justification. This is what was to be proved.

The same is stated even more plainly by the same person in Psalm 143:2: "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is justified." This testimony deserves special attention because it is drawn from the law (Exodus 34:7) and carried over into the gospel, where the apostle cites it twice for the same purpose (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16).

The person who makes this plea with God identifies himself as God's servant: "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant" — that is, with one who loved Him, feared Him, and rendered sincere obedience. This was not a hypocrite, an unbeliever, or an unregenerate person whose works were entirely legal — performed only in the strength of the law — the kind of works that everyone acknowledges to be excluded from justification, and which many suppose are the only works so excluded. This was David — not only converted and a true believer with the Spirit of God and the help of special grace in his obedience, but one who had this testimony: that he was a man after God's own heart. His own conscience bore him witness to his integrity, uprightness, and personal righteousness — so much so that he frequently affirmed them, appealed to God about their reality, and pleaded them as grounds for judgment

between himself and his adversaries. We therefore have before us the case of a sincere and outstanding believer who excelled most in personal inherent righteousness.

This person — with such testimony from both God and his own conscience regarding the sincerity and even the excellence of his obedience — considers how he may stand before God and be justified in His sight. Why does he not now plead his own merits? Why not argue that if not by strict merit, then at least by suitability, he deserved to be acquitted and justified? He left that kind of plea for the generation to come after him — those who would justify themselves and despise others. But suppose he had no such confidence in the merit of his works as some have now attained — why does he not simply enter into judgment with God and put it to the test, pleading that he has fulfilled the conditions of the new covenant, that everlasting covenant God made with him, "ordered in all things and sure"? If the purchase of that covenant and its terms by Christ (for I assume the benefit of that purchase is allowed to extend back to the Old Testament) — if this is all that was required of him, why does he not plead it? Should we not fear that he was one of those who see no necessity for personal holiness and righteousness, since he makes no mention of it precisely when it should serve him most? At the very least, could he not plead his faith as his own duty and work, to be counted to him as righteousness? Whatever the reason, he sets all of these aside and absolutely refuses a trial on that basis. "Do not come into judgment with Your servant," he says — just as it is promised that the one who believes will not come into judgment (John 5:24).

If this holy person renounces all consideration of his personal inherent righteousness — in every form, under every pretense, in any regard whatsoever — and refuses to appeal to it for any use in his justification before God, we may safely conclude that no such righteousness in anyone can justify them before God. If people would only step out from behind the shelters and distinctions they hide behind in their disputes, set aside the pretenses by which they deceive both themselves and others, and tell us plainly what plea they would dare make before God from their own righteousness and obedience in order to be justified — we would understand their position far better than we do now. There is one, I confess, who speaks with some confidence on this point: Vasquez the Jesuit (In 1.2, Disp. 204, cap. 4): "Inherent righteousness renders the soul so just and holy, and thereby a child of God, that by this very fact it renders her an heir and worthy of eternal glory; indeed, God Himself cannot ordain otherwise than that a person with such righteousness is and must be worthy of eternal blessedness." Is it not sobering that David displayed such apparent ignorance of the worth of his inherent righteousness, and such faint-heartedness about his trial before God — when, according to this Jesuit, God Himself could not arrange it otherwise than that he was and must be worthy of eternal blessedness?

The reason the Psalmist gives for refusing to submit to a trial on the basis of his own obedience is this general principle: "For in Your sight, no man living will be justified." This must be understood either absolutely or with reference to some particular means of justification. If it is absolute, then justification before God ceases to exist entirely — but that contradicts all of Scripture and destroys the gospel. It must therefore be understood with refer-

ence to our own obedience and works. He is not praying absolutely that God would never enter into judgment with him — for that would mean asking God to give up His governance of the world. He is asking that God not enter into judgment with him on the basis of his own duties and obedience. But if those duties and obedience could in any sense or way fulfill what a justifying righteousness requires, there would be no reason to dread a trial by them. Since the Holy Spirit so positively affirms that no man living will be justified in God's sight by or on the basis of his own works or obedience, I find it remarkable that some interpret the apostle James as affirming the direct opposite — that we are justified in the sight of God by our own works. James says no such thing. This therefore is an eternal rule of truth: by or upon his own obedience, no man living can be justified in the sight of God. It may be objected that if God were to judge anyone by their own obedience strictly according to the law, then indeed no one could be justified. But God, judging according to the gospel and the terms of the new covenant, can justify people on the basis of their own duties, works, and obedience. In answer: first, the negative statement is general and unlimited — no man living will be justified before God on his own works or obedience. To limit this to one particular mode of judgment is not to make a distinction but to contradict the Holy Spirit. Second, the judgment intended here concerns justification, as the words plainly indicate. But there is no judgment of our works with respect to righteousness and justification except by the proper rule and measure of those works — which is the law. If they cannot survive trial by the law, they cannot survive any trial with respect to righteousness and justification in the sight of God. Third, on this objection's own terms, the Psalmist's prayer and

plea would mean: "O Lord, do not enter into judgment with Your servant by or according to the law — but enter into judgment with me on my own works and obedience according to the rule of the gospel" — citing as his reason that "in Your sight no man living will be justified." How far this is from his intent needs no explanation. Fourth, God's judgment for justification according to the gospel does not proceed on our works of obedience but on the righteousness of Christ and our share in it by faith — which is too clear to be honestly denied. Notwithstanding this objection, therefore, the argument stands.

If the holiest servants of God — in the midst of and following a course of sincere and fruitful obedience, testified to by God Himself and confirmed by their own consciences, that is, at the very point when they have the strongest evidence of their sincerity and their standing as true servants of God — if they renounce all thought of a righteousness by which they could in any sense be justified before God, then there is no such righteousness in anyone. And since all of them do so, and ought to do so, on the basis of the universal rule stated here — that in the sight of God no man living will be justified — this is plainly affirmed in this testimony.

I have no doubt that many learned men, after all their arguments for a role of personal righteousness and works in our justification before God, do in their own actual practice fall back on the Psalmist's method — crying out as the prophet Daniel does in the name of the church: "We are not presenting our supplications before You on account of our righteousness, but on account of Your great compassion" (Daniel 9:18). Similarly, Job — as noted earlier — after a long and earnest defense of his own faith, integrity, and personal righteousness (in justifying himself against the accusa-

tions of Satan and others), when called to plead his cause before God and declare on what grounds he expected to be justified before Him, abandoned all his former pleas and took refuge in the same position as the Psalmist (Job 40:4; 42:6).

It is true that in particular circumstances, and for some specific purpose in God's providence, a person may appeal to their own integrity and obedience before God Himself. Hezekiah did this when he prayed for his life to be spared: "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight" (Isaiah 38:3). This kind of plea may be made in relation to temporal deliverance or some other particular purpose in which God's glory is involved. Such was clearly the case with the sparing of Hezekiah's life at that time. For since he had with great zeal and effort reformed religion and restored the true worship of God, his dying in the middle of his days would have given the idolatrous multitude occasion to point to him as dying under a sign of divine displeasure. But no one has ever made such a plea before God for the absolute justification of their person. Nehemiah, for example, in the great struggle he waged for the worship of God and the service of His house, appealed to God's remembrance of it in vindicating himself against his adversaries — but resolved his own personal acceptance with God into pardoning mercy: "spare me according to the greatness of Your steadfast love" (Nehemiah 13:22).

Another testimony to the same purpose comes from the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the name of the church: "We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6). It is true that the prophet is here making a deep confession of the people's sins. Yet he joins himself with them

and at the same time affirms their special standing through adoption: that God was their Father and they were His people (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8-9). The righteousness of all who are children of God is of the same kind — however much they may differ in degree, and some may be more righteous than others. Yet all of it is described as something on the basis of which we cannot rightly expect justification in the sight of God. Since the nature of our inherent righteousness belongs to the second part of our argument, I will not dwell further on this testimony here.

Many other passages to the same purpose I will pass over entirely: all those in which the saints of God, or the church, in humble acknowledgment and confession of their own sins, turn to the mercy and grace of God alone as it is dispensed through the mediation and blood of Christ; all those in which God promises to pardon and blot out iniquities for His own sake, for His name's sake; all those in which He promises to bless His people not for any good in them, not for their righteousness, not for their works — whose very consideration He excludes from having any influence on any of His acts of grace toward them; all those in which God expresses His delight in and approval of those who hope in His mercy and trust in His name — turning to Him as their only refuge — and pronounces accursed those who trust in anything else or glory in themselves; and all those that contain special promises to those who come to God as fatherless, helpless, and lost in themselves.

None of the many testimonies gathered for this purpose fails to prove sufficiently that the best of God's saints have no righteousness of their own on the basis of which they could in any sense be justified before God. For in every passage cited, they renounce any such righteousness of their own — everything in them, everything

they have done or can do — and turn to grace and mercy alone. And since, as we have already proved, God in justifying anyone exercises grace toward them with reference to a righteousness on the basis of which He declares them righteous and accepted before Him, all of them point to a righteousness that is not inherent in us but imputed to us.

This is where the substance of everything we inquire into in the matter of justification lies. All other disputes about qualifications, conditions, causes, and any role assigned to our own works and obedience in our justification before God are the speculations of people at ease. The conscience of a convicted sinner standing in God's presence finds everything practically reduced to this one point: whether he will trust in his own personal inherent righteousness, or, fully renouncing it, turn to the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ alone. Nothing else concerns him. However people may dress up his own righteousness for him — calling it meritorious, or only evangelical and not legal, or only the fulfillment of the condition of the new covenant, or a necessary cause without which he cannot be justified — it will not be easy to bring his mind to confidence in it for justification before God, without ultimately deceiving him.

The second part of this argument is drawn from the nature of the matter itself — from a consideration of what our personal inherent righteousness is, what it consists in, and what role it can play in our justification. On this point the following may be observed.

1. We acknowledge an inherent righteousness in all who believe, as was stated earlier. "The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians 5:9). "Having

been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:20). "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness" (1 Timothy 6:11). Although righteousness is mostly used in Scripture for a specific grace or duty distinct from others, we acknowledge that it can also refer to our whole obedience before God — and the word is used that way in Scripture when our own righteousness is contrasted with the righteousness of God. This righteousness is either habitual or actual. There is a habitual righteousness inherent in believers, as they have put on the new self, "which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:24) — as they are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:8-10). And there is an actual righteousness consisting in the good works to which we are thus created — the fruit of righteousness that is to the praise of God through Jesus Christ. Concerning this righteousness it may be noted: first, that Scripture calls people just or righteous by means of it, but no one is said to be justified by it before God; and second, that it is not found in anyone except those who are already justified, in the order of nature prior to it.

Since this is the consistent doctrine of all the Reformed churches and theologians, it is a plain slander to attribute the contrary to them or to any who believe in the imputation of Christ's righteousness for our justification. Bellarmine claims that no Protestant writers acknowledge an inherent righteousness — with the sole exceptions of Bucer and Chemnitz — when in fact not a single one of them denies either the reality of inherent righteousness or its necessity. Some excuse may be made for him, however, because of the way they expressed themselves — always carefully

distinguishing between inherent holiness and the righteousness by which we are justified. But now we are told by one writer that even if we affirm it a hundred times, he could scarcely believe us. This is harsh. Though he speaks to one, the charge falls equally on all who hold to the imputation of Christ's righteousness — which he denies — and who constitute the great majority of Protestant theologians. They are thereby represented as either too foolish to know what they are saying, or too dishonest to mean what they say. He attempts to justify this judgment by several arguments. First, he says that inherent righteousness can only be called ours on the grounds that by it we are made righteous — that is, that it is the condition of our justification required in the new covenant. Denying this, he says, is denying inherent righteousness altogether. But how is this proved? Suppose someone says that every believer is inherently righteous, but that this inherent righteousness is not the condition of justification but rather its consequence — and that it is nowhere required in the new covenant as the condition of our justification. How would the contrary be shown? Scripture plainly affirms that there is such an inherent righteousness in all who believe, and equally plainly affirms that we are justified before God by faith apart from works. Therefore to say that inherent righteousness is the condition of our justification and thus prior to it is directly contrary to the apostle's words: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). Nor is inherent righteousness the condition of the covenant itself in the sense that all the covenant's grace is suspended on it. For as a habitual reality — from which the designation "righteous" is primarily taken — it is itself a grace of the covenant, not a condition of it (Jeremiah 31:33; 32:39; Ezekiel

36:25-27). If what is meant is simply that its actual exercise is indispensably required of all who are taken into the covenant, in order to fulfill the covenant's complete purposes, we are agreed. But it does not follow from this that it is the condition of our justification. It is also argued that all righteousness relates to a law and a rule by which it is to be tested, and that the righteous person is one who has done what that law requires. But first, this is not how Scripture represents our justification before God — the only thing under consideration — namely, that we bring to it a personal righteousness of our own that answers the law by which we are to be judged. Indeed, such an assertion is foreign to the gospel and destructive of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Second, it is granted that all righteousness relates to a law as its rule — and so does this righteousness, namely, the moral law. Since the moral law is the sole eternal and unchanging rule of righteousness, if our inherent righteousness does not in substance answer to it, it is not righteousness at all. But it does answer it in substance: as a habitual reality, it consists in the renewal of the image of God, in which that law is written on our hearts; and all the actual duties it involves are, in their substance, what the law requires. But as for the manner in which it is communicated to us and performed by us — from faith in God through Jesus Christ and love for Him as the author and source of all the grace and mercy He procured and administers — it has reference to the gospel. What follows from this? That the one who does what that law requires is just — certainly. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13). As Moses describes the righteousness of the law: "The man who does them will live by them" (Romans 10:5). But although the righteousness we are discussing

is required by the law — as indeed it is, being nothing other than the law in our hearts from which we walk in God's ways and keep His commandments — it does not so answer the law that any person can be justified by it. Then it will be said: if it does not answer the law and rule by which we are to be judged, then it is no righteousness at all. I say it is entirely true that it is not a perfect righteousness. It does not answer the rule and law in such a way that we could be justified by it or safely go to trial on it. But insofar as it does answer the law, it is a righteousness — imperfectly so, and therefore an imperfect righteousness — which nonetheless gives the designation of "righteous" to those who possess it, both in an absolute and in a comparative sense. It is therefore said that it is the law of grace or the gospel from which we are called righteous with this righteousness. But it will not be proved that the gospel calls us righteous on the basis of a righteousness not required by the moral law. Nor does the law of grace or the gospel anywhere require or prescribe this righteousness as the basis on which we are to be justified before God. The gospel requires faith in Christ Jesus — receiving Him as He is offered in its promises — from all who are to be justified. It also requires repentance from dead works in all who believe, and the fruits of faith, conversion to God, and repentance in works of righteousness that are to the praise of God through Jesus Christ, with perseverance in these to the end. All of this may, if you like, be called our evangelical righteousness — our obedience to God according to the gospel. But the graces and duties that comprise it do not more perfectly answer the commands of the gospel than they do those of the moral law. For the

notion that the gospel reduces the holiness required by the law — that it makes what is sin by the law to be no sin, or that it approves of less love for God than the law demands — is an impious idea.

That the gospel requires all these things wholly and equally as the condition of our justification before God, and thus prior to it, has not yet been proved and never will be. The conclusion drawn is that this is our righteousness according to the evangelical law that requires it — that by it we are made righteous, meaning not guilty of failing to fulfill the condition required in that law. These things are said to be very plain. No doubt they seemed so to the author; to us they are tangled and confused. I wholly deny, however, that our faith, obedience, and righteousness — considered as ours and as performed by us — perfectly answer the commands of the gospel that require them in terms of substance, manner, and degree, even though they are all accepted by God through Jesus Christ according to the grace declared in the gospel. It is therefore utterly impossible that they should serve as the cause or condition of our justification before God. Yet in explaining these things, the same author adds that our flawed and imperfect righteousness is accepted for salvation as if it were completely perfect — because Christ by His most perfect righteousness has merited that it should be so. But we are discussing justification only, not salvation; and that our works of obedience and righteousness have a different relationship to salvation than to justification is stated too plainly and too often in Scripture to be honestly denied. And if this weak and imperfect righteousness of ours is regarded and accepted by God as fully perfect, then either God judges it to actually be perfect — and on that basis declares and justifies us as perfectly righteous in His sight — or He judges it to not be complete and perfect, yet still declares us

perfectly righteous by it. Neither of these, I suppose, can easily be granted. It will therefore be said: it is neither of these; Christ has obtained by His complete and most perfect righteousness and obedience that this lame and imperfect righteousness of ours should be accepted as fully perfect. If that is so, some may think it best not to take this detour through a weak, halting, and imperfect righteousness, but to go directly to the most perfect righteousness of Christ for their justification — which Scripture certainly encourages them to do. They will readily think that a righteousness which cannot justify itself, but must be propped up by grace and pardon through the merits of Christ, will never be able to justify them. And what does this explanation of our imperfect righteousness being accepted for justification on the merit of Christ actually amount to? Only this, as far as I can tell: that Christ has merited and procured either that God should judge as perfect what is imperfect and declare us perfectly righteous when we are not, or that He should judge the righteousness to be still imperfect (as it is) yet declare us perfectly righteous by this imperfect righteousness. These are the paths that people walk in when, unable to deny that a righteousness is required for justification or that we may be declared righteous before God in God's sight and according to His judgment, they yet deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and will allow no other righteousness for this purpose — one so weak and imperfect that no one can justify it in their own conscience, and no one but an arrogant fool could imagine themselves perfectly righteous by it.

When it is added that anyone who fails to see that our righteousness is subordinate to the righteousness of Christ must be blind — I must admit, notwithstanding the severity of that judg-

ment, that I see it differently. It seems to me that in the view being described, the righteousness of Christ is in fact subordinate to our own righteousness, not the other way around. For the goal of all of this is our acceptance with God as righteous. But according to this view, it is our own righteousness on the basis of which we are immediately accepted by God as righteous.

Christ has only merited, by His righteousness, that our righteousness may be so accepted — and is therefore, as far as the end of our justification before God is concerned, subordinate to it.

But to return from this digression and continue the argument: This personal inherent righteousness — which we acknowledge in believers according to Scripture — is not that by which or with which we are justified before God. For it is not perfect and does not perfectly answer any rule of obedience given to us; therefore it cannot be our righteousness before God for our justification. We must therefore be justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, or be justified without regard to any righteousness, or not be justified at all. A threefold imperfection accompanies our inherent righteousness.

The first imperfection concerns the habitual principle of inherent righteousness as it resides in us. First, a contrary principle of sin coexists with it in the same person throughout this life. Two opposing qualities can reside in the same subject as long as neither has fully prevailed. This is exactly the situation Paul describes: "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17). Second, none of our soul's faculties are perfectly renewed in this life. "The inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians

4:16) — meaning the process is ongoing, not complete. We are always to be "cleansing ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1). This includes everything Scripture says about the remnants of indwelling sin that believers find in themselves by experience — the darkness of our minds, by which at best we know only in part and through ignorance are prone to wander (Hebrews 5:2), the deceitfulness of the heart, and the disorder of the affections. I cannot understand how anyone could think of pleading their own righteousness before God, or suppose they could be justified by it, on this ground alone — the imperfection of its inherent habit and principle. Such ideas arise from ignorance of God and of ourselves, or from a failure to properly consider both. Nor can I see how any number of distinctions could safely introduce inherent righteousness into any role in our justification before God. Anyone who can search their own heart and soul by even a measure of spiritual light will find that "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" is a better plea than anything their own worth could supply. "What is man, that he should be pure, and he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15:14-16; 25:4). Gregory therefore wrote (lib. 9, cap. 14): "As we have often said, all human righteousness is shown to be unrighteousness if it is judged closely." Bernard speaks to the same point in nearly the same words (Serm. 1, fest. omn. sanct.): "What can all human righteousness amount to before God? Is it not, as the prophet says, regarded as a filthy garment? And if it is judged closely, all our righteousness will be found to be unrighteousness and lacking." A person cannot be justified in any sense by a righteousness that, upon close examination, turns out to be unrighteousness.

The second imperfection is that every act and duty of inherent righteousness — whether internal or external — is imperfect. Iniquity clings to our holy things, and "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6). It has often and rightly been observed that if even the best of men were allowed to choose the single best work he had ever performed and then enter into judgment with God on that work alone — claiming only that he had fulfilled the required condition for acceptance with God — his wisest course would be to renounce it and turn to grace and mercy alone. Even Bellarmine acknowledged as much.

The third imperfection comes from the ongoing presence of actual sins. Our Savior taught us to pray continually for the forgiveness of sins. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, for in many things we all stumble. And what confidence can be placed in a righteousness that even its own defenders admit is weak, crippled, and imperfect?

I have only touched on these points, which could have been developed at much greater length and are indeed of great importance to the present argument. But enough has been said to show that although the righteousness of believers is in other respects like the fruit of the vine — which gladdens the heart of God and man — it is, when it comes to our justification before God, like the wood of the vine: utterly useless, not even strong enough to hang any weight of this case upon.

Two defenses are offered on behalf of inherent righteousness and its role in justification. The first is that it is absolutely complete and perfect. Some on this basis claim they are sinless and perfect in this life, with no further need to mortify sin or grow in grace. This is, in fact, the only rationally coherent basis for arguing

that our justification before God rests on inherent righteousness. For if any person were genuinely sinless, what would prevent him from being justified on that basis before God — except that he had been a sinner before, which undoes the whole argument. But this empty notion is so plainly contradicted by Scripture, and by the experience of all who know the fear of the Lord and what it means to walk humbly before Him, that I will not spend time refuting it.

The second defense is this: even though our inherent righteousness does not perfectly fulfill the moral law, it does fulfill the condition of the new covenant — it fully answers the law of grace and everything required of us under it.

In answer: this claim eliminates sin and the need for pardon just as completely as the notion of sinless perfection we just rejected. If our obedience fully answers the only law and rule by which it is to be tested, measured, and judged, then there is no sin in us and no need for pardon. Nothing more is required to keep a person completely free from sin than that he fully and exactly comply with the rule and law of his obedience by which he must be judged. On this assumption, then, there is neither sin nor any need for its pardon. To say that sin still exists and pardon is still needed with respect to God's moral law is to admit that the moral law is in fact the rule of our obedience — and that this inherent righteousness does not answer it. Therefore no one can be justified before God by it.

The second point is this: even though this righteousness is accepted in justified persons by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, consider the principle of it, together with all the acts and duties that comprise it, as they are required and prescribed in the gospel — they do not, whether taken jointly or individually, fulfill and an-

swer the commands of the gospel any more than they answer the commands of the law. They therefore cannot together constitute a righteousness that consists in exact conformity to the rules of the gospel or its law. It is impious to suppose that the gospel, in requiring any duty of us — say, the love of God — reduces in any way the substance, manner, or degree of perfection required by the law. Does the gospel require a lower degree of love for God, a less perfect love than the law demanded? Absolutely not. The same applies to the inward disposition of our nature and to every other duty. Therefore, although this righteousness is accepted in justified persons — just as God had regard for Abel before He had regard for his offering — and is accepted in the manner and for the ends that will be described later, it is still, in relation to the commands of the gospel, no less imperfect than it would be if left to stand trial under the law of creation alone.

Third: I do not know what some people intend. On one hand they affirm that our Lord Jesus Christ deepened and heightened the spiritual demands of the moral law, and not only that, but added new commands of even more exact obedience than it required. Yet on the other hand, they would have Him reduce or lift the obligation of the law so that a person — having adapted it to gospel use — could be judged by God to have fulfilled all the obedience the law requires, even though he never answered a single precept of it according to its original sense and obligation. This is what must follow if our imperfect righteousness is in any way considered a fulfillment of the rule of our obedience such that we could be justified in the sight of God by it.

Fourth: this view creates an irreconcilable conflict between the law and the gospel — one that no distinction can resolve. According to it, God declares through the gospel that a person is perfectly righteous, justified, and blessed on the basis of a righteousness that is imperfect, while in the law He pronounces everyone cursed who does not continue in all things required by it, in the exact manner they are required. But it is said that this righteousness is to be understood only as the condition of the new covenant, by which we obtain remission of sins solely on the basis of Christ's satisfaction — and that this is where our justification consists.

In answer: first, some do say this, but not all — not most, and not the most learned opponents in this controversy. In defending what we believe to be the truth, we cannot always address every private opinion that opposes it. Second, the claim that justification consists only in the pardon of sin is so contrary to the meaning of the word, its consistent use in Scripture, the common understanding of mankind, the sense of people's own consciences under the obligation of duty, and the plain testimony of Scripture, that I am somewhat surprised it can even be proposed. But this will be addressed elsewhere. Third, if this righteousness is the fulfillment of the new covenant's condition on which we are justified, it must in itself exactly answer some rule or law of righteousness — it must therefore be perfect. But it is not perfect, and therefore cannot serve as the righteousness on which our justification rests. Fourth, the claim that this inherent righteousness is the condition of our justification before God — or of the interest in Christ's righteousness by which we are justified — has not been proved and never will be.

I will briefly add two or three considerations that exclude this personal righteousness from any role in our justification, and then close this argument.

First: any righteousness that neither answers God's law nor serves God's purpose in justification through the gospel is not the righteousness on which we are justified. The inherent righteousness of believers — even the best of them — is exactly that kind of righteousness. That it does not answer God's law has already been shown from its imperfection. No sober person will claim that it exactly and perfectly fulfills the law of creation. And that law cannot be abolished as long as the relationship between God and us continues — God as Creator and Rewarder, and we as creatures capable of obedience and receiving reward. Therefore, what does not answer this law will not justify us. God will not abolish that law simply so that those who transgressed it may be justified. Does the doctrine of justification by faith without works make void the law? As the apostle says, "God forbid! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). Second, being justified with reference to our own inherent righteousness does not serve God's purpose in justifying us through the gospel. That purpose is to remove all boasting in ourselves and every occasion for it — so that everything may be to the praise of His grace through Christ (Romans 3:27; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31). How faith alone gives glory to God in this has already been explained in the description of its nature. But it is clear that no one has — or could possibly have — any greater occasion for boasting in themselves with respect to their justification than if they are justified on the basis of their own performance of a condition that consists in their personal righteousness.

Second: no one has ever been justified by inherent righteousness in their own conscience — much less can anyone be justified by it in the sight of God. For God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. There is no person in the whole world, however righteous and holy, who has ever lived without their own conscience charging them in many things with falling short of the obedience required — in substance or manner, in kind or degree of perfection. For there is no one who lives and does not sin. As the ancient saying goes, no one is acquitted when he himself is the judge. Let anyone honestly examine whether they could be justified in their own conscience by their own righteousness, and they will find themselves condemned at their own judgment seat. And anyone who does not then conclude that there must be another righteousness — one that does not originally and inherently belong to them — by which they must be justified, will never find peace with God. But it will be said that people can be justified in their consciences that they have fulfilled the condition of the new covenant, which is all that is being claimed for this righteousness. I do not doubt at all that believers may have a settled assurance of their sincerity in obedience and a real satisfaction in God's acceptance of it. But this happens when they examine their obedience as a fruit of faith — the faith by which they are justified — not as the condition of their justification. If instead they frame the question this way — that God requires a personal righteousness as the basis for justification, and therefore they must determine, 'This is my righteousness, which I now present to God so that I may be justified' — they will find it extremely difficult to reach such assurance, if I am not greatly mistaken.

Third: none of the godly men and women of old whose faith and experience are recorded in Scripture ever pleaded their personal righteousness in any form — neither as meritorious works nor as a complete fulfillment of what the covenant required of them — as the basis for their justification before God. This point has already been addressed above.

CHAPTER 11: THE NATURE OF THE OBEDIENCE GOD REQUIRES; THE ETERNAL OBLIGATION OF THE LAW



Our second argument is drawn from the nature of the obedience or righteousness that God requires of us for us to be accepted and approved by Him. This is a broad subject if handled in full, so I will organize what is relevant here under a few specific headings.

First: God being the most perfect and therefore the most free of all agents, all His dealings with mankind — all His actions toward them, all His arrangements and laws concerning them — must be traced back ultimately to His sovereign will and pleasure. No other ultimate explanation can be given for the whole system of them. Scripture testifies to this (Psalm 115:3; 135:6; Proverbs 16:4; Ephesians 1:9, 11; Revelation 4:11). The existence and natural circumstances of all creatures are an effect of God's free counsel and pleasure, so everything that belongs to them must ultimately be resolved into that same source.

Second: given certain free acts of God's will and their execution — establishing an order among things external to Him and determining their relations to one another — some things become nec-

essary within that established order that were not absolutely necessary in their own nature. The order of all things and their mutual relations depend on God's free constitution just as much as their existence does. But once that constitution is established, things within that order stand in necessary relationship to one another and all of them to God. Therefore:

Third: it was a free and sovereign act of God's will to create a being like man — that is, a creature with intelligence, reason, and the capacity for moral obedience, reward, and punishment. But given that man exists as such, he could only be governed by a moral instrument — a law or rule — that works through the rational faculties of his soul to guide him toward obedience. He could not, by his nature, be governed the way irrational animals are, by mere physical influence. To suppose that would be to deny or destroy the essential faculties and powers with which he was created. Therefore, given that man exists, it was necessary that a law or rule of obedience be prescribed to him as the instrument of God's governance.

Fourth: this necessary law — necessary to the extent just described — arose immediately and unavoidably from the constitution of our nature in relation to God. Given the nature, existence, and attributes of God on one side, and the existence, nature, and necessary relationship of man to God on the other, this law is simply the rule governing that relationship — a relationship that cannot exist or be maintained without it. The law is therefore eternal and not subject to removal, admitting of no variation except as the relationship between God and man might vary — which is a necessary consequence of their distinct natures and attributes.

Fifth: the substance of this law was that man, clinging to God absolutely, universally, unchangeably, and without interruption — in trust, love, and fear — as the highest good and the first author of his being and all present and future benefits, should yield obedience to Him. This obedience was to be given with respect to God's infinite wisdom, righteousness, and almighty power to protect, reward, and punish, in all things known to be His will and pleasure — whether known through the natural light of reason or through special revelation. It is clear that nothing more is required to establish this law than that God be God and man be man, with the necessary relationship that must follow between them. Therefore:

Sixth: this law eternally and unchangeably obligates all people to obedience to God — that obedience which it requires, in the manner in which it requires it. Both the substance of what it requires and the manner of its performance — its measures and degrees — are equally necessary and unalterable, given the premises laid down. For God cannot contradict Himself, and the essential nature of man — to which alone this law has reference — is not changed by anything that may happen to him. Even if God chose to add to the original obligations of this law whatever additional commands He pleased — commands that did not necessarily arise from the relationship between Him and us, and could exist or not exist independently — these would still be resolved into that foundational principle of the law: that God is to be trusted and obeyed absolutely in all things.

Seventh: all God's works are known to Him from the foundation of the world. In establishing this order of things, He made it possible and foresaw it would happen that man would rebel against the preceptive authority of this law and disturb the order in

which he had been placed under God's moral governance. This gave rise to an expression of infinite divine righteousness in the form of the punishment appointed to fall on man upon his transgression of the law. This punishment was no more a product of arbitrary will than the law itself was. Given the creation of man, the law described was necessary — arising from all the divine attributes of God's nature. And given that man would transgress that law, God now acting as his Ruler and Governor, the appointment of punishment due to man's sin and transgression was a necessary expression of divine righteousness. This would not have been the case if the law itself had been arbitrary. But since the law was necessary, so was the penalty for transgressing it. Therefore the appointment of this penalty is no more subject to change, alteration, or removal than the law itself — short of a fundamental change in the relationship between God and man.

Eighth: this is the law that our Lord Jesus Christ came not to abolish but to fulfill — so that He might be the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe. He did not and could not abolish this law without destroying the relationship between God and man that necessarily arises from their distinct natures and attributes. Since that relationship cannot be destroyed, the Lord Christ came to the opposite end: to repair and restore what had been weakened in it. Therefore:

Ninth: this law — the law requiring sinless, perfect obedience, with its sentence of death upon all transgressors — does and must remain in force forever in this world. Nothing more is required for this to be so than that God be God and man be man. This will be further demonstrated below.

First: there is nothing in Scripture — not a single word — indicating any alteration or abolition of this law. Nothing that the law declares to be a duty has ceased to be a duty; nothing it calls sin has ceased to be sin — whether in matter or degree. Nor has anything the law declares to be sin been exempted from deserving the punishment its sanction announces. The wages of sin is death. If any scriptural testimony can be produced to show either that something the law declares sinful — whether by omission or commission, in substance or manner — is no longer sin, or that any such sin is now exempt from the punishment the law threatens in terms of merit and desert, it should be brought forward. Until then, this law stands in universal force toward all mankind. There is no relief from it — except: behold the Lamb of God.

Against this it is argued that when this law was first given to Adam, it served as the rule and instrument of a covenant between God and man — a covenant of works and perfect obedience. But with the entrance of sin, it ceased to function as a covenant for anyone. Indeed, it so ceased that even if — on an impossible supposition — someone were to fulfill its perfect righteousness, he would not thereby be justified or obtain the benefit of the covenant. The law has therefore not merely become ineffective for us as a covenant because of our weakness and inability to perform it; it has ceased, in its own nature, to be a covenant at all. But these claims, besides being irrelevant to our present argument, are wholly unproved. For the following reasons:

First: our discussion is not about the law's covenantal dimension but about its moral nature only. It is enough to establish that as a law it continues to bind all mankind to perfect obedience under its original penalty. From this it unavoidably follows that un-

less its commands are fulfilled, the penalty will fall on all who transgress it. Those who grant that this law still has force as a rule of obedience — as requiring duties of us — have conceded everything we need. For it requires no obedience except what it originally required: sinless and perfect obedience. And it requires no duty and forbids no sin except under the penalty of death for disobedience.

Second: it is true that once a person has sinned, perfect obedience to God afterward could not by itself gain him the benefit of the covenant's promise. But the only reason for this is that he is already a sinner and therefore already liable to the law's curse. No one can be under the curse of the law and have a claim to its promise at the same time. But suppose a person were somehow freed from the curse due to sin — if we then denied that perfect, sinless obedience of the kind the law requires would give that person a right to the promise of life, we would be denying the truth of God and casting the highest dishonor on His justice. Jesus Christ Himself was justified by this law. And it remains unchangeably true that he who does what the law requires shall live by it.

Third: it is granted that man did not continue in obedience to this law in its role as the rule of the covenant between God and him. To be precise: the law was not itself the covenant, but its rule — the covenantal aspect being added on top of the law's inherent authority. The covenant included elements that did not arise necessarily from the relationship between God and man. Therefore, by sinning, man may be said to have broken the covenant in terms of forfeiting its benefits and, as far as any advantage to himself was concerned, rendering it void. It is also true that God never formally and absolutely renewed or re-enacted this law as a covenant a sec-

ond time. Nor was there any need for Him to do so, except in a declarative sense — which is what happened at Sinai. For the whole law, being an expression of eternal right and truth, remains and must remain in full force forever. The covenant has been broken only in this sense: all mankind has sinned against its commands and, through guilt and the resulting inability to obey, has forfeited any claim to its promise and any possibility of obtaining such a claim. But as to the law's power to bind all mankind to obedience, and the unchangeable truth of its promises and threats, it remains exactly what it was from the beginning.

Second: remove this law, and mankind is left with no standard of righteousness, no certain boundaries between good and evil. The pillars on which God has fixed the moral order of the world would be left to drift and float like a ship without an anchor. Some say the rule of good and evil for humanity is not this original law but the light of nature and the dictates of reason. If they mean the original light that was created with our nature, and those dictates of right and wrong that reason originally suggested and approved, they are simply saying in other words that this law remains the unalterable rule of obedience for all mankind. But if they mean the residual light of nature that continues in fallen individuals in this corrupted state — further distorted by traditions, customs, prejudices, and every kind of sinful desire — there is nothing more irrational. This leaves no certain boundary between good and evil: what is good to one person would on this basis be evil in its very nature to another, and vice versa. And every idolater who has ever existed could use this argument as an excuse.

Third: conscience bears witness to this law. Regarding every good commanded and every evil forbidden by this law, no one in the world, once it is made clear to them, can convince or bribe their conscience to withhold agreement as to what it means for them personally. Conscience will accuse or excuse, condemn or acquit, according to the sentence of this law — whatever a person does to resist it.

Briefly acknowledged: by virtue of His supreme dominion over all things, God may in some instances alter the ordinary operation of the divine law's precepts. This is what happened when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son and when He directed the Israelites to take the Egyptians' valuables. But assuming the continuation of the order of things that this law was designed to preserve, the intrinsic nature of the goods it commands and the evils it forbids places them beyond the reach of divine dispensation — as even the scholastic theologians generally concede.

Tenth: from what has been discussed, two things unavoidably follow.

First: since all mankind has fallen under the penalty threatened for transgressing this law, and since enduring that penalty — eternal death — is incompatible with acceptance before God or the enjoyment of blessedness, it is utterly impossible for any descendant of Adam to be justified in God's sight, accepted by Him, or blessed by Him unless this penalty is answered, borne, and suffered — either by them or for them. The law in this regard is not to be abolished but established.

Second: for the same ends — acceptance with God, justification before Him, and blessing from Him — the righteousness of this eternal law must be fulfilled in us in such a way that by God's judgment, which is according to truth, we are reckoned to have fulfilled it and are treated accordingly. For if this is not fulfilled, the law's sanction is not an arbitrary matter — the penalty may or may not be applied according to some discretion — but is a necessary consequence of God's righteousness as the supreme Governor of all.

Eleventh: on the first of these two points, our controversy is with the Socinians alone, who deny the satisfaction of Christ and any necessity for it. I have addressed this at length elsewhere and do not expect to see a response to the arguments I have set forth there. On the second point, we must ask how we can be said to comply with the rule of this unchangeable law — whose authority we can in no way escape. Our answer is that the obedience and righteousness of Christ imputed to us — His obedience as the surety of the new covenant, granted to us and made ours by God's gracious constitution, sovereign appointment, and donation — is the basis on which we are judged and reckoned to have answered the righteousness of the law. "Through the obedience of the One the many were made righteous" (Romans 5:19). "So that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:4). From this we argue as follows.

If there is no other way for the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled in us — without which we cannot be justified but must inevitably fall under the penalty threatened for transgressing it — except through the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, then that

imputed righteousness is the sole righteousness by which we are justified in God's sight. The premise is true, and so is the conclusion.

Twelfth: given this law with its original obligation to obedience, its sanction, and its threats, there are only three possible ways in which those of us who have sinned — and are entirely unable in ourselves to render the obedience the law requires going forward — can come to be justified before God. Each of them involves a sovereign act of God with reference to this law. The first is the abolition of the law — so that it no longer binds us to either obedience or punishment. We have shown this to be impossible, and those who place their trust in it will fatally deceive themselves. The second is the transfer of the law's obligation, for the purpose of justification, onto a surety or common representative. This is what we contend for as the substance of the mystery of the gospel — given who this Surety is and the grace He brings. By this way, all things tend toward the exaltation of God's glory in all the holy attributes of His nature, together with the fulfilling and establishing of the law itself (Matthew 5:17; Romans 3:31; 8:4; 10:3-4). The third way involves an act of God with respect to the law on one side and an act toward us on the other, by which the nature of the righteousness the law requires is changed. This is the only remaining alternative to our present argument, and we will now examine it.

Third consideration: it is claimed that by our own personal obedience we answer the righteousness of the law to the extent required of us. But since no sober person can imagine that we are able — or that anyone in our fallen condition has ever been able — to render in our own persons the perfect, sinless obedience to God

that the law of creation requires, two suppositions are needed to make our obedience, such as it is, acceptable to God as if it were sinless and perfect. For although some will not allow that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us for what it actually is, they contend that our own righteousness is imputed to us for what it is not. One of these two suppositions concerns the law, the other concerns our obedience.

Fourteenth: what is said about the law is not that it has been abolished. Although abolishing the law of creation entirely — removing its obligation both to obedience and to punishment, leaving in force only a law requiring sincere obedience with no absolute standard for how that obedience must be performed — might seem the most convenient way to resolve this difficulty, many do not in fact claim this. They do not say the law is abolished in such a way that it no longer has the force and effect of a law toward us. Nor is it possible that it should be, and no basis can be given for how it could be. It is true that the law has been broken by man — broken by all of us — with respect to its primary purpose of keeping us in subjection to God and dependence on Him according to its rule. But it is foolish to think that the failures of those to whom a righteous law was rightly given should abolish the law itself. A good and just law may cease and expire in its binding power when the relationship it governed ceases or expires. So the apostle tells us that when a woman's husband dies, she is free from the law of her husband (Romans 7:2). But the relationship between God and us, established in creation, can never cease. Furthermore, a law cannot be abolished without a new law enacted by the same or an equal authority — either expressly revoking the old one or requiring things incompatible with it and contradictory to its observance.

It was in this second way that the law of the Mosaic institutions was abolished. There was no direct law enacted to remove it; rather, the establishment of a new form of worship through the gospel — incompatible with and contrary to the old — stripped it of all binding authority. But God has taken neither of these approaches with respect to the original law of moral obedience — neither as to its duties nor as to its rewards and punishments. There is no direct law enacting its abolition, and He has given no new law of moral obedience that is either incompatible with or contrary to it. On the contrary, the gospel declares that this law is established and fulfilled.

It is true, as was noted earlier, that this law was also made the instrument of a covenant between God and man — and that provides another angle to consider. For God has actually introduced a new covenant that is incompatible with and contrary to the old. Yet even this does not instantly and automatically free all people from the law in its covenantal capacity. For the binding force of a law requires only that its content be just and right, that it was enacted by one with proper authority to do so, and that it has been sufficiently declared to those who are to be bound by it. Therefore the enactment and proclamation of a new law automatically abolishes any previous law contrary to it and frees all those formerly bound by it. But a covenant does not work this way. A covenant does not operate by mere sovereign authority alone — it does not become a covenant without the consent of the parties with whom it is made. Therefore no benefit and no freedom from the old covenant comes to any person simply because the new covenant has been constituted, unless that person has actually come to it, embraced it, and been brought into it. In Adam, we consented to

and accepted the first covenant. And despite our sin, we remain — and must remain — under its obligation to duty and punishment, until by faith we become partakers of the new covenant. It cannot therefore be said that we have no concern with fulfilling the righteousness of this law on the grounds that it has been abolished.

Fifteenth: nor can it be claimed that the law has received a new interpretation by which it is now declared not to require sinless, perfect obedience — so that its demands can be met on far easier terms. The law was given to us when we were sinless and for the specific purpose of keeping us in that condition. It is absurd to say it did not oblige us to sinless obedience. To propose this is not a reinterpretation of the law but a plain corruption of its sense and meaning. Nor is any such thing even hinted at in the gospel. In fact, our Savior's teaching on the law is completely destructive of any such idea. The scribes and Pharisees had attempted by false glosses and interpretations to accommodate the law to human desires and appetites — a practice later pursued both theoretically and practically by those who, in burdening people's consciences with their own commands, consistently try to compensate by being indulgent with respect to God's commands. But Christ rejected all such attempts at accommodation and restored the law to its original, full demands — just as Jewish tradition holds the Messiah would do.

Sixteenth: nor can a relaxation of the law be claimed, if such a thing exists at all in principle. If it does exist, it would concern the law as a whole and would consist either in suspending its entire obligation — at least for a time — or in substituting another person to answer its demands in the place of those originally obligated. Some do say that the Lord Christ was made under the law for us

through an act of relaxation of the original obligation — how technically accurate that is, they may judge for themselves. But in the sense relevant here, this concept has no application.

Seventeenth: the act of God toward the law that is being proposed in this case is a partial reduction of its binding power with respect to obedience. The original law obligated us to perfect, sinless obedience in all duties — both in their substance and in the manner of their performance. The proposal is that the law should still be allowed to bind us to obedience, but not to the exact same obedience as before — specifically not to its completeness and perfection. For if it did still require perfect obedience, then either that requirement must be fulfilled by Christ's righteousness on our behalf, or no living person can ever be justified in God's sight. So by this partial reduction of the law's original power, the proposal is that the law now requires sincere and universal obedience — covering all its parts — but not absolutely sinless and perfect obedience. Even if our obedience is performed with less intensity of love for God, or at a lower degree than the law originally required, that is now all the law asks of us. This is all it requires as it has been adapted to serve the new covenant and made the rule of obedience according to the law of Christ. On this view, the law's preceptive demands, as they apply to us, are met and satisfied. Whether any of this is actually the case, we will examine briefly and directly.

Eighteenth: from this it follows that God's act with respect to our obedience is not an act of judgment according to any rule or law of His own, but an acceptilation — a legal fiction by which what is genuinely imperfect is treated and accepted as perfect, or as a substitute for what is perfect.

Nineteenth: it is added that both of these — the reduction of the law's demands and the acceptation of imperfect obedience — depend on and are procured by Christ's obedience, suffering, and merit. It is on account of His work that our weak and imperfect obedience is accepted as if it were perfect, and that the law's power to require absolutely perfect obedience is removed. And since these are effects of Christ's righteousness, that righteousness may on their account and to that extent be said to be imputed to us.

Twentieth: but despite all the effort expended to give these ideas an appearance of truth, both of them are human inventions and fictions — they have no grounding in Scripture and do not accord with the experience of those who believe. To touch briefly on the experiential point first: every true believer has two things firmly established in his mind and conscience.

First: in every principle, habit, quality, and action where he falls short of perfect compliance with God's holy law — the law as it originally required perfect obedience — he recognizes that he has sinned, and that what he has done in itself deserves the curse originally attached to breaking that law. True believers therefore do not perceive the law's obligation as having been lifted, weakened, or reduced in any way. Second: they find no relief from what the law requires or from what it threatens except through the mediation of Jesus Christ alone, who is made righteousness for them by God. They therefore do not rest on or find comfort in the acceptance of their own obedience, as if it were sufficient to answer the law — but trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God.

Twenty-first: both of these positions are also doctrinally false. On the first claim — the reduction of the law's demands — three things may be said. First, it has no scriptural basis. There is no hint

in Scripture of any such arrangement by which God has reduced the demands of the original law of obedience. Much is said about our deliverance from the law's curse through Christ, but nothing at all about any reduction of its preceptive authority. Second, it is contrary to Scripture. Scripture plainly states that the law is not to be abolished but fulfilled, not to be nullified but established, and that its righteous requirement must be fulfilled in us. Third, it is a supposition both unreasonable and impossible, for the following reasons. The law was a representation to us of God's holiness and His righteousness in governing His creatures. No change can be made here, since with God Himself there is no variableness or shadow of turning. It would also leave no fixed standard of righteousness — only a flexible rule that bends and adapts to the capacities and abilities of each individual, leaving as many different measures of righteousness as there are believers in the world. It would also involve a change in the very center of all religion: the natural and moral relationship of human beings to God. For there must be such a change if everything that was once necessary to that relationship no longer continues to be. Furthermore, it dishonors the mediation of Christ. It makes the principal purpose of His mediation to be that God should accept for our justification a righteousness incomparably inferior to what He originally required. In a sense this makes Christ the agent of sin — not by taking away its guilt through satisfaction and pardon, but by stripping away its very nature and demerit, so that what was originally sin should no longer be sin, or at least should no longer deserve the punishment originally threatened. Finally, it reflects poorly on God's own goodness. If He has now reduced His law to a state where it can be satisfied by obedience as weak, as imperfect, and

as accompanied by as many failures and sins as even the best believers' obedience is in this world — whatever the delusions of pride may suggest to anyone's mind to the contrary — what reason consistent with His goodness can be given for why He originally gave a law of perfect obedience, where a single sin brought the penalty of ruin on all mankind?

Twenty-second: all these and various other objections of the same kind also apply to the second claim — the acceptilation, or the imaginary treating of imperfect obedience as if it were perfect, of sin-laden obedience as if it were sinless. But God's judgment is according to truth. He will not reckon as a perfect righteousness in His sight what is so imperfect as to be like torn rags — especially when He has promised us robes of righteousness and garments of salvation.

The necessary conclusion from all this discussion is that there is no other way in which God's original and unchangeable law can be established and fulfilled with respect to us, except through the imputation of the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ — who is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe.

CHAPTER 12: THE IMPUTATION OF THE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST UNTO THE LAW, DECLARED AND VINDICATED



From the preceding general argument, a particular argument follows concerning the imputation of Christ's active obedience and righteousness to us as an essential part of the righteousness on which we are justified before God. It runs as follows: if it was necessary that the Lord Christ, as our Surety, undergo the law's penalty for us and in our place — because we have all sinned — then it was equally necessary that as our Surety He yield obedience to the preceptive part of the law for us as well. And if the imputation of the former is needed for our justification before God, then the imputation of the latter is needed for the same end. Why was it necessary — why did God require — that the Lord Christ as the covenant's Surety should bear the curse and penalty of the law that we had incurred by sin, in order for us to be justified before Him? Was it not so that the honor and glory of God's righteousness — as the author of the law and the supreme Governor of all mankind — might not be violated by the sins of its transgressors going entirely unpunished? If it was essential to God's glory that

the law's penalty be borne for us, or suffered by our Surety in our place, because we had sinned, why is it not equally essential to God's glory that the preceptive part of the law be fulfilled for us — since obedience to it is required of us? We are no more able to fulfill the law through obedience by our own power than we are to undergo its penalty in a way that justifies us. And no reason can be given why God is any less concerned for His honor and glory in having the law's preceptive authority met by perfect obedience than in having its sanction upheld by the suffering of its penalty. Therefore on the same grounds that it was necessary for the Lord Christ to suffer the law's penalty for us so that we might be justified in God's sight — and that the satisfaction He thereby made should be imputed to us as if we ourselves had made it to God, as Bellarmine himself says and grants — on those same grounds it was equally necessary, for the honor and glory of the Lawgiver and supreme Governor, that He fulfill the law's preceptive demands through His perfect obedience, which is also to be imputed to us for our justification.

On the first of these points — Christ's satisfaction and its imputation to us — our primary dispute is with the Socinians. I have written extensively elsewhere in defense of the truth on that subject and will not repeat those arguments here. That point is therefore taken for granted here, though I am aware that some have different views about the nature of Christ's suffering in our stead and the imputation of those sufferings to us. I will not address those differences here, since I press this argument only to this point: that the imputation of Christ's obedience to the law is no less necessary for our justification before God than the imputation of His suffer-

ing of the law's penalty to the same end. The nature of this imputation and what formally is imputed has already been addressed elsewhere.

That Christ the Mediator's obedience is thus imputed to us will be proved below from specific scriptural testimonies. Here my aim is only to defend the argument as stated above, which will take somewhat more time than usual. For no part of the whole doctrine of justification faces more fierce and varied opposition than this. But the truth is great and will prevail.

The objections typically urged against the imputation of Christ's obedience to our justification can be grouped under three headings. First, that it is impossible. Second, that it is useless. Third, that it is dangerous to believe it. If the arguments used to support these objections are as strong as the charges themselves are fierce and severe, they would inevitably overthrow this conviction in the minds of all sober people. But there is often a wide difference between what is asserted and what is actually proved, as will become evident in this case.

First, the charge of impossibility rests on a single ground: that Christ's obedience to the law was owed by Him on His own account and was performed by Him for Himself, as a man placed under the law. What was necessary for Himself and done for Himself, it is argued, cannot be said to have been done for us in a way that could be imputed to us.

Second, the charge of uselessness is based on this reasoning: since all our sins of omission and commission are pardoned in justification on account of Christ's death and satisfaction, we are

thereby made completely righteous. There is therefore no need and no use for the imputation of Christ's obedience to us.

Third, some say it is dangerous — that it removes the necessity of our own personal obedience and introduces antinomianism, moral license, and all manner of evils.

The third charge I will address in its proper place. Though some urge it specifically against this aspect of justification, others direct it against the whole doctrine. And even if we were to grant that Christ's obedience to the law is not imputed to us for justification, we would still not be free from this false accusation — unless we were also prepared to abandon the entirety of Christ's satisfaction and merit. We do not intend to purchase our peace with the world at that price. I will therefore address this charge in its proper place, as it applies to the whole doctrine of justification and all its components that we believe and profess.

The first charge — that the imputation of Christ's obedience to us is impossible — is pressed by Socinus (*de Servat.*, part 3, cap. 5). Everything since argued to the same effect has been derived from him, or at least anticipated by him before others arrived at it. He makes this argument the primary weapon with which he tries to overthrow the entire doctrine of Christ's merit. His reasoning is that if everything Christ did in obedience was owed by Him on His own account — being simply the duty He owed to God for Himself in His station and circumstances as a man in this world — then it cannot be meritorious for us or imputed to us in any way. In a similar move, he weakens the doctrine of Christ's satisfaction and its imputation to us by arguing that Christ offered as a priest for Himself in the offering He made on the cross (part 2, cap. 22). His actual view was that whatever was sacrificial or offering-like in

Christ's death was for Himself — that is, it was an act of obedience to God that pleased Him as a sweet-smelling fragrance. Christ's offering for us, in Socinus's view, consists only in His presenting Himself in God's presence in heaven, now that He no longer has any duty to perform for Himself. And the truth is: if Christ's obedience had reference only to Himself — if He yielded it to God out of the necessity of His own condition and not for us — I see no remaining foundation for asserting His merit, any more than I see a foundation for its imputation to those who believe.

What we contend for is this: the Lord Christ fulfilled the whole law for us. He not only bore the law's penalty due to our sins but also yielded the perfect obedience it required. I will not here enter into the debate about the distinction between Christ's active and passive obedience. For He exercised the highest active obedience in His very suffering, when He offered Himself to God through the eternal Spirit. And all His obedience — given who He was as a person — was mingled with suffering as part of His self-emptying and humiliation, which is why Scripture says that though He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. Moreover, while doing and suffering belong to different categories of things, scriptural testimony is not to be regulated by philosophical distinctions. It must also be said that Christ's sufferings, considered purely as penal, are only imprecisely called His passive righteousness. All righteousness consists either in a disposition or in an action — and suffering is neither. No one is considered righteous, or is deemed righteous, on the basis of what they suffer. Sufferings also give no satisfaction to the law's commands, which require only obedience. It therefore unavoidably follows that we need more than Christ's sufferings alone to be justified before God, if any

righteousness is required for that justification. But all I am arguing here is this: Christ's fulfilling of the law through obedience to its commands is no less imputed to us for our justification than His bearing of the law's penalty.

I cannot help thinking that it sounds deeply wrong to the ears of all Christians to say that the Lord Jesus Christ's obedience as Mediator and Surety to the whole law of God was for Himself alone and not for us — or that what He did in that obedience was not so that He might be the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe, nor a means of fulfilling the law's righteous requirement in us. This is especially so given that the faith of the church is that He was given to us, born for us — that for us and for our salvation He came down from heaven and did and suffered all that was required of Him. But since those who deny the imputation of Christ's obedience to us for justification press mainly on the second charge — its uselessness — I will under this first head consider only the arguments of Socinus, which are the primary tools some use to confuse the truth in our own day.

His argument runs as follows (*de Servat.*, part 3, cap. 5): "It is plain that Christ, because He was born a man, and indeed — as Paul says — made under the law, was no less subject to the divine law, which is eternal and unchangeable, than other men. Otherwise Christ could have neglected God's eternal law or even broken it entirely if He chose — which is impious even to think. In fact, as was explained above, unless Christ Himself had been subject to keeping the divine law — as Paul's words indicate — He could not have helped those who are subject to keeping that law, nor brought them to a firm hope of immortality. In this respect, therefore, Christ when born as a man did not differ from other

men. Therefore He could not, by keeping the divine law, render satisfaction on behalf of others any more than any other man could — since He was Himself entirely obligated to keep it." I have transcribed his words exactly so that it may be seen with whose weapons some young disputants among us take the field against the truth.

The substance of Socinus's argument is that our Lord Jesus Christ was obligated to all the obedience He performed by virtue of His own standing, on His own account. He tries to prove this by arguing: if it were otherwise — if He were not obligated to obedience on His own account — then He could have neglected the whole law of God and broken it at will. But Socinus forgot to consider that if Christ was not obligated to obedience on His own account but on ours — because He had taken up our cause — the obligation of obedience upon Him was no less complete and perfect than it would have been if He had been personally obligated on His own account. From his premise, Socinus infers that what Christ did could not have been for us, because it was done for Himself — just as whatever any other person is bound to do in duty for himself cannot be reckoned as having been done for another. For Socinus will not allow any consideration of the person of Christ that would give what He did and suffered a different nature and efficacy from what any other man could do or suffer. The only additional point he makes in the course of his argument is that whatever Christ did that was not required by the law in general was done on the special command of God and therefore for Himself — so it cannot be imputed to us. By this reasoning he excludes the church from any benefit from Christ's mediation except what consists in His teaching, example, and the exercise of His

power in heaven on our behalf — which was in fact his goal. But we must also address those who make use of his arguments without yet openly sharing all his conclusions.

To clarify the truth here, the following points must be observed.

First: the obedience under discussion was the obedience of Christ the Mediator. But the obedience of Christ as Mediator of the covenant was the obedience of His person — for God redeemed His church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). It was performed in the human nature, but the person of Christ was the one who performed it. Just as in any human being, some acts are immediately acts of the body and some of the soul, yet in their performance they are acts of the whole person — so the acts of Christ in His mediation were, as to their immediate operation, the acts of His distinct natures: some of the divine and some of the human. But as to their full accomplishment and effective power, they were the acts of His whole person — the person who performed them and whose power of operation was a property of that person. Therefore the obedience we are discussing was the obedience of the Son of God. But the Son of God was never absolutely placed under the law as a whole person, nor could He formally be bound by it. He was indeed, as the apostle testifies, placed under the law in His human nature — "born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4) — to the extent that He was born of a woman. Yet in His person He remained Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) — and therefore Lord of the whole law. The obedience itself was the obedience of a person who was never, and could never be, absolutely placed under the law in His whole person. The divine nature cannot be subjected to an external work of its own such as the law, nor can the law have

authoritative commanding power over it — as it would have to if Christ were placed under the law in His divine nature. The apostle argues similarly that Levi paid tithes in Abraham, because he was in Abraham's body when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), and from this proves that Levi was inferior to the Lord Christ, of whom Melchizedek was a type. But could it not be replied that Christ was in Abraham's body no less than Levi? For, as the same apostle says, He took on Himself the seed of Abraham. It is true that He did so with respect to His human nature — but as He was represented by Melchizedek in His whole person, without father or mother or genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, He was not absolutely in Abraham's body and was exempt from being tithed in him. Therefore the obedience we are discussing is not the obedience of the human nature in abstraction — even though it was performed in and through the human nature — but the obedience of the person of the Son of God. Whatever the human nature's subjection to the law (in what sense and to what ends will be addressed later), this obedience was not for Himself, and could not have been for Himself, because His whole person was not under the law's obligation. It is therefore absurd to compare Christ's obedience with that of any other man, whose whole person is under the law. For while another man's duty performed for himself might not be reckoned as done for others (though we will show that in some cases it may), Christ's obedience both could and must have been for others, and not for Himself. This we must hold firmly. If the obedience Christ yielded to the law had been for Himself — since it was the act of His person, His whole person — then the divine nature within that person would have been placed under the law, which is impossible. For although God's ordering of

things required that Christ's self-emptying precede His glorious and majestic exaltation, as Scripture testifies (Philippians 2:9; Luke 24:26; Romans 14:9), yet absolutely His glory was an immediate consequence of the hypostatic union (Hebrews 1:6; Matthew 2:11).

Socinus evades the force of this argument by denying the divine person of Christ. But in this discussion I take that as established, having proved it elsewhere beyond what any of his followers have been able to counter. If we may not build on truths he denies, we will scarcely have any principle of evangelical truth left from which to prove anything. In any case, I intend to address only those who share his position on the matter under debate while rejecting his view of the person of Christ.

Second: as our Lord Jesus Christ did not personally owe this obedience for Himself by any authority or power the law held over Him, so He did not intend or design it for Himself but for us. This point, added to the first, gives full confirmation to the truth we are defending. For if He was not obligated to obedience for Himself — His person not being under the law — and if He did not intend it for Himself, then it must have been for us, or it was pointless. He performed all this obedience in our human nature. But the taking on of our nature was His own voluntary act, done with reference to a specific end and purpose. Whatever was the purpose of assuming our nature was equally the purpose of all He did within that nature. Now He assumed our nature for us and not for Himself — nothing was added to Him by it. In the outcome of His work, His only goal for Himself was to be restored to the glory He had shared with the Father before the world was, by the removal of the veil

placed on it through His self-emptying. But that He assumed our nature for us is the foundation of the Christian faith, as the apostle affirms (Hebrews 2:14; Philippians 2:5-8).

Some of the ancient schoolmen debated whether the Son of God would have become incarnate even if man had not sinned and fallen. Osiander fiercely pursued the same opinion, as I have noted elsewhere. But none of them ever imagined that He would have been made man so as to be placed under the law and obligated to the obedience He has now performed. They believed He would have been, immediately upon incarnation, a glorious head to the whole creation. For it is the common and virtually universal conviction of all Christians — except those who sacrifice such convictions to their own private theories — that the obedience Christ yielded to the law on earth, in the state and condition in which He yielded it, was not for Himself but for the church, which was obligated to perfect obedience but unable to render it. That this was His sole end and design is, if I am not mistaken, a foundational article of the creed of most Christians in the world. To deny it is to undercut all the grace and love of both the Father and the Son in His mediation.

It is said that this obedience was necessary as a qualification of His person to make Him fit to serve as Mediator for us, and therefore was for Himself. It belongs, the claim goes, to the necessary constitution of His person with respect to His mediatorial work. This I positively deny. The Lord Christ was fully equipped in every way for the whole work of mediation by the ineffable union of the human nature with the divine — a union that elevated the human nature in dignity, honor, and worth beyond anything else or any combination of things that followed from it. Through this union

He became in His whole person the object of all divine worship and honor, for when God brings the Firstborn into the world He says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." Furthermore, what is an effect of the Mediator's person as already constituted cannot be a qualification necessary to constitute it. That is: what He did as Mediator did not contribute to making Him fit to be Mediator. And all the obedience He yielded to the law was of this character — performed as Mediator, because "it was fitting for Him to fulfill all righteousness."

Since He was made man and of the line of Abraham not for Himself but for the church — specifically to become thereby the Surety of the covenant and the representative of the whole — His obedience as a man to the law in general, and as a son of Abraham to the law of Moses, was for us and not for Himself. It was designed as such, performed as such, and apart from its reference to the church it would have served no purpose for Him. He was born for us, given to us, lived for us, died for us, obeyed for us, and suffered for us — so that through the obedience of One, many might be made righteous. This is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the faith of the universal church. And what He did for us is imputed to us. This is included in the very concept of His doing it for us — for that phrase has no meaning unless what He so did is imputed to us. People should be careful not to shake the foundations of the Christian faith through clever distinctions and studied evasions in defense of their own private opinions. And I am certain it will be easier, as the proverb says, to wrest the club from the hand of Hercules than to dislodge from the minds of true believers the conviction that what the Lord Christ did in obedience to God according to the law, He designed in His love and grace to do for

them. He had no need of obedience for Himself. He did not enter into a capacity for yielding obedience for His own benefit, but for ours. Therefore it was for us that He fulfilled the law in obedience to God according to its terms. The obligation laid on Him to obedience was as entirely for us, as needful to us, as not for Himself, and as unnecessary for His own sake, as was the obligation laid on Him as the covenant's Surety to bear the law's penalty — neither more nor less.

Third: setting aside the grace and love of Christ and the compact between the Father and the Son regarding His undertaking for us — which undeniably proves that everything He did in the pursuit of that undertaking was done for us and not for Himself — even apart from those considerations, the human nature of Christ, by virtue of its union with the person of the Son of God, had a right to and could have been immediately admitted into the highest glory of which it was capable, without any prior obedience to the law. This is evident from the fact that from the very first moment of that union, the whole person of Christ — with our nature existing in it — was the object of all divine worship from angels and men, in which consists the highest possible exaltation of that nature.

It is true that there was a particular form of glory that Christ was actually to receive in connection with His prior obedience and suffering (Philippians 2:8-9). By God's ordination, His actual possession of this glory was to follow His obeying and suffering — not for Himself but for us. But as to the right and capacity of the human nature itself, all the glory of which it was capable was due to it from the instant of the union. For in that union it was exalted above the condition that any creature is capable of through mere

creation. It is a Socinian fiction that the first foundation of Christ's divine glory was laid in His obedience. His obedience was only the path to His actual possession of that portion of His glory that consists in His mediatorial power and authority over all. The true foundation of the whole was laid in the union of His person — from which He prays that the Father would glorify Him (in outward manifestation) with the glory He had with Him before the world was.

I will grant that the Lord Christ was a traveler through this world — a pilgrim in the state of obedience, not yet in possession of full glory. Yet I say that this was not a necessary condition for His own sake but was something He took upon Himself by special arrangement for us. Therefore the obedience He performed in that condition was for us and not for Himself.

Fourth: it is granted that Christ's human nature was placed under the law, as the apostle affirms — "born of a woman, born under the law." By this, obedience became necessary for Him in His capacity as a pilgrim in this world. But since this was by special arrangement — expressed in the very language of the text, "made under the law" in the same way He was "made of a woman," by deliberate condescension (Philippians 2:6-8) — the obedience He rendered as a result was for us and not for Himself. This is clear from the following: He was placed under the law in such a way that He owed not only obedience to its precepts but was also made liable to its curse. Surely no one would say that His liability to the curse was for Himself and not for us. We owed obedience to the law and were under its curse. Obedience was required of us, and was just as necessary if we were to enter life as bearing the curse on our behalf was necessary if we were to escape eternal death. Christ as our

Surety was placed under the law for us — bound both to the obedience the law required and to the penalty it threatened. Who would dare say that He bore the law's penalty for us but yielded obedience to it for Himself alone? Such a supposition would throw the whole harmony of His mediatorial work into disorder.

Judah, the son of Jacob, undertook to become a slave in Benjamin's place so that his brother might go free (Genesis 44:33). There is no doubt that Joseph could have accepted this offer. Had he done so, the service and bondage Judah undertook would have been obligatory on Judah and right for him to bear — yet he would have borne it not for himself but for his brother Benjamin, and to Benjamin it would have been credited as his freedom. Similarly, when Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus (verse 18): "If he has wronged you or owes you anything, charge that to my account; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand — I will repay it" — he assumed that Philemon might have two possible claims against Onesimus: one for the wrong or injury done him, and one for loss or debt. Paul put himself under personal obligation to answer for both and to repay a full settlement if required. By this he was personally obligated to make satisfaction to Philemon — yet he was doing so for Onesimus and not for himself. Therefore whatever obedience was due from the Lord Christ in His human nature while in the form of a servant — whether as a man or as an Israelite — since He was in that condition not by natural necessity for His own sake but by voluntary condescension and undertaking for us, it was done for us and not for Himself.

Fifth: the Lord Christ in His obedience was not a private person but a public person. He obeyed as the Surety of the covenant and as the Mediator between God and man. I assume this will not

be denied. He cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered apart from that capacity. But what a public person does as a public person — that is, as the representative of others and the one who has undertaken on their behalf — he does not for himself but for others. If others were not involved, if it were not for them, what he does would have no meaning or purpose. In fact, it is a contradiction for anyone to act as a public person and yet do so only for himself. One who holds a public office may do things that concern himself alone, but he cannot do them in his capacity as a public person. Therefore, just as Socinus and his followers would have Christ offered for Himself — making Him a Mediator for Himself, since His offering was a mediatorial act, which is both foolish and impious — so to say that His mediatorial obedience, His obedience as a public person, was for Himself and not for others falls little short of equal impiety.

Sixth: it is granted that because Christ had a human nature, which was a creature, that nature was necessarily subject to the law of creation. There is a relationship that necessarily arises from and depends on the very existence of Creator and creature. Every rational creature is eternally obligated, by the nature of God and its relationship to Him, to love Him, obey Him, depend on Him, submit to Him, and make Him its end, blessedness, and reward. But the law of creation in this sense does not pertain only to this world and this life — it pertains to the future state of heaven and eternity as well. Christ's human nature is subject to this law in heaven and glory, and cannot but be so as long as it remains a creature and not God — that is, as long as it has its own existence. No one imagines such an infusion of divine properties into Christ's human nature that it would become self-subsisting and absolutely

immense in itself, for that would openly destroy it. Yet no one would say that He is now under the law in the sense the apostle intends. Christ's human nature, in the sense just described, was subject to the law of creation on its own account while He was in this world. And this is enough to answer Socinus's objection raised at the outset of this discussion — namely, that if the Lord Christ was not obligated to obedience for Himself, then He could, if He chose, neglect or break the whole law. For apart from the fact that this is a foolish notion with respect to that holy nature hypostatically united to the Son of God — and thereby rendered incapable of any deviation from the divine will — the eternal, indispensable law of love, adherence, and dependence on God, to which Christ's human nature is subject as a creature, provides sufficient security against any such suggestion.

But there is another way of considering God's law: as imposed on creatures by special arrangement, for a limited time and a specific end, with particular rules and regulations that do not belong essentially to the eternal law as described above. This is the character of the written law of God, under which the Lord Christ was placed — not by necessity of creaturehood, but by special arrangement. For the law in this sense is presented not as binding absolutely and eternally, but as binding while we are in this world, with the specific purpose that through obedience to it we might obtain the reward of eternal life. It is evident that the law's obligation in this sense ceases when we come to enjoy that reward. The command "do this and live" no longer formally binds when the life it promises is already being enjoyed. In this sense the Lord Christ was not placed under the law for Himself, nor did He yield obedience to it for Himself. He was not obligated to it by virtue of His

created condition. From the very first instant of the union of His natures, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, He could, notwithstanding the law He submitted to, have been placed immediately in glory. For One who was the object of all divine worship had no need of new obedience to procure a state of blessedness for Himself. And if He had been subject to the law in this sense purely by virtue of being a creature, He would have to be subject to it eternally — which He is not. For what depends solely on the natures of God and the creature is eternal and unchangeable. Therefore, just as this law was given to us not absolutely but with respect to a future state and reward, so the Lord Christ voluntarily subjected Himself to it for us — and His obedience under it was for us and not for Himself. These arguments, added to what I have written previously on this subject — to which nothing but a few irrelevant quibbles has been opposed — are sufficient to dismiss the first part of the charge: that the imputation of Christ's obedience to us is impossible. That impossibility would be no greater than the impossibility of imputing Adam's disobedience to us, by which the apostle tells us we were all made sinners.

The second charge against the imputation of Christ's obedience to us is that it is useless to those being justified. The argument runs: since in justification believers receive the pardon of all their sins, they are thereby made righteous and have a title to life and blessedness. One who is pardoned so completely as to be reckoned not guilty of any sin — whether of omission or commission — is treated as if he had done everything he was required to do and omitted nothing. He is therefore not unrighteous, and to be not unrighteous is the same as being righteous — just as one who is not dead is alive, with no middle state possible between death and

life. Those who have all their sins forgiven therefore have the full blessedness of justification, and there is neither need nor use for any further imputation of righteousness. Various other arguments of the same kind are pressed to the same effect, and these will either be addressed in the following discussion or answered elsewhere.

In answer: this matter is too important and too clearly set forth in Scripture to be settled by the kind of philosophical cleverness that has more subtlety than theological substance. This objection could therefore be dismissed without much reply, on the well-known principle that a truth well established and confirmed is not to be questioned — much less abandoned — simply because of every tangled sophism that appears difficult to unravel. But as we shall see, there is no great difficulty in these arguments that cannot easily be resolved. And since the reasoning behind them is employed by a number of learned persons who nevertheless agree with us on the substance of the doctrine of justification — that it is by faith alone, without works, through the imputation of Christ's merit and satisfaction — I will as briefly as possible identify the errors on which this argument rests.

First: this objection assumes that one who has been pardoned for sins of omission and commission is reckoned to have done everything required of him and to have committed nothing forbidden. Without this assumption, the bare pardon of sin would neither make, constitute, nor designate anyone as righteous. But this assumption is false, and no such thing is included in the nature of pardon. In pardoning sin, neither God nor any human judge decides that the one who sinned did not sin — but that decision is exactly what would have to be made if one who is pardoned were

reckoned to have done everything he ought and nothing he ought not. If a man is brought to trial for a crime, legally convicted, and then released by a sovereign pardon, he is indeed treated in the eyes of the law as innocent with respect to the punishment due to him. But no one thinks that he is thereby made righteous, or that he is regarded as not having done what he plainly did and was convicted of. Joab and Abiathar the priest were both guilty of the same crime at the same time. Solomon ordered Joab to be put to death for his crime, but granted Abiathar a pardon. Did that pardon make, declare, or constitute Abiathar righteous? Solomon himself says the opposite — he affirms Abiathar was unrighteous and guilty, and only remitted the punishment for his fault (1 Kings 2:26). Therefore, pardon of sin frees the guilty person from being liable to the anger, wrath, and punishment due to sin — but it does not imply, nor warrant in the slightest, that the pardoned person is therefore to be regarded as having done no wrong and having fulfilled all righteousness. Some say pardon gives a righteousness of innocence, but not of obedience. But it cannot give even an absolute righteousness of innocence like Adam's, for he had actually done no wrong. Pardon only removes guilt — the relationship of sin to punishment that follows from the law's sanction. This false assumption is what drives this entire objection.

The same may be said about the related claim that being "not unrighteous" — which is what a pardoned person is — is the same thing as being righteous. If "not unrighteous" is taken in the privative sense — as a settled positive state — then it does equal being just or righteous, since it assumes that the person has done everything duty requires. But "not unrighteous" used negatively, as it is in this argument, does not mean that. At best it means only that a

person has as yet done nothing actually contrary to the rule of righteousness. This can be true even when a person has fulfilled none of the positive duties required to constitute him righteous, simply because the occasions for them have not yet arisen. This was Adam's condition in the state of innocence — and that is the height of what can be achieved by complete pardon of sin.

Second: this objection also proceeds on the assumption that in the case of sin, the law does not simultaneously obligate to both punishment and obedience — and therefore that the law is fully satisfied and complied with when only the penalty is dealt with. But if the law does obligate to both, then the pardon of sin, which only frees us from the law's penalty, still leaves the fulfillment of its commands necessary. In my judgment, the opposite assumption is a clear mistake — and one that does not establish the law but makes it void. I will demonstrate this.

First: the law has two parts or powers. The first is its preceptive part, commanding and requiring obedience with a promise of life attached: "Do this and live." The second is its sanction in the case of disobedience, binding the sinner to punishment or a fitting recompense: "In the day you sin, you shall die." Every law properly so called operates on these two suppositions — obedience and disobedience — and its commanding and punishing powers are therefore inseparable from its nature.

Second: this law was first given to man in innocence, and at that point only the first power was active — it bound only to obedience. An innocent person could not be subject to the law's sanction, which contained only an obligation to punishment on the supposition of disobedience. The law therefore could not oblige our first parents to both obedience and punishment simultane-

ously, since the obligation to punishment could not be active except on the supposition of actual disobedience. The threatened sanction did serve as a moral cause and motive for obedience and had influence in preserving man from sin. To that end God said to Adam, "In the day you eat, you shall surely die." The failure to heed this warning and allow it to rule the minds of our first parents opened the door to sin. But it is a contradiction to say that an innocent person could be under an actual obligation to punishment from the law's sanction. Before the law's transgression, it bound only to obedience, as every law with penalties does before it is broken.

Third: upon the commission of sin — as is the case with everyone who has sinned — man came under an actual obligation to punishment. This is no more questionable than the fact that he was originally under an obligation to obedience. But the question is this: does the law's original and first obligation to obedience cease to apply to the sinner, or does it continue — so that both powers of the law are simultaneously active toward him, binding him to both obedience and punishment? To this I say:

First: had the threatened punishment been immediately inflicted to its full extent, this would not be a question at all. Man would have died immediately — both temporally and eternally — and been removed from the only state in which he could stand in any relation to the law's preceptive power. One who has been fully executed has satisfied the law's claims in such a way that he owes it no further obedience.

But second: God in His wisdom and patience has arranged things otherwise. Man continues as a traveler still making his way toward his final end, not yet fixed in his eternal and unchangeable

condition where neither promise nor threat, neither reward nor punishment, could be offered to him. In this condition he falls under a twofold consideration. First, as a guilty person, he is bound to the full punishment the law threatens. This is not disputed. Second, as a man — a rational creature of God — who has not yet reached his eternal end.

Third: in this state, the law is the only instrument and means by which the relationship between God and man is maintained. Under this consideration, the law cannot but continue to oblige man to obedience — unless we say that by sinning he has exempted himself from God's governance. Therefore it is through the law that God's rule and governance over human beings is maintained while they are in this present life. For every act of disobedience, every violation of the law's rule and order in its commanding power, places us further and more deeply under the law's power to demand punishment.

This cannot be otherwise. No person alive, not even the most wicked, can avoid judging himself, while he remains in this world, to be obligated to obey God's law to the extent that he knows it — whether through natural conscience or otherwise. A wicked servant who is punished for a fault, if the punishment is not fatal and his condition of service continues, is not freed from his obligation to duty. Indeed, his obligation regarding the very crime for which he was punished is not dissolved until a capital sentence ends his existence entirely. Therefore, since pardon of sin frees us only from the obligation to punishment, there is something more required for our justification: obedience to what the law commands.

This greatly strengthens the argument we are defending. Since we are sinners, we were liable to both the command and the curse of the law. Both must be answered, or we cannot be justified. Just as the Lord Christ could not by His most perfect obedience satisfy the curse of the law — "in the day you die, you shall die" — so by the fullest extent of His suffering He could not fulfill the command of the law — "do this and live." Suffering as suffering is not obedience, even though there can be obedience in suffering — as there supremely was in Christ's. Therefore, just as we affirm that Christ's death is imputed to us for our justification, we deny that it alone is imputed to us for our righteousness. Through the imputation of Christ's sufferings, our sins are remitted and pardoned and we are delivered from the curse of the law that He bore. But we are not thereby reckoned just or righteous — which we cannot be without reference to the fulfilling of the law's commands and the obedience it requires. Grotius expresses this excellently in the words quoted earlier: "When we say Christ has obtained for us both freedom from punishment and the reward of eternal life, the ancient church attributed the former distinctly to His satisfaction and the latter to His merit. Satisfaction consists in the transfer of deserved punishment; merit consists in the imputation of most perfect obedience rendered on our behalf."

Third: this objection also assumes that pardon of sin gives a title to eternal blessedness in the enjoyment of God. Justification does indeed give such a title, and according to the authors of this view, no righteousness other than pardon of sin is required for it. That justification gives a right and title to adoption, acceptance with God, and the heavenly inheritance, I trust will not be denied — and it has already been demonstrated. But pardon of sin de-

pend solely on the death and suffering of Christ: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Suffering in payment for punishment, however, gives a right or title to nothing — it only satisfies for something. Suffering deserves no reward. The law nowhere says "suffer this and live" — only "do this and live."

These things are, I acknowledge, inseparably joined in God's ordinance, appointment, and covenant. Whoever has his sins pardoned is accepted with God and has a right to eternal blessedness. These things are inseparable — but they are not one and the same. Because they are inseparably connected, the apostle places them together: "Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account'" (Romans 4:6-8). It is the imputation of righteousness that gives a right to blessedness, and pardon of sin is inseparably connected to it and flows from it — both being set in contrast to justification by works or by any internal righteousness of our own. But it is one thing to be freed from liability to eternal death and another to have a right and title to blessed and eternal life. It is one thing to be redeemed from under the law — that is, from its curse — and another to receive the adoption of sons. It is one thing to be freed from the curse and another to have the blessing of Abraham come upon us, as the apostle distinguishes these things (Galatians 3:13-14; 4:4-5). So also does our Lord Jesus Christ: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance" — that is, a share in and a right to the inheritance — "among

those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). Forgiveness of sins removes sin from being a ground of condemnation — so that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But it does not give a right and title to glory or the heavenly inheritance. Can it seriously be supposed that all the great and glorious effects of present grace and future blessedness must necessarily flow from and rest entirely on the mere pardon of sin? Can we not be pardoned without necessarily being made sons, heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ?

Pardon of sin, considered with reference to the sinner, is a free and gracious act of God — "forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." But with reference to the satisfaction of Christ, it is an act of judgment. For it is on the consideration of that satisfaction imputed to the sinner that God absolves and acquits him at his trial. But pardon granted at a judicial trial — on whatever grounds it is given — confers no right or title to any favor, benefit, or privilege beyond mere deliverance. It is one thing to be acquitted before a king's throne of charges brought against someone — whether by clemency or on other grounds — and quite another to be made his son by adoption and heir to his kingdom.

Scripture represents these things as distinct and as resting on distinct causes. So they appear in the vision of Joshua the high priest (Zechariah 3:4-5): "He spoke to those who were standing before him, saying, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' And he said to him, 'See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.' Then I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments." It is generally agreed that this vision represents the justification of a sinner before God. The removal of

the filthy garments is explained as the passing away of iniquity. When a man's filthy garments are removed, he is no longer defiled by them — but he is not thereby clothed. Being clothed with a change of garments is an additional grace and favor beyond mere removal of defilement. What this change of garments is, is declared in Isaiah 61:10: "He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness" — which the apostle alludes to in Philippians 3:9. These two things are therefore distinct: the removal of the filthy garments and the clothing with a change of raiment — that is, the pardon of sin and the robe of righteousness. By the one we are freed from condemnation; by the other we have a right to salvation. The same is represented in similar fashion in Ezekiel 16:6-12.

I had previously urged this passage for this purpose in my work on communion with God (page 187), which Mr. Hotch. attempts to answer in his usual manner. Passing over his abusive language and the crude, unproved assertions of his own opinions, his answer is that by the change of garments the prophet describes our own personal righteousness. He acknowledges that our justification before God is here represented. He likewise interprets the confirming passage from Isaiah 61:10 — where this change of garments is called "the garments of salvation" and "the robe of righteousness" — as referring to our personal righteousness before God in justification (page 203). To all these presumptions I will set only one testimony from the same prophet, which he may consider at his leisure and which sooner or later he will have to acknowledge: "We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6). One who can make garments of salvation and robes of righteousness out of filthy rags has a skill

in composing spiritual vestments that I am not acquainted with. As for the rest of that chapter in his work, I will not address it — it is, after his customary fashion, nothing but a perverse twisting of my words into a meaning designed to make me and others look contemptible.

There is therefore no force in the analogy between justification and life and death in nature, where the two are directly and immediately opposed — so that one who is not dead is alive, and one who is alive is not dead, with no distinct state between them. These matters are of different kinds, and the comparison therefore carries no argumentative weight. Though it may hold in natural things, it does not hold in moral and legal matters, where the proper representation of justification is forensic. If it were true that there is no difference between being acquitted of a crime at a judge's bench and having a right to a kingdom — and no distinct state between these — then it might prove there is no intermediate state between being pardoned and having a right to the heavenly inheritance. But this is an empty notion.

It is true that a right to eternal life follows upon freedom from the guilt of eternal death: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified." But this is not because the nature of the things themselves requires it — it is solely by God's free appointment. Believers have the pardon of sin and an immediate right and title to God's favor, adoption as sons, and eternal life. But in the nature of things themselves, another state is possible — and it might actually have been so, had it pleased God. For who cannot see that there is a condition in which a person is neither under the guilt of condemnation nor does he have an immediate right and title to glory as an inheritance? God

could have pardoned all men's past sins and placed them in a condition of seeking righteousness going forward through obedience to the law, so that they might live — for this would correspond to Adam's original state. God has not done so, it is true. But since He could have, it is clear that placing people in a condition of right and title to life and salvation does not depend on or follow from the pardon of sin, but has another cause: the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us, as He fulfilled the law on our behalf.

And in truth, this is the view held by most of our opponents in this controversy. They contend that over and above the remission of sins — which some of them say is absolute and unconnected to Christ's merit or satisfaction, while others connect it to them — there is a righteousness of works required for our justification. The only difference is that they say this righteousness is our own incomplete and imperfect righteousness, imputed to us as if it were perfect — that is, credited to us for what it is not — rather than the righteousness of Christ imputed to us for what it is.

From everything that has been discussed, it is clear that for our justification before God, more is required than merely being freed from the law's condemning sentence — which we are through the pardon of sin. Beyond that, the righteousness of the law must be fulfilled in us, or we must have a righteousness answering the obedience the law requires, on which our acceptance with God through the riches of His grace and our title to the heavenly inheritance depend. This we do not have in or of ourselves, nor can we attain to it, as has been proved. Therefore either the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, or we can never be justified in God's sight.

The quibbling objections of the Socinians and their followers carry no force against this truth. They claim that Christ's righteousness can be imputed to only one person, if to any — for who can suppose that the same righteousness of one person could become the righteousness of many, even of all who believe? They also argue that He did not perform all the duties required of us in all our various relationships, since He was never placed in them. Both of these objections, I say, are foolish and impious and destructive of the whole gospel. For everything here depends on God's ordination. It is His appointment that just as through the offense of one many died, so His grace and the gift of grace through the one man Jesus Christ abounded to many. And just as through one man's offense judgment came to all people for condemnation, so through one man's act of righteousness the free gift came to all people for justification of life, and through the obedience of one the many were made righteous — as the apostle argues in Romans 5. "For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:3-4). "For Christ is the end of the law — its complete fulfillment — for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). This is God's appointment in His wisdom, righteousness, and grace: that the whole righteousness and obedience of Christ should be accepted as our complete righteousness before Him — imputed to us by His grace and applied to us, made ours, through faith, and therefore to all who believe. And if the actual sin of Adam is imputed to all of us who derive our nature from him — to our condemnation — even though he did not sin in our specific circumstances and relation-

ships, is it strange that the actual obedience of Christ should be imputed to those who derive a spiritual nature from Him, to the justification of life? Furthermore, both the satisfaction and the obedience of Christ, considered in relation to His person, were in some sense infinite — that is, of infinite value — and cannot therefore be parceled out as if one portion were imputed to one person and another portion to another. The whole is imputed to every one who believes. And if the Israelites could say that David was worth ten thousand of them (2 Samuel 21:3), we may well allow that the Lord Christ — and therefore everything He did and suffered — is worth more than all of us and all that we could ever do and suffer.

There are also several other errors underlying the part of the charge we have now addressed — the charge against the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. I say "righteousness" because the apostle in this context uses two words — righteousness and obedience — as equivalent in meaning (Romans 5:18-19). Such errors include: the claim that remission of sins and justification are the same thing, or that justification consists only in remission of sins; the claim that faith itself, as our act and duty, is imputed to us as righteousness because it is the condition of the covenant; and the claim that we have a personal inherent righteousness that in some way constitutes our righteousness before God for justification — whether as a condition of it, a disposition toward it, a congruity that deserves the grace of justification, or an outright merit of full desert. All of these are really various expressions of the same thing, differing only in how people have conceived of it. But all of them have been addressed and refuted in the preceding discussions.

To close this argument and its defense, and at the same time to address an objection, I acknowledge that in Scripture, eternal blessedness and life are often attributed to the death of Christ. But this is so, first, as the principal cause of the whole — that without which no imputation of obedience could have justified us, since the penalty of the law had to be borne without exception. Second, it is attributed to His death not exclusively as opposed to all obedience mentioned elsewhere, but as that to which His obedience is inseparably joined. As Bernard wrote: "In His life, Christ underwent active suffering; in His death, He bore active passion, while He was working salvation in the midst of the earth." Eternal life is also attributed to His resurrection with respect to evidence and demonstration. But nowhere is the death of Christ alone — to the exclusion of His obedience — asserted as the cause of eternal life, including the exceeding weight of glory that accompanies it.

Up to this point we have treated and defended the imputation of Christ's active obedience to us, as the truth of it was drawn from the preceding argument about the obligation of the law of creation. I will now briefly confirm it with additional reasons and testimonies.

First: whatever Christ the Mediator and Surety of the covenant did in obedience to God in the discharge of His office, He did for us, and it is imputed to us. This has already been proved, and it has too plain an evidence of truth to be denied. He was born for us, given to us (Isaiah 9:6). "For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:3-4). Everything said about the grace, love, and

purpose of God in sending or giving His Son, everything said about the love, grace, and condescension of the Son in coming and undertaking the work of redemption appointed to Him, and everything about the very office of Mediator or Surety itself — all of it bears witness to this assertion. Indeed, it is the foundational principle of the gospel and of the faith of all who truly believe. Those who deny the divine person and satisfaction of Christ — thereby overturning the whole of His mediatorial work — are not our present concern. What then did Christ do in this mediatorial capacity? This we must inquire into.

First: the Lord Christ our Mediator and Surety was, in His human nature, made under the law (Galatians 4:4). We have already shown that this was not because His own condition required it. It was therefore for us. But as one who was made under the law, He yielded obedience to it — and this obedience was therefore for us and is imputed to us. The Socinian exception that it refers only to the ceremonial law is too trivial to dwell on. For He was made under the same law whose curse we are delivered from. And if we are delivered only from the curse of the Mosaic law — which they argue contained neither promises nor threats of anything beyond this present life — we remain in our sins and under the curse of the moral law, regardless of what He has done for us. It is equally implausible to say that He was made under the law only with respect to its curse. The text is plain: Christ was made under the law in the same way we are under it. "He was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law." If He was not made under it as we are, there is no connection between His being made under the law and our redemption from it. But we were under the law in a way that obligated us not only to its curse but to all the obedience it re-

quired, as has been proved. And if the Lord Christ redeemed us only from its curse by bearing it, leaving us on our own to answer the law's obligation to obedience, we are neither freed nor delivered. The expression "under the law" primarily and properly signifies being under the law's obligation to obedience, and only secondarily refers to its curse. Paul confirms this: "Tell me, you who want to be under the law" (Galatians 4:21) — they did not want to be under its curse but under its obligation to obedience, which in all ordinary usage is the primary and proper meaning of the phrase. Therefore, the Lord Christ having been made under the law for us, He yielded perfect obedience to it for us — and this obedience is therefore imputed to us. For that what He did was done for us depends entirely on imputation.

Second: as Christ was made under the law, so He actually fulfilled it through His obedience to it. He testifies this concerning Himself: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). The Jews continually cite these words against Christians as contradicting what they claim Christ actually did — namely, that He abolished and removed the law. Maimonides, in his treatise on the foundations of the law, makes many blasphemous attacks on the Lord Christ as a false prophet on this point. But the reconciliation is straightforward. Two laws were given to the church: the moral law and the ceremonial law. The first, as we have proved, is of eternal obligation. The second was given for a limited time. The apostle proves with irresistible testimony from the Old Testament, against the stubbornness of the Jews, in his letter to the Hebrews, that the latter was to be taken away and abolished. Yet it was not to be removed without its own fulfillment — it came to its end by

being accomplished. So the Lord Christ dissolved and ended that law only by fulfilling it, as is fully explained in Ephesians 2:14-16. But the moral law — which obligates all people to obedience to God always — He did not come to abolish or destroy. This is the law the Lord Christ says He came not to destroy, which He makes plain in the teaching that follows, demonstrating both its power to obligate us always to obedience and giving an exposition of what it requires. When Jesus says He came to "fulfill" this law, the word means the same as it does in other usage: to yield full and perfect obedience to the law's commands so that they are absolutely satisfied. "Fulfill" here does not mean making the law more perfect — it was always already perfect (James 1:25) — but yielding perfect obedience to it. This is the same thing our Savior calls "fulfilling all righteousness" in Matthew 3:15 — that is, obeying all God's commands and institutions, as the context makes clear. The apostle uses the same expression: "He who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

It is an empty exception to say that Christ fulfilled the law by teaching it — by giving an exposition of it. The contrast in the words between "destroying" and "fulfilling" allows no such sense. Our Savior Himself explains this fulfilling of the law as doing its commands (verse 19). Therefore the Lord Christ, as our Mediator and Surety, fulfilled the law by yielding perfect obedience to it — and He did so for us, so it is imputed to us.

This is plainly affirmed by the apostle: "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the

many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:18-19). The full argument from and defense of this text I will address in its proper place among the scriptural testimonies to the imputation of Christ's righteousness for our justification. Here I will only observe that the apostle expressly and explicitly affirms that through Christ's obedience we are made righteous — that is, justified — which cannot happen except through the imputation of that obedience to us. The only response I have encountered with any appearance of seriousness is the claim that "the obedience of Christ" here refers to His death and sufferings, in which He was obedient to God — as the apostle says, "He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). But this has no plausibility. First: it is acknowledged that there is a close and intimate connection between Christ's obedience and His sufferings, so that while they may be distinguished, they cannot be separated. He suffered throughout the entire course of His obedience from the womb to the cross, and He obeyed throughout all His sufferings to the final moment. But they are genuinely distinct, as has been proved — and they were distinct in Him: "He learned obedience from the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Second: in this passage, "obedience" (verse 19) and "righteousness" (verse 18) are synonymous. "Through the righteousness of One" and "through the obedience of One" refer to the same thing. But suffering as suffering is not righteousness. If it were, then everyone who suffers what is due to them would be righteous and justified — even the devil himself. Third: the righteousness and obedience here in view are set in contrast to "the offense." "Through the offense of one" — and that offense was an actual transgression of the law. Therefore the "righteousness" must be an actual obedience to the commands of

the law, or the force of the apostle's argument and antithesis cannot be understood. Fourth: it is specifically an obedience opposed to Adam's disobedience. "One man's disobedience" — "one man's obedience." But Adam's disobedience was an actual transgression of the law. Therefore the obedience of Christ here in view was His active obedience to the law — exactly what we are arguing for. I will not press this argument further here, because its force in confirming the truth we contend for will be included in the arguments that follow.

CHAPTER 13: THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION PROVED FROM THE DIFFERENCE OF THE COVENANTS



The third argument for our position is drawn from the difference between the two covenants. The following observations apply.

First: by "the two covenants" I mean those given absolutely to the whole church, each designed to bring it to a complete and perfect state. The first is the covenant of works — the law of our creation as given to us, with promises and threats, rewards and punishments attached. The second is the covenant of grace, revealed and proposed in the first promise. The Sinai covenant, the new covenant as actually confirmed in Christ's death with all the spiritual privileges flowing from it, and the differences between them — these belong to a different discussion.

Second: the entire nature of the covenant of works consisted in this: that upon our personal obedience, according to its law and rule, we would be accepted by God and rewarded by Him. This is where its essential character lay. And whatever covenant proceeds on these terms, or has this nature in it — however it may be modified with additions or alterations — is still the same covenant, not

a different one. Similarly, when God renewed the promise containing the essence of the covenant of grace — as He did with Abraham and David — He often added other provisions, yet it remained the same covenant in substance. So whatever variations or additions may be made to the administration of the first covenant, as long as the fundamental rule remains — "do this and live" — it is still the same covenant in its substance and essence.

Third: two things therefore belonged to this covenant. First, all transactions were directly between God and man — there was no Mediator, no one to undertake anything on either side. Since the whole covenant depended on each person's personal obedience, there was no place for a Mediator. Second, nothing but perfect, sinless obedience would be accepted by God or preserve the covenant in its original condition. There was no provision in it for the pardon of sin or for any deficiency in personal obedience.

Fourth: therefore, once this covenant was established between God and man, no new covenant could be made unless its essential form was of a different nature — specifically, that our personal obedience would no longer be the rule and ground of our acceptance and justification before God. For as long as it remains so, the covenant is still the same, however much its administration may be revised to suit our present condition. Any grace introduced into such a covenant could not be the kind that excludes works as the cause of justification. But if a new covenant is to be made, a grace must be provided that is entirely incompatible with any works of ours as the ground of the covenant's primary ends — as the apostle declares (Romans 11:6).

Fifth: the covenant of grace, if it is truly a new, real, and absolute covenant — and not merely a revised administration of the old one adapted to our present condition, as some suppose — must differ in its very essence, substance, and nature from the first covenant of works. And it cannot do so if we are justified before God on the basis of our personal obedience — which was the essence of the first covenant. If the righteousness by which we are justified before God is our own personal righteousness, then we are still under the first covenant and no other.

Sixth: but things in the new covenant are indeed altogether different. First, it is of grace — which entirely excludes works. That is, it is so entirely of grace that our own works are not the means of justification before God, as the passages cited above demonstrate. Second, it has a Mediator and Surety. This is built on the premise that what we could not do in ourselves — what was originally required of us and what the law of the first covenant could not enable us to perform — should be performed for us by our Mediator and Surety. Even if this is not necessarily implied in the bare concept of a mediator or surety, it is certainly implied in the concept of a Mediator or Surety who voluntarily intervenes on behalf of those who are openly acknowledged to be utterly unable to perform what was required of them. On this supposition the entire truth of Scripture rests. One of the very first principles of the Christian faith is that the Lord Christ was given for us and born for us — that He came as Mediator to do for us what we could not do for ourselves, and not merely to suffer what we had deserved. Here, instead of our own righteousness, we have the righteousness of God. Instead of being righteous in ourselves before God, He is the Lord our righteousness. And nothing but a righteousness of a

different kind and nature from our own could constitute a different covenant for justification before God. Therefore the righteousness by which we are justified is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us — or we are still under the law, still under the covenant of works.

It will be said that no one claims our personal obedience is the righteousness by which we are justified before God in exactly the same way as under the covenant of works. But the argument is not about the manner or mode of its role — it is about the thing itself. If personal obedience serves as the basis of justification in any way, under whatever qualifications, we are still under that covenant. If it is based on works in any way, it is not of grace at all. It is then added that the differences are sufficient to constitute effectively distinct covenants. Four such differences are proposed. First: the first covenant required perfect, sinless obedience, whereas in the new covenant an obedience that is imperfect and accompanied by many sins and failures is accepted. In answer: this is simply asserted without proof and begs the question. No righteousness for justification before God is or can be accepted unless it is perfect. Second: grace is the original fountain and cause of all our acceptance before God in the new covenant. In answer: it was also so in the old. The creation of man in original righteousness was an effect of divine grace, kindness, and goodness. And the reward of eternal life in the enjoyment of God was of pure sovereign grace. Yet what was then of works was not of grace — and neither is it now. Third: in the old covenant there would have been merit from works, which is now excluded. In answer: the kind of merit that arises from equality and proportion between works and reward by the rule of commutative justice would not have existed

even in the first covenant. And it is only in this sense that those who oppose the imputation of Christ's righteousness now reject merit. Fourth: everything now rests on the merit of Christ, on account of which alone our personal righteousness is accepted before God for justification. In answer: the question is not on what account or for what reason it is so accepted, but whether it is so accepted at all — since its being so is precisely what constitutes a covenant of works.

CHAPTER 14: THE EXCLUSION OF ALL WORKS FROM JUSTIFICATION; THE LAW AND ITS WORKS IN PAUL'S EPISTLES



Our fourth argument is drawn from Scripture's explicit exclusion of all works of whatever kind from our justification before God. This is our central claim: that no acts or works of our own are the causes or conditions of our justification — the whole of it is resolved into the free grace of God through Jesus Christ, the Mediator and Surety of the covenant. Scripture speaks to this expressly. "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:28). "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works" (Romans 11:6). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Galatians 2:16). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not

as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

These and similar testimonies are explicit and in plain terms assert everything we contend for. I am convinced that no unprejudiced person — whose mind is not already filled with notions and distinctions that have no basis in these texts or anywhere else — can read them and conclude anything other than this: the law in every sense, and all kinds of works that sinners or believers could ever perform at any time or by any means, are excluded from our justification before God — not in this or that particular sense, but entirely and in every sense. And if that is so, then it is to the righteousness of Christ alone that we must turn, or the matter must be settled forever. The apostle himself draws this conclusion from one of the testimonies cited above — Galatians 2:16 — adding: "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Galatians 2:19-21).

Our opponents are deeply divided among themselves and cannot agree on what the apostle means in these statements. The natural and obvious reading — especially given the contrast drawn between law and works on one side and faith, grace, and Christ on the other, set as incompatible alternatives in the matter of justification — they refuse to accept, because accepting it would ruin the

positions they are defending. Their various interpretations will therefore be examined — both to expose the inconsistency among those who oppose the truth, and to confirm our present argument.

First interpretation: some say it is the ceremonial law alone and its works that are intended — or the law as given through Moses on Mount Sinai, constituting the covenant that was afterward to be abolished. This was formerly the common view of the scholastic theologians, though it has now been generally discarded. A recently revived version of this position argues that Paul excludes justification from works of the law not because no one can render the perfect obedience the law requires — not excluding works that are absolutely perfect and sinlessly righteous — but because the law he has in view is one that could not justify anyone through its observance. This is nothing but a revival of the old discredited notion that it is the ceremonial law only, or equivalently the Sinai covenant separated from the grace of the promise, that could not justify anyone through its rites and commands. Of all the proposed interpretations, this one is the most off-target and most contrary to the apostle's purpose — and is therefore rejected even by Bellarmine himself. For the apostle refers to the law whose doers will be justified (Romans 2:13) — but the proponents of this view want him to mean a law that can justify none of those who observe it. He refers to the law through which comes the knowledge of sin, giving as his reason why we cannot be justified by its works: "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). And the law by which sin is known he identifies explicitly: "I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7) — which is the moral law alone. He has in view the law that stops every mouth and makes all the world

accountable to God (Romans 3:19) — which can only be the law written in human hearts at creation (Romans 2:14-15). He means the law by which one who does its works shall live by them (Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5) and which brings everyone under its curse for sin (Galatians 3:10). It is the law that is established by faith and not made void (Romans 3:31) — which the ceremonial law and the Sinai covenant are not. It is the law whose righteous requirement is to be fulfilled in us (Romans 8:4). And the example the apostle gives of justification apart from the works of the law he has in mind — the case of Abraham — occurred hundreds of years before the ceremonial law was given. I do not say that the ceremonial law and its works are entirely outside the apostle's scope. When that law was given, observing it was a specific expression of the obedience owed to the first table of the Decalogue — and its exclusion from justification, as part of the moral obedience we owe to God, is therefore also an exclusion of all other works. But that the ceremonial law is the only one intended, or that the law in view is one that could never justify anyone through its observance even when properly observed — this is an empty notion, directly contradicted by the apostle's own statements. Whatever is claimed to the contrary, this view is explicitly rejected by Augustine (*lib. de Spirit. et liter.*, cap. 8): "Lest anyone think the apostle here said that no one is justified by that law containing many figurative precepts in the old sacraments — including the circumcision of the flesh — he immediately goes on to identify the law he means, adding: 'through the law comes the knowledge of sin.'" Augustine speaks to the same point again (*Epist. 200*): "Not only the works of the law which consist in the old sacraments and are no longer observed by Christians now that the new covenant has been revealed — such as

circumcision of the foreskin, resting on a physical sabbath, abstaining from certain foods, sacrificing animals, observing new moons and unleavened bread, and similar things — but even what the law says, 'You shall not covet,' which no Christian anywhere doubts is still binding, does not justify a man except through faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Second interpretation: some say the apostle excludes only the perfect works required by the law of innocence — a view diametrically opposed to the first. This position is favored by the Socinians. Socinus himself states: "Paul in this saying is dealing with works that are perfect. He added 'apart from works of the law' to indicate that he is speaking of works as the law requires them — that is, perpetual and most perfect obedience to God's commandments as the law demands it. Since no one is able to render such obedience as the law requires, the apostle therefore says we are justified by faith — that is, by trust and that obedience which each person is able to render, and which daily he strives and labors to render as fully as possible. 'Apart from works of the law' means: even though for the present he cannot perfectly fulfill the whole law as he ought." But in response: first, this concedes everything we are arguing for. It grants that the moral, indispensable law of God is what the apostle intends, and that no one can be justified by its works — indeed, that all works of it are excluded from our justification, since the apostle says justification is "apart from works." The works of this law, when performed according to its requirement, would justify those who perform them — as the apostle affirms (Romans 2:13) and Scripture elsewhere confirms: "the one who practices it shall live by it." But because no sinner can ever

perform these works as the law requires, all consideration of them is excluded from our justification. Second: it is a wild notion that the apostle's whole argument amounts to this — that perfect works of the law will not justify us, but imperfect works that fall short of the law's standard will do so. Third: even granting that the law in view is the moral law of God — the law of creation — the apostle nowhere introduces the distinction that we are not justified by the perfect works we cannot perform, but can be justified by some imperfect works we can perform and labor to do. Nothing is more foreign to his argument and explicit words. Fourth: the escape route they take — claiming that the "faith" the apostle sets in opposition to the excluded works is our own obedience rendered imperfectly as best we can — is completely futile in this context. For when the apostle has excluded all justification by the law and its works, he does not replace them with our own faith and obedience. Instead he says: "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (Romans 3:24-25).

Third interpretation: some in our own day — and they have predecessors — claim that the works the apostle excludes from justification are only external works performed without an inward principle of faith, fear, or love for God. Servile works done out of fear of the law's threats, they say, are the ones that cannot justify. But this view is not merely false — it is impious. First, the apostle excludes the works of Abraham, which were not the kind of external, servile works imagined here. Second, the excluded works are those the law requires — and the law is holy, just, and good. But a law that requires only external works without internal love for God is neither holy, just, nor good. Third, the law itself condemns

works separated from the internal principle of faith, fear, and love — for it requires that in all our obedience we love the Lord our God with all our hearts. The apostle says we are not justified by works the law condemns — but he says nothing about being justified by works the law commands. Fourth, it is deeply dishonoring to God — whose divine prerogative it is to know the hearts of men, and who therefore regards the heart alone in all acts of obedience — to suggest that He gave a law requiring only outward, servile works. And if the law He actually gave requires more than that, then those external works are not the only ones being excluded.

Fourth interpretation: some say in general terms that the Jewish law is what is intended, thinking this settles the whole difficulty. But if by the Jewish law they mean only the ceremonial law or the law as absolutely given through Moses, we have already shown the emptiness of that claim. If, however, they mean by it the whole law or rule of obedience given to the church of Israel under the Old Testament, they are expressing much of the truth — perhaps more than they intended.

Fifth interpretation: some say it is works performed with a claim to merit — works that would make the reward a matter of debt rather than grace — that the apostle excludes. But no such distinction appears in the text or context. First, the apostle excludes all works of the law — that is, all works the law requires in the way of obedience, whatever their kind. Second, the law requires no works along with a claim to merit. Third, the works of the law, originally considered, included no merit in the sense of merit arising from the proportion between work and reward by the rule of commutative justice — and it is only in that sense that those who argue for a role of works in justification now reject merit.

Fourth, the merit the apostle excludes is the kind inseparable from works as such — so that works cannot be admitted without also admitting this merit. Two things make works meritorious in this sense. The first is a comparative boasting — not absolute boasting before God, which would follow from strict condign merit (the kind that some poor sinful mortals have imagined in their works), but the kind that gives one person a preference over another in obtaining justification, which grace will not allow (Romans 4:2). The second is that the reward not be absolutely of grace, but that works have some bearing on it — making it in some measure a matter of debt, not from any intrinsic worth that would not even have existed under the law of creation, but from some congruity with respect to God's promise (verse 4). In these two respects, merit is inseparable from works. The Holy Spirit, in order to exclude merit entirely, therefore excludes all works from which it is inseparable — which means all works. Fifth, the apostle does not say a word about excluding only the merit of works while allowing the works themselves. He excludes all works whatsoever, arguing that admitting them would necessarily introduce merit in the sense described, which is incompatible with grace. And while some think it unfair to be accused of maintaining merit when they assert a role for works in justification, those among them who understand the matter best are not so quick to deny all merit — knowing it is inseparable from works.

Sixth interpretation: some argue that the apostle excludes only works done before faith — works performed in the strength of the natural will and abilities, without the help of grace. Works required by the law, they say, are those performed by the law's direction alone. But the law of faith, they argue, requires works per-

formed through the supply of grace, and these are not excluded. This is the position that the most learned and careful theologians of the Roman church have now generally settled on. Those among us who argue for a role of works in justification use many distinctions to explain their position and distance themselves from agreement with the papists. They deny the word "merit" and reject it in the Roman sense, just as the Socinians do. They therefore make use of the previous evasion — that merit is what the apostle excludes, and works are excluded only insofar as they are meritorious — even though the apostle's plain argument is that works are excluded because the kind of merit incompatible with grace is inseparable from them.

But the Roman church cannot so readily give up merit. They must therefore identify a specific category of works to be excluded — one they are content to let go, since those works are not meritorious. These are the works described above: performed, as they say, before faith and without the help of grace. All works of the law, they say, are of this kind. They do this with somewhat more care and sobriety than those among us who would limit the excluded works to external observances only. For the Roman theologians grant that certain internal works — such as attrition, sorrow for sin, and similar acts — are of this non-meritorious kind. But it is works of the law, they say, that are excluded. This entire argument, and all the sophisms supporting it, has been so thoroughly examined and refuted by Protestant writers of all kinds against Bellarmine and others, that there is no need to repeat those same arguments or add to them. It will be sufficiently proved false in what follows concerning the law and works the apostle actually intends. The main points of that demonstration may however be

briefly outlined. First, the apostle excludes all works without distinction or exception — and we are not to draw distinctions where the text gives us no basis for them. Second, all works of the law are excluded, and therefore all works performed after faith by the help of grace are excluded — for all such works are required by the law (see Psalm 119:35; Romans 7:22). Works not required by the law are no less an abomination to God than sins against the law. Third, the works of believers after conversion, performed with the help of grace, are explicitly excluded by the apostle. He excludes the works of Abraham, performed many years after Abraham had been a believer and was abounding in them to God's praise. He excludes his own works after his conversion (Galatians 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:4; Philippians 3:9). And he excludes the works of all other believers (Ephesians 2:9-10). Fourth, all works that might provide grounds for boasting are excluded (Romans 4:2; 3:27; Ephesians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31) — and the good works of regenerate persons give more grounds for boasting than any works of unbelievers. Fifth, the law required faith and love in all our works, and therefore if all works of the law are excluded, the best works of believers are included in that exclusion. Sixth, all works are excluded that are opposed to grace working freely in our justification — and that describes all works whatsoever (Romans 11:6). Seventh, in the letter to the Galatians the apostle excludes from justification all the works that the false teachers were pressing as necessary for it. But those false teachers were urging the works of believers — of people who had already been converted to God by grace. For those to whom they pressed these requirements were already believers. Eighth, it is good works that the apostle excludes from justification. No one could seriously claim to be justified by works that are

not good or that lack what is essentially required to make them good. But all works of unbelievers performed without grace are exactly that: not good, and not accepted by God as such — they lack what is essentially required for a work to be good. It is absurd to think the apostle is arguing about the exclusion of such works from justification, when no one in their right mind would think those works had any place there to begin with. Ninth, the reason no one can be justified by the law is that no one can render the perfect obedience it requires. For perfect obedience would justify under the law (Romans 2:13; 10:5). Therefore all works that are not absolutely perfect are excluded — and the best works of believers are not perfect, as has already been demonstrated. Tenth, if a reserve for the works of believers performed by grace were made in our justification, these works would have to function either as co-causes of justification or as indispensably subordinate to whatever is the cause. But they are not co-causes of our justification — that is not openly claimed. Nor can it be said they are necessarily subordinate to the causes that actually are causes. They are not subordinate to the efficient cause, which is the grace and favor of God alone (Romans 3:24-25; 4:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; Revelation 1:6). They are not subordinate to the meritorious cause, which is Christ alone (Acts 13:38; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). They are not subordinate to the material cause, which is the righteousness of Christ alone (Romans 10:3-4). Nor are they subordinate to faith, wherever its role is placed. For not only is faith alone mentioned wherever Scripture explains how the righteousness of Christ is derived and communicated to us — with no mention of works alongside it — but works and faith are actually set in

opposition and contradiction to each other with respect to justification (Romans 3:28). Many other points could be pressed to the same effect.

Seventh interpretation: some affirm that the apostle excludes all works from our first justification, but not from the second, or as some put it, from the continuation of our justification. But we have already examined these distinctions and found them groundless.

It is therefore evident that those who oppose the apostle's teaching place themselves in an unstable and slippery position, with no firm footing — unable to identify any reading that gives their denial of his plain and repeatedly stated assertion even the appearance of truth.

To confirm the present argument further, I will look more closely at what the apostle actually means by the law and works he discusses. Whatever they are, with respect to our justification they are absolutely and universally opposed to grace, faith, the righteousness of God, and the blood of Christ — as entirely incompatible with them. This cannot be denied or questioned by anyone, since it is the apostle's plain design to demonstrate that incompatibility.

First, it is generally evident that by "the law" and its "works" the apostle means what the Jews with whom he was dealing understood by the law and their entire obedience to it. This cannot be denied. Without granting it, nothing is proved against them and they learn nothing from him. Suppose the terms were used in one sense by the apostle and in another by his readers — nothing could rightly be concluded from what is said about them. The apostle

therefore takes the meaning of "the law" and "works" as well known and agreed upon between himself and those he was addressing.

Second point: the Jews by "the law" meant what the Old Testament Scriptures meant by that expression. They are nowhere blamed for having a false notion about the law, or for counting something as law that was not in fact law and not called law in Scripture. Their present oral law had not yet developed, though the Pharisees were beginning to incubate it.

Third point: in the Old Testament, "the law" primarily refers to the law given at Mount Sinai — there is no distinct mention of it before then. It is commonly called simply "the law" without qualification, but most frequently "the law of God" or "the law of the Lord," and sometimes "the law of Moses" because of his particular ministry in delivering it: "Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded him" (Malachi 4:4). This is what the Jews meant by the law.

Fourth point: the law given at Horeb comprised three parts. First, the Ten Commandments — "the ten words" (Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4) — written on two stone tablets. This part of the law was given first, served as the foundation of the whole, and contained the perfect obedience required of mankind by the law of creation — now received into the church's life with the highest testimony to its indispensable obligation, carrying the sanction of obedience or punishment. Second, the statutes and ordinances — what the Septuagint renders as the legal rights, and the Latin translators rendered as "justifications" (*justificationes*), a translation that has caused great confusion among many ancient and modern theologians. We call this the ceremonial law. The apostle refers to this

part of the law distinctly as "the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" — consisting in a multitude of specific and arbitrary commands (Ephesians 2:15). Third, what we commonly call the judicial law. This division encompasses the Old Testament as it is used in countless places — though only the Ten Commandments are referred to by the general word "the law" in Malachi 4:4.

Fifth point: these being the parts of the law given to the church at Sinai, the whole of it is consistently called "the law" — meaning the instruction (as the Hebrew word signifies) that God gave to the church as the rule of obedience He prescribed for it. This is the consistent meaning of the word in Scripture wherever it is used absolutely. And on this basis, the term does not refer precisely to the law as given at Horeb alone, but encompasses with it all the divine revelations under the Old Testament that explained and confirmed that law — its rules, motives, directions, and reinforcements of obedience.

Sixth point: therefore the law is the whole rule of obedience God gave to the church under the Old Testament, together with all the power and influence with which it was accompanied through God's ordinances — including all the promises and threats that served as motivations for the obedience God required. This is what God and the church called the law under the Old Testament, and what the Jews with whom the apostle was dealing called it. What we call the moral law was the foundation of the whole. What we call the judicial and ceremonial law consisted of particular expressions of the obedience the Old Testament church was bound to render in its specific political arrangements and forms of divine worship appropriate to that era. Scripture testifies two things about this law.

First: it was a perfect and complete rule of all the internal, spiritual, and moral obedience God required of the church. "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). It was equally a complete rule of all external duties of obedience — their substance and manner, their times and occasions — so that in both respects the church might walk acceptably before God (Isaiah 8:20). Although the foundational duties of the moral law are often given priority over the particular duties of outward worship, the whole law was always the complete rule of all the obedience — internal and external — that God required of the church and accepted from those who believed.

Second: this law — this rule of obedience as God appointed it to govern the church, adapted to the covenant made with Abraham whose administration it served and which its introduction at Sinai did not annul — was accompanied by a power and efficacy enabling obedience. The law itself, considered merely as a set of precepts and commands, supplied no ability to those under its authority to render obedience — any more than the bare commands of the gospel do by themselves. Moreover, under the Old Testament the law pressed obedience on people's minds and consciences through the manner of its delivery and the severity of its sanction, filling them with fear and dread. It was accompanied by burdensome requirements of outward worship that made it a heavy yoke for the people. But as God's instruction and teaching in all acceptable obedience — adapted to the Abrahamic covenant — it was also accompanied by an administration of effectual grace that produced and sustained obedience in the church. The law is therefore not to

be considered in isolation from those aids to obedience which God administered under the Old Testament, whose effects are therefore ascribed to the law itself (see Psalm 1; Psalm 19; Psalm 119).

Second: this being the law as the apostle and his audience understood it, the next question is what they meant by "works" or "works of the law." The answer is plain: they meant by this the universal, sincere obedience of the church to God according to this law. The law of God acknowledges no other works — it expressly condemns all works that have any defect making them unacceptable to God. Hence, despite all the positive commands God gave for the strict observance of sacrifices, offerings, and similar rites, when the people performed them without faith and love, He explicitly declared that He had not commanded them to be observed in that manner. The works of the law therefore constituted the personal righteousness of believers — those who "walked in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord blamelessly" (Luke 1:6), who "served God night and day" (Acts 26:7). This they regarded as their own righteousness, their righteousness according to the law — as indeed it was (Philippians 3:6, 9). Although the Pharisees had greatly corrupted the doctrine of the law and placed false interpretations on many of its precepts, the idea that the church in that era understood "works of the law" to mean only ceremonial duties, or only external acts, or works performed with a claim to merit, or works done without an inward principle of faith and love for God — rather than their own personal, sincere obedience to the whole teaching and rule of the law — has nothing to support it. For the following reasons:

First: all of this is perfectly set out in the answer the scribe gave to our Savior's declaration of the meaning and purpose of the law when asked about the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-33; Matthew 22:36). One of the scribes asked: "Which is the foremost commandment of all?" Jesus answered: "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" And the scribe said to Him: "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And this — faith and love as the principle of all obedience — is so plainly set forth by Moses as the sum of the law in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 that it is remarkable what could lead any learned, sober person to fix on any other interpretation — as if it referred only to ceremonial or external works, or to works that could be performed without faith or love. This is the law about which the apostle is disputing, and these are the works of obedience that constitute its demands. God has never required, and never will require, anything more than this as obedience in this world. Therefore the law and its works that the apostle excludes from justification are the very duties by which we are obligated to believe in God as the one and only God and to love Him with all our hearts and souls and our neighbors as ourselves. I do not know of any works — however performed, whether by regenerate or un-

regenerate persons, whether in the strength of grace or without it — that are acceptable to God and that cannot be reduced to these categories.

Second: the apostle himself makes clear that it is the law and its works in the sense we have described that he excludes from our justification.

The law he speaks of is the law of righteousness (Romans 9:31). It is the law whose righteous requirement is to be fulfilled in us so that we may be accepted with God and freed from condemnation (Romans 8:3-4). It is the law in obedience to which our personal righteousness consists — whether that which we consider righteous before conversion (Romans 10:3) or after it (Philippians 3:9). It is the law that one who keeps it shall live by and be justified before God (Romans 2:13; Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5). It is the law that is holy, just, and good — the law that exposes and condemns all sin whatsoever (Romans 7:7, 9).

From what has been discussed, two things stand clearly confirmed in our present argument. First: the law the apostle intends, when he denies that anyone can be justified by its works, is the complete rule and guide of our obedience to God — covering the whole spiritual constitution of our souls and all the acts of obedience and duty He requires of us. Second: the works of this law that the apostle so frequently and plainly excludes from our justification, setting them against the grace of God and the blood of Christ, are all the duties of obedience — internal, supernatural, external, and ceremonial — however we are or may be enabled to perform them, that God requires of us. With these excluded, it is the righteousness of Christ alone, imputed to us, on the basis of which we are justified before God.

The truth is — as far as I can discern — the real disagreement among us today about the doctrine of justification before God is the same disagreement that existed between the apostle and the Jews, and no other. But religious controversies often appear entirely new when they are really only the same old debates dressed up in new terminology. So it has been with the controversy about nature and grace. At its core, it is today the same controversy it was between Paul and the Pharisees, and afterward between Augustine and Pelagius. But it has passed through so many forms and disguises in its language that it is barely recognizable as the same thing. Many today will condemn Pelagius and the exact words in which he taught his doctrine, yet embrace and approve of the very things he meant. Every shift in philosophical thinking gives the appearance of a new development in the controversies argued through it. But strip off the covering of philosophical expressions, scholastic distinctions, metaphysical concepts, and the fashionable technical jargon that some ancient scholastics and later disputants have piled upon it — and the disagreement about grace and nature is, among all of us, the same as it always was, and is fully in line with what the Socinians allow.

So the apostle, in treating of our justification before God, uses terms that both express the thing itself and were well understood by those he was addressing — terms the Holy Spirit had consecrated through revelation to their proper use. On one side, he explicitly excludes the law, our own works, and our own righteousness from any role in justification. In opposition to them, and as incompatible with them in the matter of justification, he attributes it wholly to the righteousness of God, righteousness imputed to us, the obedience of Christ, Christ made righteousness for us, the

blood of Christ as a propitiation, faith, receiving Christ and the atonement. There is no awakened conscience guided by even the least beam of spiritual light that does not plainly understand these things and what they mean. But through the introduction of foreign learning — with its philosophical terms and concepts — into the teaching of spiritual things in religion, an entirely new appearance is given to the whole matter, and a compromise is constructed between things the apostle directly sets in opposition as contrary and incompatible. Hence arise all our discourses about preparations, dispositions, conditions, merits of congruity and condignity, accompanied by such a train of distinctions that unless some limit is placed on inventing and coining them — an easy work that grows on us daily — we will soon be unable to see through them clearly enough to understand the things intended or to follow one another's meaning. As one said of lies, so it may be said of arbitrary distinctions: they must constantly be patched and re-covered, or the truth will rain through. But the better course is to cast off all these coverings — and we will then quickly see that the real disagreement about the justification of a sinner before God is the same today as it was in the apostle Paul's day between him and the Jews. And all the things people now argue for, under the names of preparations, conditions, dispositions, and merit in relation to a first or second justification, as having some causal role in our justification before God — the apostle excludes all of these just as effectively as if he had named every one of them. For in all of them, what is being argued for is nothing but the role of personal righteousness that the Jews maintained against the apostle — now expressed in the concepts and terminology of current intellectual fashion. A clear understanding of what the apostle means by the

law, its works, and its righteousness would be sufficient to settle this controversy — were it not that people have grown very skilled in the art of endless argument.

CHAPTER 15: FAITH ALONE



The truth we are defending has two parts. First: the righteousness of God imputed to us for the justification of life is the righteousness of Christ, through whose obedience we are made righteous. Second: faith alone is required on our part to connect us to that righteousness — by which we comply with God's gift and communication of it and receive it for our benefit. Although this faith is in itself the root principle of all obedience — and whatever claims to be faith but cannot, and does not on all occasions, evidence and demonstrate itself through works is not true faith — yet as the instrument by which we are justified, its act and character are such that no other grace, duty, or work can be associated with it or placed alongside it. Both of these truths are clearly confirmed in what Scripture tells us about the nature of faith and believing to the justification of life.

I am aware that many of the expressions Scripture uses to describe the nature and work of faith are metaphorical — at least, they are commonly regarded as such. But they are expressions the Holy Spirit in His infinite wisdom chose to use for the instruction and building up of the church. I cannot help saying that those who do not understand how effectively these expressions communicate spiritual knowledge to the minds of believers, and how they speak

to their spiritual experience, seem not to have reflected on them carefully. Nor do we always know, whatever skill we may claim, which expressions about spiritual things are metaphorical. Those that seem most figurative are often the most precise. In any case, it is safest for us to hold to the Spirit's own expressions and not embrace meanings that are inconsistent with or contrary to them. Therefore:

First: the faith through which we are justified is most frequently described in the New Testament as receiving. This aspect of faith was addressed earlier in the general discussion of its role in justification, so I will not dwell on it at length here. Two things may be observed about it. First, this language of receiving is used with respect to the whole object of faith — to everything that in any way contributes to our justification. We are said to receive Christ Himself: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12); "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord" (Colossians 2:6). Unbelief is correspondingly expressed as not receiving Him (John 1:11; 3:11; 12:48; 14:17). This is a receiving of Christ as He is the Lord our righteousness — as He is made righteousness for us by God. Just as no other grace or duty can cooperate with faith in this act of receiving — since receiving Christ does not belong to their nature or come within their operation — so this receiving excludes all righteousness from our justification except Christ's alone. For we are justified by faith; faith alone receives Christ; and what it receives is the cause of our justification, through which we become children of God. We also receive the atonement made by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:11), for God set Him forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood. This receiving of the atonement includes the

soul's approval of the way of salvation through Christ's blood and the soul's appropriation of that atonement to itself. Through it we also receive the forgiveness of sins: "that they may receive forgiveness of sins through faith in Me" (Acts 26:18). In receiving Christ we receive the atonement, and in the atonement we receive the forgiveness of sins. Moreover, the grace of God and righteousness itself — as the efficient and material causes of our justification — are also received: "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (Romans 5:17). So faith, with respect to all the causes of justification, is expressed as receiving — including the promise, which is the instrumental cause on God's side (Acts 2:41; Hebrews 9:15). Second, since faith's nature and operation with respect to all the causes of justification consists in receiving, its object must be something offered, presented, and given to us as something not originally ours — something made ours only through that giving and receiving. This is evident from the general nature of receiving. And here, as was observed, just as no other grace or duty can join with faith in this act, so the righteousness by which we are justified can be none of our own — neither prior to this receiving nor ever inherent in us. From this we argue: if the work of faith in our justification is receiving what is freely granted, given, communicated, and imputed to us — that is, Christ, the atonement, the gift of righteousness, the forgiveness of sins — then our other graces, our obedience, duties, and works have no influence in our justification and are not its causes or conditions. For they are neither the receiving nor the thing received, and only those two things are involved in justification.

Second: faith is also expressed as looking. "Turn to Me and be saved" (Isaiah 45:22). "A man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have regard for the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 17:7). "They will look on Me whom they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10). See also Psalm 123:2. The nature of this is expressed in John 3:14-15: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life." This was His being lifted up on the cross in death (John 8:28; 12:32). The original event is recorded in Numbers 21:8-9. The stinging of the people by the venomous serpents and the death that followed were types of the guilt of sin and the verdict of the fiery law against it — as Paul says, "these things happened to them as a type" (1 Corinthians 10:11). When anyone was stung or bitten, all other remedies failed — only those who looked at the bronze serpent lifted up were healed and lived. This was God's appointed ordinance and the only way of healing He had provided. Their healing was a type of the pardon of sin with everlasting life. So looking illustrates the nature of faith, as our Savior plainly explains: "so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him" — that is, as the Israelites looked at the serpent in the wilderness. Although some have mocked or disparaged this illustration by Christ Himself, it is as instructive about the nature of faith, justification, and salvation through Christ as any passage in Scripture. Now if the faith through which we are justified is — in the very act by which we are justified — a looking to Christ under a sense of guilt and lostness, for all our help and relief, for deliverance, righteousness, and life, then it is in that act exclusive of all other graces and duties whatsoever. For by those other graces we do not look, and they are not what we look for. This is how the

Holy Spirit expresses the nature and exercise of faith. And those who do believe understand what He means. Whatever may be claimed about the figurative character of the language, faith is the act of the soul by which those who are hopeless, helpless, and lost in themselves seek all their help and relief in Christ alone through expectation and trust — or there is no truth in it. This also sufficiently reveals the nature of our justification through Christ.

Third: faith is frequently expressed as coming to Christ. "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden" (Matthew 11:28). See also John 6:35, 37, 45, 65; 7:37. To come to Christ for life and salvation is to believe in Him to the justification of life. But no other grace or duty is a coming to Christ, and therefore no other grace or duty has any place in justification. Anyone who has been convicted of sin, wearied by its burden, genuinely sought to flee from the wrath to come, and heard the voice of Christ in the gospel inviting him to come for help and relief, will tell you that this coming to Christ consists in going entirely out of oneself — in a complete renunciation of all one's own duties and righteousness — and entrusting oneself with all confidence to Christ alone and His righteousness, for the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, and a right to the heavenly inheritance. Some may say this is not believing but mere religious sentiment. So be it — we refer the judgment to the church of God.

Fourth: faith is expressed as fleeing for refuge. "We who have taken refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18). "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Some have therefore defined faith as the soul's flight to Christ for deliverance from sin and misery — a definition that sheds much light on what is actually in-

tended. For in this expression, it is assumed that the one who believes is previously convinced of his lost condition and that if he remains in it he will perish eternally. He has nothing in himself by which he can be delivered from it. He must turn to something outside himself for relief. He sees Christ set before him and offered to him in the promise of the gospel. He judges this to be a holy and sure way of deliverance and acceptance with God, bearing all the marks of divine excellence upon it. So he flees to it for refuge — with urgency and speed, so as not to perish in his present condition — and places his entire trust and confidence there. The whole nature of our justification through Christ is better communicated by this image to the spiritual sense and experience of believers than by a hundred philosophical disputations about it.

Fifth: in the Old Testament, faith is expressed by leaning on God (Micah 3:11) or on Christ (Song of Solomon 8:5), by rolling or casting oneself and one's burden on the Lord (Psalm 22:8; 37:5), by resting on God or in Him (2 Chronicles 14:11; Psalm 37:7), by cleaving to the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:4; Acts 11:23), and in countless passages by trusting, hoping, and waiting. The Holy Spirit's wisdom in choosing these expressions has been profanely mocked by some. It may also be observed that those who acted in faith as thus expressed everywhere describe themselves as lost, hopeless, helpless, desolate, poor, and fatherless — and on that basis place all their hope and expectation on God alone.

All I would conclude from these things is this: the faith through which we believe to the justification of life — that is, the faith required of us as a duty in order to be justified — is an act of the whole soul by which convicted sinners go entirely out of them-

selves to rest on God in Christ for mercy, pardon, life, righteousness, and salvation, with a settled resting of the heart in that. This is the whole of the truth we are defending.

CHAPTER 16: THE TRUTH FURTHER CONFIRMED BY TESTIMONIES OF SCRIPTURE, JEREMIAH 23:6



We now turn to the explicit scriptural testimonies that confirm the truth we are defending — especially those passages where the doctrine of the justification of sinners is expressly and deliberately addressed. These are where we must learn the truth, and into these our faith must be anchored. Their authority must override all human arguments and objections. They convey more light to the minds of believers than the most sophisticated philosophical disputations. It is truly troubling to see Protestant authors writing entire books about justification in which hardly a single scriptural testimony is produced — except to find ways to escape its force. In particular, the apostle Paul has most fully and explicitly declared and defended the doctrine of evangelical justification — as he had the greatest occasion to do. Yet not a few writers on this subject are so far from drawing their thoughts and convictions out of his writings that they have begun to dismiss those writings as obscure and prone to dangerous misunderstanding. They rarely or never make use of them, except — as has been said — to deflect and object against them on the basis of

their own mistaken principles. It is as though we have grown wiser than the apostle, or wiser than the Spirit by whom he was inspired in everything he wrote. But nothing is more contrary to the spirit of Christian faith than refusing to learn humbly from Paul's declaration of the mystery of God's grace. Yet the foundation of God stands firm, whatever course people choose to take in their profession of religion.

Regarding the testimonies I will produce and examine, I ask the reader to note three things. First, these are only a portion of the many that could be cited to the same purpose. Second, those already cited on particular occasions throughout this work, and most of the Old Testament testimonies given to this truth, I will largely omit. Third, in expounding these passages, I will attend as carefully as I can, first, to the analogy of faith — that is, the clear scope and design of God's revelation of His mind and will in Scripture. And that this design is to exalt the freedom and riches of God's own grace, the glory and excellence of Christ and His mediation, and to reveal the pitiable, lost, and ruined condition of man through sin — debasing and humbling everything that is in us and of us with respect to attaining life, righteousness, and salvation — this cannot be denied by anyone whose senses have been trained in the Scriptures. Second, I will attend to the experience of those who believe and the condition of those who seek justification through Jesus Christ. In other matters, I hope the best tools and principles of scriptural interpretation will not be neglected.

Deserving particular weight in this discussion is the name given to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as He was promised and given to us: "The Lord our righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6). Just as the name Jehovah, attributed to Him, is a full declaration

of His divine person, so the addition "our righteousness" plainly declares that in and through Him alone we have righteousness, or are made righteous. This is what Melchizedek foreshadowed — described first as king of righteousness, and then as king of peace (Hebrews 7:2), for it is through His righteousness alone that we have peace with God. Some Socinians try to evade this testimony by noting that "righteousness" in the Old Testament sometimes means kindness, goodness, or mercy, and they suggest it may carry that meaning here. But most of them, recognizing the obvious weakness of that interpretation, refer it to the righteousness of God in delivering and vindicating His people. As Brennius briefly states: "He is so called because through His hand the Lord will execute justice and righteousness for Israel." But these are the evasions of bold men who care nothing for whether what they say agrees with the analogy of faith or the plain words of Scripture, as long as they can say something. Bellarmine, who was more careful to give his answers at least an appearance of truth, first offers other reasons why Christ is called "the Lord our righteousness" — but then, whether unwittingly or overpowered by the force of the evidence, grants the very interpretation that contains everything we are arguing for. Christ, he says, may be called the Lord our righteousness because He is the efficient cause of our righteousness, as God is said to be our strength and salvation. Again, Christ is said to be our righteousness as He is our wisdom, our redemption, and our peace — because He has redeemed us and makes us wise and righteous and reconciles us to God. Others add reasons of the same kind. But not trusting these explanations, Bellarmine adds: "Furthermore, Christ is called our righteousness because He has made satisfaction to the Father for us, and so gives and com-

municates that satisfaction to us when He justifies us, that it may be called our satisfaction and our righteousness." And further: "In this sense it would not be absurd if one were to say that the righteousness and merits of Christ are imputed to us, as if we ourselves had given satisfaction to God" (de Justificat., lib. 2, cap. 10). This is the sense in which we say that Christ is the Lord our righteousness. And there is nothing of importance in the whole doctrine of justification that we affirm which is not here granted by the Cardinal — in terms that some among us today scruple at and reject. I will therefore look more carefully at this testimony, which has wrested so remarkable a confession of the truth from so great an opponent. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness'" (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Christians universally acknowledge this as an illustrious renewal of the first promise concerning the incarnation of the Son of God and our salvation through Him. This promise was first given when we had lost our original righteousness and stood before God only as those who had sinned and fallen short of His glory. In that condition, a righteousness was absolutely necessary for us to be accepted by God again — for without a righteousness, indeed a perfect and complete righteousness, we never were accepted and never can be. In that condition it is promised that He will be our righteousness — or, as the apostle puts it, the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe. That He is our righteousness is beyond question; the whole inquiry is how He is so. The most measured of our opponents say it is because He is the efficient cause of our righteousness — that is, our personal, inherent righteousness. But this righteousness may be considered in two

ways. Considered in itself as an effect of God's grace, it is good and holy — though not perfect and complete. Considered as ours, inherent in us and accompanied by the remaining defilements of our nature, the prophet's word applies: "we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" (Isaiah 64:6) — which covers our entire personal, inherent righteousness. And the Lord Christ cannot be called "the Lord our righteousness" on the basis of a righteousness that is all as filthy rags. The name must be taken from a righteousness of a different kind. Therefore He is our righteousness in this sense: all our righteousness is in Him. So the church, confessing that all her own righteousnesses are filthy rags, says: "In the Lord I have righteousness" (Isaiah 45:24) — expounded of Christ by the apostle in Romans 14:11. "Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength." The apostle expresses both of these in Philippians 3:9: "that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law" — which in this case is as filthy rags — "but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." To this Isaiah adds: "In the Lord all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory" (Isaiah 45:25) — because He is, in what He is and what He did and suffered as given for us, our righteousness. All our righteousness is in Him, which totally excludes our personal inherent righteousness from any role in our justification and ascribes it wholly to the righteousness of Christ. This is the force of the Psalmist's emphatic words: "I will go in the strength of the Lord God" — for as to holiness and obedience, all our spiritual strength comes from Him alone — "and I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only" (Psalm 71:16). The repeated emphasis of "Yours only" ex-

cludes all confidence in anything but God's righteousness alone. This, the apostle affirms, is God's very purpose in making Christ to be righteousness for us — "that no man may boast before God, but let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:29-31). For it is faith alone — making mention, in the matter of justification, of the righteousness of God and of His righteousness only — that excludes all boasting (Romans 3:27). Beyond what will be pressed from individual testimonies, Scripture eminently declares how He is the Lord our righteousness — namely, in that He makes an end of sin and makes atonement for iniquity, and brings in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24). For by these things our justification is completed: by satisfaction made for sin, by its pardon in our reconciliation to God, and by the provision for us of an everlasting righteousness. Therefore He is rightly called the Lord our righteousness. Since we had lost original righteousness, and had none of our own remaining, and stood in need of a perfect and complete righteousness to procure our acceptance with God — one that would exclude all grounds for boasting in ourselves — the Lord Christ was given and made to us as the Lord our righteousness. In Him we have all our righteousness. Our own, as it belongs to us, is as filthy rags in God's sight. His righteousness — and His alone — is that by which we are justified in God's sight and may glory. This is the substance of what we are contending for, and it is presented in Scripture in a way that brings more light and spiritual understanding to the minds of believers than all the philosophical expressions and distinctions that vaunt themselves as precise and rigorous.

CHAPTER 17: TESTIMONIES FROM THE EVANGELISTS CONSIDERED



The reasons why the doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness is more fully and clearly taught in the later writings of the New Testament than in the Gospels have already been explained. Even so, the Gospels give sufficient testimony to this doctrine, representing the state of the church before Christ's death and resurrection. I will consider a few of the many testimonies that can be drawn from their writings for this purpose.

The main purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ's sermon — especially the portion recorded in Matthew 5 — is to declare what true righteousness before God actually is. The Scribes and Pharisees, whose teachings had enslaved the consciences of their hearers, placed all of our righteousness before God in the works of the law — in people's own obedience to it. This is what they taught the people, and on this basis they justified themselves, as He charges them in Luke 16:15: "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God." And all those under their influence sought to establish their own right-

eousness, as it were by the works of the law (Romans 9:33; 10:3). Yet in their own consciences they were convinced that they could not reach the law's standard of righteousness — the perfect obedience the law required. Still, they refused to give up their proud fantasy of justification by their own righteousness, and instead — as people in every age do in the same situation — looked for other devices to silence their convictions. To that end they corrupted the whole law with false interpretations, pulling down and degrading its meaning to what they could proudly claim to perform. Our Savior illustrates this principle and practice of the whole group in the parable of the Pharisee in Luke 18:10-12. Similarly, the young man claimed he had kept the whole law from his youth — meaning, in their watered-down interpretation (Matthew 19:20).

To uproot this destructive error from the church, our Lord Jesus Christ gives the law its true, spiritual meaning in many instances, showing what righteousness the law actually requires and on what basis a person could be justified by it. Among several things He makes clear, two stand out. First, the law's commands and prohibitions reach all the way to the heart — its deepest thoughts and earliest stirrings. He teaches that the innermost movements of the heart, including the first impulses of sinful desire even when not consented to, let alone acted on, are directly forbidden by the law — along with everything that leads toward sin. He declares this in His exposition of the seventh commandment (Matthew 5:27-30). Second, He declares that the law's penalty for even the smallest sin is hell fire, as He states in connection with the sixth commandment and the prohibition of unjustified anger. If people would test themselves by these standards and others given by our Savior, it might well strip away their pride in their

own righteousness and self-justification. But as it was then, so it remains today: most of those who argue for justification by works try to corrupt the meaning of the law and adjust it to fit their own behavior. A reader can see an excellent demonstration of this in a recent treatise titled *The Practical Divinity of the Papists Discovered to Be Destructive of Christianity and Men's Souls*. The spiritual depth of the law and the severity of its penalty — extending to the least and most imperceptible movements of sin in the heart — are neither believed nor rightly considered by those who argue for justification by works in any sense. Therefore the primary purpose of our Savior's sermon is both to declare the nature of the obedience God requires through the law, and to prepare the minds of His disciples to seek a different kind of righteousness — one whose source and means could not yet be plainly declared, though many of them, prepared by John's ministry, were already hungry and thirsting for it.

Yet He gives a clear enough indication of what that righteousness consists in when He says He came to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). What He came for, He was sent for — He was born for us and given to us, not for Himself. He came to fulfill the law so that its righteousness might be fulfilled in us. If we cannot fulfill the law in the proper sense of its commands — which the law does not abolish but establishes, as our Savior declares — and if we cannot avoid the law's curse and penalty for transgressing it, and if He came to fulfill it for us, all of which He Himself declares, then His righteousness — the righteousness He accomplished for us by fulfilling the law — is the righteousness by which we are justified before God. Two kinds of righteousness are set before us: one, the fulfilling of the law by Christ; the other, our own perfect obedience

to the law as He has explained its meaning. There is no middle option between them. It is left to the consciences of convicted sinners to decide which of these they will rely on. And guiding people in that choice is the primary purpose we should have in teaching this doctrine.

I will pass over all those passages in which the foundations of this doctrine are firmly laid without being explicitly stated — passages that, when properly interpreted, necessarily lead to it. Among these are all the places where the Lord Christ is said to die for us, or in our place, to give His life as a ransom for us, and the like. I will pass these by so as not to digress from the present argument.

Our Savior's own depiction of how people come to be justified before God — in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector — is a guide for all who share the same desire. Luke 18:9-14: "And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people — swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

That our Savior's purpose in this parable was to represent the way of justification before God is clear for several reasons. First, from the description of those He was addressing (verse 9): they were people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous — that they had a personal righteousness of their own before God. Second, from the general principle with which He confirms His verdict about these two men: "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled" (verse 14), "and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Applied to the Pharisee and his prayer, this plainly declares that any plea of our own works for our justification before God — under any consideration — is a self-exaltation that God despises. Applied to the tax collector, it declares that a genuine sense of sin is the only preparation on our part for acceptance with God through faith.

Both men are shown as seeking to be justified — that is how our Savior frames the outcome of their approach to God. One was justified; the other was not.

The Pharisee's case for justification has two parts. First, he claims he has fulfilled the condition on which he might be justified. He makes no mention of any merit — whether of congruity or condignity. But since God's covenant with the church at that time had two dimensions — one relating to the moral law and one to the ceremonial law — he pleads that he has met the conditions of both, giving examples of each. He adds that he had even gone beyond what was required, fasting twice a week. When people begin to seek righteousness and justification by works, they quickly decide their best hope lies in doing something extraordinary — more than other people do, and more indeed than is actually commanded. This gave rise to all the Pharisaical austerities within Roman

Catholicism. And it cannot be said that all of this counted for nothing simply because he was a hypocrite and a boaster — for it might be replied that all who seek justification by works appear to be so. Our Savior simply presents a typical example of someone who does; nor are these things the stated reason for his rejection. He is rejected specifically because he exalted himself by trusting in his own righteousness. Second, in his prayer he ascribes everything he has done to God: "God, I thank You." Though he had done all this, he acknowledged God's help and grace in all of it. He recognized that he differed greatly from other people, but he did not credit himself for that difference. All the righteousness and holiness he claimed, he attributed to the goodness and kindness of God. He therefore pleaded neither personal merit in his works nor works done in his own strength apart from grace. His entire claim was that by the grace of God he had fulfilled the covenant's condition and therefore expected to be justified. Whatever words a person may use in their prayers, God reads their hearts according to what they actually trust for their justification. And if some people are honest about their own principles, this Pharisee's prayer — *mutatis mutandis* — is the prayer they ought to be making.

If someone objects that the Pharisee was rejected because he trusted in himself and despised others, I answer two things. First, this charge does not describe the character of the individual man but the nature and tendency of the belief itself. The conviction that justification comes by works inherently contains contempt for other means — for if Abraham had been justified by works, he would have had something to boast about. Second, those the Pharisee despised were people who placed their entire trust in

grace and mercy — like this tax collector. One might wish that all others who hold the same view as the Pharisee did not do exactly the same.

The outcome for the Pharisee is that he was not justified — and no one ever will be, on the basis of their own personal righteousness. Our Savior told us that when we have done everything — that is, when our consciences testify to the sincerity of our obedience — instead of pleading it for our justification, we should say (that is, genuinely judge and acknowledge) that we are unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). As the apostle says: "For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted" (1 Corinthians 4:4). And the person who is an unprofitable servant with nothing to rely on but his service will be cast out of God's presence (Matthew 25:30). Therefore, on the basis of our best obedience, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants is to confess that after everything we have, we deserve to be cast out of God's presence.

In contrast, the tax collector's condition and prayer — with the same goal of seeking justification before God — are then described. His outward posture and actions represent the inward state of his heart. He stood at a distance; he would not even lift his eyes; he beat his breast. All of this depicts someone who has given up on himself — someone in despair. This is the nature and the result of that conviction of sin which, as we have argued, must come before justification. Grief, sorrow, a sense of danger, and fear of wrath — all of these are present in him. In short, he declares himself guilty before God, with no defense or excuse to offer. His prayer is the sincere cry of his soul to sovereign grace and mercy for deliverance from the condition brought on by his guilt. In the very word he

uses — "be merciful" — there is a reference to propitiation. His entire approach to God contains four things: first, self-condemnation and self-loathing; second, grief and sorrow for sin; third, a complete renunciation of all his own works as any basis for justification; and fourth, an acknowledgment of his sin, guilt, and misery. This is all that is required of us for justification before God, apart from the faith by which we apply ourselves to Him for deliverance.

Some make a weak attempt to use this passage to prove that justification consists entirely in the forgiveness of sin — since the tax collector prays for mercy and pardon and is then said to be justified. But this argument has no force. First, the full nature of justification is not explained here — only what is required of us for it. The relationship of justification to Christ's mediation was not yet to be openly revealed, as was shown earlier. Second, although the tax collector comes before God with a deep sense of the guilt of sin, he does not pray merely for the bare forgiveness of sin but for all the sovereign mercy and grace God has provided for sinners. Third, the word "justified" must carry the same meaning when applied to the Pharisee as when applied to the tax collector. If it means "pardoned" for the tax collector, then it means "not pardoned" for the Pharisee — but the Pharisee did not come on that errand at all. He came to be justified, not pardoned; he makes no mention of his sin or any sense of it. Therefore, although the forgiveness of sin is included in justification, the word "justify" in this passage refers to a righteousness by which a person is declared just and righteous — a righteousness that, on the tax collector's side, is wrapped up in the sovereign and producing cause: the mercy of God.

A few additional testimonies may be drawn from the other Gospels, which are full of them. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Here faith is expressed as receiving Christ, for receiving Him and believing in His name are the same thing. It is a receiving of Him as the One God has set forth as a propitiation for sin — the great ordinance of God for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners. This idea of faith therefore includes several things: first, a proposal and offer of Christ to us for a specific purpose; second, this proposal is made through the promise of the gospel, which is why we are said to receive both Christ and the promise; third, the purpose for which Christ is offered to us in the gospel's promise — namely, the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, the same purpose as the first promise; fourth, in the offer of His person, there is an offer of all the benefits of His mediation as the means of our deliverance from sin and acceptance with God; fifth, nothing is required of us to participate in this end except receiving Him — believing in His name; and sixth, this act of receiving gives us a right and title to the heavenly inheritance and the power to become children of God, which includes adoption and justification. What this receiving of Christ consists in has been explained already in the discussion of the faith by which we are justified. The argument from this passage is that nothing more is required for obtaining a right and title to the heavenly inheritance than faith alone in Christ's name — the receiving of Christ as God's ordained means of justification and salvation. This is what gives us our original right to that inheritance and our acceptance with God, which is our justification — though more is required for its actual possession. It may be objected that other

graces and works are not excluded even though faith alone is stated. But everything that is not a receiving of Christ is excluded. It is effectively excluded because it is not of the nature of what is required. When we speak of the means by which we see, we do not exclude other members of the body — but we exclude everything except the eye from the act of seeing. And if faith is required as a receiving of Christ, then every grace and duty that is not such a receiving is excluded from any role in justification.

John 3:14-18: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

I will note only a few things from these words, which by themselves bring more light and understanding of this mystery to the minds of believers than many lengthy discussions by learned men. First, our Savior is speaking about the justification of people and their right to eternal life. This is plain in verse 18: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already." Second, the only means of reaching this state on our part is believing — stated positively three times without any addition. Third, the nature of this faith is explained in three ways. Its object is Christ Himself, the Son of God — "whoever believes in Him" is repeated throughout. The specific way in which He is the object of faith for the justification of life is as the ordinance of God

— given, sent, and offered from the Father's love and grace: "God so loved the world that He gave; God sent His Son." And the particular act included in the type through which God's design in Him is illustrated is the looking to the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness by those stung by venomous snakes — our faith in Christ for justification answers to this, and includes a trust in Him alone for deliverance and relief. This is the way, and these are the only causes and means of justification for condemned sinners. This is the substance of everything we are arguing for.

Someone may say that all this does not prove the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us — which is the main point at issue. But if nothing is required of us for justification except faith directed toward Christ as God's appointed means of our recovery and salvation, that is the whole of what we are arguing for. A justification consisting only in the forgiveness of sins — without a righteousness that gives us acceptance with God and a right to the heavenly inheritance — is foreign to Scripture and to the ordinary understanding of what justification means. And what that righteousness must be, given that faith alone is required on our part to participate in it, is sufficiently declared in the words where Christ Himself is so often set forth as the object of our faith for that purpose.

Without adding more specific texts — which multiply to the same purpose throughout this Gospel — the sum of the doctrine declared in it is this: the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that is, by the sacrifice of Himself in which He fulfilled all the typological sacrifices of the law; He sanctified Himself for this purpose so that those who believe might be sanctified — perfected forever — by His one offering of Himself;

in the Gospel He is set forth as lifted up and crucified for us, bearing all our sins in His body on the cross; through faith in Him we receive adoption, justification, freedom from judgment and condemnation, and a right and title to eternal life; those who do not believe are condemned already, because they do not believe in the Son of God, and as He says elsewhere, they make God a liar by refusing to believe His testimony — namely, that He has given us eternal life and that this life is in His Son. Nowhere does He mention any other means, cause, or condition of justification on our part except faith alone — though He is full of commands to believers concerning love and keeping Christ's commands. And this faith is the receiving of Christ in the sense just described. This is the substance of the Christian faith on this matter — which we often obscure rather than clarify by debating anything in our justification other than the grace and love of God, the person and mediation of Christ, and faith in them.

CHAPTER 18: JUSTIFICATION AS DECLARED IN PAUL'S EPISTLES, ESPECIALLY ROMANS



That the way and means of our justification before God — along with all its causes — are deliberately set out by the apostle in Romans 3-4, and defended against objections there, so that this portion of Scripture is the proper home of this doctrine and the primary place to learn it, cannot be honestly denied. The recent claims by some that the doctrine of justification by faith without works appears only in Paul's writings, and that Paul's writings are obscure and difficult, are both false and a disgrace to the Christian faith — so much so that I will not spend a moment on them here. He wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. All that he delivered was sacred truth that demands our faith and obedience, and the manner in which he declared it was what the Holy Spirit judged most fitting for the building up of the church. As Paul himself said with confidence, if the gospel he preached — though considered foolishness by some — was hidden and incomprehensible to anyone, it was hidden to those who are perishing. In the same way, if what he teaches about our justification before God seems obscure or confusing to us, the fault lies in

our own prejudices, corrupt desires, or weakness of understanding — an inability to grasp the glory of this mystery of God's grace in Christ. The problem is not in the way he revealed it. Rejecting all such perverse insinuations, and with a due sense of our own weakness and an acknowledgment that at best we know only in part, we will humbly inquire into the blessed revelation of this great mystery of the justification of a sinner before God as Paul declared it in those chapters of his glorious letter to the Romans. I will do so as briefly as possible, not repeating what has already been said or anticipating what can be more conveniently addressed later.

The first thing Paul does is prove that all people are under sin and guilty before God. He states this as the conclusion of his preceding argument (Romans 1:18 through Romans 3:19, 23). This raises the question: how can any of them come to be justified before God? Since justification is a verdict rendered on the basis of a righteousness, his central question is: what righteousness is there on the basis of which a person may be so justified? On this point, he states explicitly that it is not the righteousness of the law or the works of the law — what he means by this has been partly explained already and will be further shown as we proceed. He then declares in general that the righteousness by which we are justified is the righteousness of God, in direct contrast to any righteousness of our own (Romans 1:17; 3:21-22). He describes this righteousness of God by three characteristics. First, it is apart from the law (Romans 3:21) — entirely separate from the law in all its workings, not attainable through it or through any of its works, which have no influence over it. It is neither our obedience to the law nor something obtainable through such obedience. No expression could more completely separate and exclude works of obedience to

the law from any role in this righteousness of God or its procurement for us. Therefore, whatever we can perform in obedience to the law is excluded from any part in this righteousness of God. Second, it is nevertheless attested by the law — "the Law and the Prophets" (Romans 3:21).

By distinguishing the Old Testament books into "the Law" and "the Prophets," Paul shows that by "the law" he means the books of Moses. These bear witness to the righteousness of God in four ways.

First, by explaining why this righteousness is necessary for our justification. This is done in the account of our fall from God, the loss of His image, and the state of sin that followed. That fall ended all possibility and hope of being accepted by God through our own personal righteousness. When sin entered, our own righteousness went out of the world. Either a different righteousness had to be prepared and approved by God — a righteousness called the righteousness of God in contrast to our own — or all the relationship of love and favor between God and humanity had to end forever.

Second, by pointing to the way of recovery from this condition, generally set out in the first promise of the blessed Seed through whom this righteousness of God was to be accomplished and brought in. He alone was to make an end of sin and bring in everlasting righteousness (Daniel 9:24) — a righteousness of God that would be the means of justification for the church in every age and under every dispensation.

Third, by closing off the way to any other righteousness through the law's threats and the curse that accompanied every transgression of it. This plainly and fully declared that a righteous-

ness had to be provided for our justification that would answer and remove that curse.

Fourth, by prefiguring and representing the only way and means by which this righteousness of God was to be accomplished. This was done through all of its sacrifices — especially the great annual sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, when all the sins of the congregation were laid on the head of the sacrifice and carried away. Third, Paul describes the only way we participate in this righteousness — the only means on our part by which it is communicated to us. That means is faith alone. "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction" (Romans 3:22). Faith in Jesus Christ is so completely the only way this righteousness of God comes upon us and is communicated to us that it is given to all who have this faith — and only to them — without any difference on the basis of anything else. Although faith considered in the abstract can be used in various senses, when specified and defined as faith in Jesus Christ — or as Paul calls it elsewhere, "faith in Me" (Acts 26:18) — it can mean nothing other than receiving Him and trusting in Him as God's appointed means of righteousness and salvation.

This description of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel — which Paul asserts as the only means and cause of our justification before God, with the only way of participating in it through faith in Jesus Christ — fully confirms the truth we are arguing for. If the righteousness by which we must be justified before God is not our own but God's righteousness, as these two are directly set in opposition in Philippians 3:9, and if the only way it comes upon us or we become partakers of it is through faith in Jesus Christ, then our own personal, inherent righteousness or

obedience has no role in our justification before God. This argument is unanswerable, and no distinction can blunt its force — so long as we keep our hearts in proper reverence for the authority of God in His word.

Having fully proved that no living person has any righteousness of their own by which they might be justified, that all are condemned under the guilt of sin, and having declared that there is a righteousness of God now fully revealed in the gospel by which alone we may be justified — leaving all people in themselves to their own lot, since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" — Paul goes on to describe the full nature of our justification before God in all its causes. Romans 3:24-26: "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

If there were anywhere in Scripture where we should expect to find personal obedience — under some qualification — assigned a role in justification, it is here. Even if one supposed (which cannot be reasonably argued) that earlier in his discussion Paul had excluded only works of the law considered as perfectly performed, or performed in our own strength without grace, or as meritorious — he had already in Romans 3:20 excluded all works from justification without any distinction or qualification. So here, where he gives the full explanation of justification in all its causes, we would naturally expect him to assign whatever role our personal right-

eousness plays — whether in a first or second justification, or in its continuation, or in some other way — and to distinguish it as gracious, sincere, or evangelical so that it would not appear to be absolutely excluded. But it is plain that no such thing crossed Paul's mind. He showed no concern at all about the impression that his doctrine might seem to overthrow the necessity of our own obedience. Taking into account the apostle's stated purpose and the circumstances of the context, the argument from his complete silence about personal righteousness in our justification before God is unanswerable. And this is not all — as we will see going forward, he explicitly and directly excludes it.

Any fair-minded reader must acknowledge that no words could be more emphatic or expressive in securing the whole of our justification to the free grace of God, through the blood and mediation of Christ — in which faith alone gives us a share — than these words of the apostle. For my own part, I can only say that I do not know how to express this matter in terms more clear or precise than Paul's own. If we could all simply accept the apostle's answer to the great question — how, by what means, on what grounds, and through what causes are we justified before God — namely, that we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation through faith in His blood, and so on, there might be an end to this controversy.

But the main elements of this testimony must be considered separately. First, the chief efficient cause is expressed with special emphasis: "being justified freely by His grace" — that is, God is the chief efficient cause of our justification, and His grace is the only moving cause. I will not linger over the objection raised by the

Roman church — that the words "by His grace" refer to internal, inherent grace infused into us, which they claim is the formal cause of justification. They have nothing to support this reading except what actually overturns it: the fact that "freely" is added to "by grace" — which would be redundant if "grace" already meant free favor. The two expressions — "freely" and "by grace" — are combined precisely to give the greater emphasis to this statement, by which the whole of our justification is assigned to the free grace of God. As far as the two can be distinguished, one points to the source from which justification flows — grace — while the other indicates how it operates — freely. Moreover, throughout this subject, the grace of God consistently and unmistakably means His goodness, love, and favor — as has been conclusively shown by many. See Romans 5:15; Ephesians 2:4, 8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:4-5.

"Freely" — the Greek word used here by the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew — means without price, without merit, without cause; sometimes it means without purpose, as in something done in vain (as Paul uses it in Galatians 2:21). It is used to mean without price or payment in Genesis 29:15 and Exodus 21:22; without cause or merit or any basis in 1 Samuel 19:5, 2 Samuel 24:24, and Psalm 69:4; and in John 15:25 it is translated as "without cause." The word's design is to exclude all consideration of anything in us that could be the cause or condition of our justification. "Grace" considered in the abstract may have reference to something in the person toward whom it is shown — Joseph found favor in Potiphar's eyes (Genesis 39:4), but not without reason, for Potiphar saw that the Lord was with him and made everything he did prosper (verse 3). But no words could be found that more com-

pletely free our justification before God from all reference to anything in ourselves — apart from what is expressly added as the means of receiving it on our part, namely through faith in His blood — than these: "freely by His grace." For those who refuse to accept this as exclusive of all our works and obedience, all conditions, preparations, and merit, I despair of ever expressing this truth to them in any way they would find intelligible.

Having asserted God's righteousness as the cause and means of our justification — in opposition to all righteousness of our own — and having declared that the cause of its communication to us on God's part is pure, sovereign free grace, Paul then states the means on our part by which we receive this righteousness of God and actually become partakers of it: it is by faith. Nothing else is proposed or required for this purpose. It is objected that there is no indication that it is by faith alone, or that faith is asserted as the exclusive means of justification. But that exclusion is directly contained in the description Paul gives of this faith with respect to its specific object: "faith in His blood." For faith that fixes on the blood of Christ as the propitiation for sin — which is the only respect in which Paul says we are justified through faith — admits no partnership with any other grace or duty. It is not part of their nature to rest on the blood of Christ for justification before God. Therefore all other graces and duties are directly excluded here. Those who think otherwise may try to introduce them into this context without clearly corrupting and distorting its meaning. Nor will the other evasion give our opponents any relief — namely, that by "faith" Paul does not mean faith as a single grace but the whole obedience the new covenant requires, faith and works together. For all works whatsoever, as our works, are already excluded in

Paul's description of justification on God's side — "freely by His grace" — by the force of the great rule of Romans 11:6: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." And the specific object Paul assigns to faith in the act by which we are justified — the blood of Christ — absolutely excludes all works from any part in that act. Whatever looks to the blood of Christ for justification is faith and nothing else. As for the claim that this reduces faith to a single act or duty, I refer the reader to the earlier discussion of the nature of justifying faith.

From his declaration of the nature and causes of our justification before God, Paul draws three further inferences, all of which shed additional light on the meaning of his words.

First, boasting is excluded (Romans 3:27). It is clear from this passage and from what Paul says about Abraham in Romans 4:2 that a large part of the controversy he was engaged in concerned whether anything in those who are justified gives them grounds for boasting. The Jews placed all their hopes in things they thought they could boast about — their privileges and their righteousness. But from his declaration of the nature and causes of justification, Paul concludes that all boasting whatsoever is completely shut out. In English, "boasting" always names a vice. But the Greek words Paul uses are neutral in themselves and can describe either a virtue or a vice, as in Hebrews 3:6.

But in every case, these words refer to something distinctive or unique to the person to whom they are ascribed. Wherever something is credited to one person and not another with respect to any good end, there is a foundation for boasting. Paul says all such grounds are completely excluded in the matter of justification. But wherever any condition or qualification in one person is consid-

ered over against another's — especially if it involves works — it provides a basis for boasting, as Paul affirms in Romans 4:2. Comparing that verse with Romans 3:27 makes it plain: wherever our own works have any influence in our justification, there is a basis for boasting. But in evangelical justification, no such boasting of any kind can be admitted. Therefore there is no place for works in our justification before God — for if there were, it would be impossible to avoid some form of boasting, either before God or before men.

Second, Paul draws the general conclusion that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law (Romans 3:28). What Paul means by the law and the works of the law in his argument about justification has already been explained. If we are justified freely through faith in the blood of Christ — that faith which has Christ's propitiation as its specific object — then that faith cannot take any other grace or duty in as a partner. And since we are justified in a way that excludes all boasting necessarily arising from any distinguishing graces or works in ourselves — which excludes all works of the law — it is certain that we are justified by faith alone in Christ. Works are not merely excluded; the path for their return is closed off so thoroughly by Paul's line of argument that all the ingenuity people can devise will never reintroduce them into our justification before God.

Third, Paul asserts from this that we do not overthrow the law through grace but rather uphold it (Romans 3:31). How this is accomplished — and how it can only be accomplished in this way — has already been explained.

This is the substance of Paul's answer to the great question of how a guilty, convicted sinner can come to be justified in the sight of God. The sovereign grace of God, the mediation of Christ, and faith in the blood of Christ — these are all he requires for it. Whatever ideas people may have about justification from other angles, it is not safe to build on any other answer to this question. We are not wiser than the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 4

At the beginning of chapter four, Paul confirms what he had established doctrinally by presenting a significant example: the justification of Abraham. Since Abraham is the father of the faithful, his justification is offered as the pattern for ours, as Paul explicitly states in verses 22-24. I will note a few things about this example on the way to verse five, where I will focus the discussion.

First, Paul denies that Abraham was justified by works (Romans 4:2). These works were not the works of the Jewish law — which some claim is all that is excluded from justification in this passage. They were works Abraham performed hundreds of years before the law was given at Sinai. Therefore what is in view is his moral obedience to God. Moreover, we must understand the works Abraham had at the time when he is said to have been justified in the testimony Paul cites. The works Abraham had at that time were works of righteousness performed in faith and love toward God — works of new obedience under the guidance and help of the Spirit of God, works required in the covenant of grace. These are the works excluded from Abraham's justification. This is plain,

clear, and unmistakable — it cannot be evaded by any distinctions. All of Abraham's gospel-wrought works are explicitly excluded from his justification before God.

Second, Paul proves by the scriptural testimony concerning Abraham's justification that he was justified in no other way than what Paul had already declared — by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:3). "Abraham believed God" — in the promise of Christ and His mediation — "and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3). He was justified by faith in the way Paul had described — there is no other justification by faith — in direct opposition to all his own works and personal righteousness.

Third, from the same testimony Paul declares how Abraham came to participate in the righteousness on the basis of which he was justified before God: by imputation — it was credited or imputed to him as righteousness. The nature of imputation has already been explained.

Fourth, Paul asserts and proves the specific character of this imputation — that it is of grace, without any respect to works — from what is contrary to it: "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due" (Romans 4:4). Where works have any weight, there is no room for the kind of imputation by which Abraham was justified — because that was a gracious imputation, and grace does not impute what is already ours, but makes something ours through that imputation. What is already ours, along with all its effects, is something that is owed to us. That is why those who argue that faith itself is what is imputed to us — in order to give some credibility to an imputation of grace — say it is imputed not for what it actually is (which would make it a matter of debt) but for what it is not. Socinus makes exactly this argu-

ment: "When faith is imputed to us as righteousness, it is imputed for that reason because faith itself is not righteousness, nor does it truly contain righteousness in itself" (De Servatore, part 4, cap. 2). This kind of imputation — which is actually nothing but a false invention — has already been disproved. All works are incompatible with the imputation by which Abraham was justified. The situation of the person justified by works is entirely different from his. Some say that only meritorious works — works performed with a claim to merit, works that make the reward a matter of debt — are excluded, but not other works. But this distinction does not come from Paul. According to Paul, if merit means making the reward a matter of debt, then all works in justification are meritorious — for without any distinction or qualification he says that to the one who works, the reward is not credited as grace but as debt. He does not exclude some works, or works understood in some particular sense, because they would make the reward a matter of debt. He says that all of them would do so, and therefore all exclude gracious imputation. If the foundation of imputation lies within ourselves, imputation by grace is ruled out. In verse five, the sum of Paul's argument — what he had contended for and proved — is expressed: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Everyone agrees that the final clause — "his faith is credited as righteousness" — describes the justification of the person in view. He is justified, and the means is this: his faith is credited or imputed. The earlier words therefore describe the subject of justification, his qualification, and what is required of him.

First, the subject of justification is described as one "who does not work." This does not mean that justification requires him to perform no duties of obedience to God whatsoever — for every person alive is always obligated to every duty of obedience according to the knowledge of God's will that has been given to him. But the expression must be understood in light of the subject being addressed. "The one who does not work" means the one who does not work with respect to justification — not that the person intends to do no works, but that the nature of the thing itself is what Paul has in mind. To say "the one who does not work is justified through believing" is to say that his works, whatever they may be, have no influence on his justification and that God, in justifying him, has no regard for them. Therefore the only subject of justification — the only person to be justified — is the one who does not work in this sense: God considers no one's works, no one's duties of obedience, in the act of justifying them, since we are justified freely by His grace. When God expressly declares that He justifies the one who does not work — and that freely by His grace — I cannot understand what place our works or duties of obedience can possibly have in our justification. Why trouble ourselves inventing roles for them in our justification before God when He Himself declares they have none at all? The words admit no escape. "The one who does not work" is the one who does not work, whatever distinctions people may wish to draw. To rise in opposition against such clear divine testimony — however well-armed with philosophical concepts and arguments, which are nothing but thorns and briars that the word of God will cut through and burn — is an unjustifiable boldness.

Paul adds a further element to his description of the subject of justification: God justifies the ungodly. This expression has stirred up great indignation in many people, some of whom seem personally offended at the apostle himself on its account. If anyone else dares to say that God justifies the ungodly, he is immediately accused of teaching a doctrine that destroys the necessity of godliness, holiness, obedience, and good works. After all, what need could there be for any of them if God justifies the ungodly? Yet this is precisely Paul's way of describing God — that He is the one who justifies the ungodly. It is His prerogative and distinctive attribute. As such, He is to be believed and worshipped, which only adds weight and force to the expression. We must not give up this testimony of the Holy Spirit, no matter how angry people become.

The disagreement is really about the meaning of the words. If that is so, we may differ without causing each other offense, even if we misunderstand the precise sense. But this much must be conceded: God justifies the ungodly. Some say this means those who were formerly ungodly — not those who remain ungodly at the time of justification. And this is certainly true. All who are justified were previously ungodly, and all who are justified are made godly at that same instant. But the question is whether they are godly or ungodly in the moment — or in any moment — prior to their justification. If they are considered godly and are actually godly before justification, then Paul's words are false — that God justifies the ungodly — because the opposite would be true: God justifies only the godly. For these two propositions are contradictory: "God justifies the ungodly" and "God justifies none but the godly."

Therefore, although in and with the justification of a sinner he is made godly — for he receives faith, which purifies the heart and is the living root of all obedience, and the conscience is purged from dead works by the blood of Christ — yet prior to his justification he is ungodly and is treated as ungodly. He is also treated as one who does not work, as one whose duties and obedience contribute nothing to his justification. As he does not work, all works are excluded as the cause through which he is justified; and as he is ungodly, they are excluded even as a necessary prior condition.

The qualification of the subject — or the means on the person's part by which he becomes actually justified — is faith, or believing: "but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly." That means it is faith alone. For it is the faith of the one who does not work; and beyond that, its specific object — God as the one who justifies the ungodly — rules out the accompaniment of any works whatsoever.

This is faith alone — or it is impossible to express faith alone without literally using the word "alone." Faith is asserted in direct opposition to all our works, to the one who does not work, and its specific character is defined by its specific object: God as the one who justifies the ungodly — that is, freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This leaves no room for any works to make the slightest approach toward our justification before God, under the cover of any distinction whatsoever. The nature of justifying faith is also established here. It is not mere intellectual agreement with divine revelation; it is not even a firm agreement that leads to obedience to all Scripture's commands — though these things are included in it. It is a believing in and trusting the One who justifies the ungodly, through the mediation of Christ.

Concerning this person, Paul says that his faith is credited as righteousness — that is, he is justified in the way and manner previously described. But there is disagreement about what these words mean. Some say faith is credited as righteousness in the sense that faith itself, as an act, a grace, and a duty or work of ours, is what is imputed. Others say it is faith as it lays hold of Christ and His righteousness that is properly imputed to us — that faith justifies, or is credited as righteousness, in a relative sense (with reference to its object) and not in a direct sense, and they acknowledge a figure of speech in the words. This view is fiercely opposed, as though these people were denying the plain words of Scripture — when in fact they are simply interpreting this one expression by the many other passages that declare the same thing. But those who hold the first view all affirm that faith here includes obedience or works — either as the form and essence of faith, or as necessary accompaniments that share the same influence on justification. In doing so, they also introduce a figure of speech in the very words they so fiercely criticize others for using, and they arrive at this reading of the whole: "To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith and works are credited to him as righteousness" — which not only denies what Paul says but assigns him a plain contradiction.

I am genuinely surprised that any fair-minded person would interpret this single expression in a way that contradicts the apostle's stated purpose, the words of the same sentence, and the entire context that follows. The proposition Paul sets out to confirm — which is the heart of his entire argument — is that we are justified by the righteousness of God through faith in the blood of Christ. That this righteousness cannot be faith itself will be shown

immediately. And in the words of the text, all works are excluded — if any words can exclude them. But faith as a simple act, grace, and duty of ours is itself a work — and if faith includes obedience within it, it is all works. Furthermore, in the context that follows, Paul proves that Abraham was not justified by works. But "not to be justified by works" and "to be justified by some works" — which is what those who say faith itself is imputed as a work are claiming — are contradictory positions. I will therefore offer a few arguments against this invented reading of Paul's words.

First: faith considered as an act and duty of ours in the absolute sense, and works, are not opposed to each other — for faith is itself a work, a particular kind of working. But faith as the means of our justification and works — or working — are opposed: "to the one who does not work, but believes" (Romans 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8).

Second: what is imputed to us is the righteousness of God. "We became the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "The righteousness of God for all those who believe" (Romans 3:21-22). But faith considered in the absolute sense is not the righteousness of God. God credits righteousness to us apart from works (Romans 4:6), but there is no hint of a double imputation — as if two different kinds of righteousness were imputed, one that is the righteousness of God and one that is not. Faith considered absolutely is not the righteousness of God. Here are the reasons:

First sub-point: that to which the righteousness of God is revealed — that by which we believe and receive it — is not itself the righteousness of God, since nothing can be the cause or means of itself. But the righteousness of God is revealed to faith (Romans 1:16) and received through faith (Romans 3:22; 5:11).

Second sub-point: faith is not the righteousness of God which is through faith. But the righteousness of God that is imputed to us is the righteousness of God which is through faith (Romans 3:22; Philippians 3:9).

Third sub-point: that by which the righteousness of God is to be sought, obtained, and submitted to is not itself that righteousness. But faith is precisely that means (Romans 9:30-31; 10:3).

Fourth sub-point: the righteousness that is imputed to us is not our own prior to that imputation — "that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own" (Philippians 3:9). But faith is a person's own: "Show me your faith; I will show you my faith" (James 2:18).

Fifth sub-point: God credits righteousness to us (Romans 4:6), and that righteousness is the righteousness by which we are justified — it is credited to us in order that we may be justified. But we are justified by the obedience and blood of Christ: "through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19); "much more then, having now been justified by His blood" (Romans 5:9); "He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Hebrews 9:26); "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11). But faith is neither the obedience nor the blood of Christ.

Sixth sub-point: faith, as we said, is our own. And what is our own can be imputed to us. But Paul's discussion concerns what is not ours prior to imputation — what is made ours through it — because it is of grace. And the imputation of what is already genuinely ours, prior to any such imputation, is not a gracious imputa-

tion in Paul's sense. What is imputed in that case is simply credited for what it is and nothing more — it is simply God's judgment about the thing imputed in relation to those whose it already is. That is how the act of Phinehas was credited to him as righteousness: God judged and declared it to be a righteous and rewardable act. Therefore, if our faith and obedience were imputed to us in this sense, that imputation would be nothing more than God's judgment that we are believers and obedient people. As the prophet says, "The righteousness of the righteous man will be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked man will be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:20). Just as the wickedness of the wicked is on him — meaning God judges him as wicked as his works are — so the righteousness of a righteous person is on him, meaning God judges his righteousness for what it is. Therefore, if faith considered absolutely — whether as containing works within itself or as accompanied by works of obedience — is imputed to us, it is imputed either as a perfect righteousness (which it is not) or as an imperfect righteousness (which it is); or the imputation is a judging of what is imperfect to be perfect. But none of these can be affirmed.

First: faith is not imputed to us as a perfect righteousness — the perfect righteousness required by the law — for it is not such a thing. Episcopius himself acknowledges in his *Disputations* (Disp. 43, sections 7-8) that the righteousness imputed to us must be "most absolute and most perfect" (*absolutissima et perfectissima*). He then defines the imputation of righteousness to us as "the gracious estimation of the divine mind by which He reckons the one who believes in His Son as if he were perfectly righteous and had in every way always obeyed the law and His will." No one will

claim that faith is a righteousness so perfect and complete that through it the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, as it is fulfilled by the righteousness that is actually imputed to us.

Second: faith is not imputed to us for what it is — an imperfect righteousness. First, this would do us no good, since we cannot be justified before God by an imperfect righteousness, as the psalmist's prayer makes plain: "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous" (Psalm 143:2) — meaning no servant of God, however high his measure of imperfect righteousness, will be justified. Second, crediting something to us that was already ours prior to that crediting, for exactly what it is and nothing more, is contrary to the kind of imputation Paul describes, as has been proved.

Third: this proposed imputation cannot be God judging as perfect what is in fact imperfect. For God's judgment is according to truth. But without judging a thing to be perfect, He cannot accept it as such. To accept anything for more than you judge it to be is simply to be deceived.

Finally, if faith as a work is imputed to us, it must be as a work done in faith — for no other work is accepted by God. Then the faith in which that work is done must also be imputed to us, for that faith is itself faith and a good work. That faith would then need yet another faith from which it proceeds. And so on without end.

There are many other things in Paul's further explanation of Abraham's justification, the nature of his faith, his righteousness before God, and the application of all this to all who believe, that could be pressed in support of the same point. But if every testi-

mony the Holy Spirit has given to this truth were examined, there would be no end of writing. I will note one more thing and then conclude the discussion of this chapter.

Romans 4:6-8: Paul continues his argument to prove the freedom of our justification by faith — apart from any regard to works — through the instance of the forgiveness of sin, which is an essential component of justification. He does this through the testimony of the psalmist, who describes a person's blessedness in terms of the forgiveness of sins. His purpose is not to declare the full nature of justification — that he has already done — but only to prove its freedom from any respect to works in this essential component of it. "Even as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works" — which is the only point Paul intends to prove from this testimony — "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered" (Romans 4:6-7). David describes their blessedness by this, not meaning that their entire blessedness consists in forgiveness alone — but this element of it is one in which no regard to any works can possibly be had. Paul may rightly describe a person's blessedness this way because the crediting of righteousness and the non-crediting of sin — both of which he mentions distinctly — are inseparable, and together they constitute that person's entire blessedness with respect to justification. Because the forgiveness of sin is the first and principal aspect of justification, and the crediting of righteousness always accompanies it, a person's blessedness may fittingly be described in terms of that forgiveness. Since all spiritual blessings go together in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), a person's blessedness may indeed be described by any one of them. Yet the crediting of righteousness and

the forgiveness of sin are not the same thing, any more than righteousness credited and sin forgiven are the same thing. Paul does not present them as identical — he mentions them distinctly, since both are equally necessary for our complete justification, as has been proved.

ROMANS 5:12-21

Romans 5:12-21: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned — for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would

increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In Romans 3:27, Paul had declared that in the matter of justification all boasting is excluded. But here he allows a boasting — and not only that, he says: "we also exult in God." He excludes boasting in ourselves, because there is nothing in us to earn or advance our own justification. He permits boasting in God because of the surpassing excellence of the way and means of justification that God in His grace has provided. This boasting in God has special reference to what Paul intends to discuss further. The phrase "and not only so" includes what he had mainly treated of up to that point — our justification as it consists in the forgiveness of sin. While he does assume and mention the crediting of righteousness to us, his main focus in the earlier chapters had been justification through the pardon of sin and our freedom from condemnation, which excludes all boasting in ourselves. But now he intends to go further — to the ground of our glorying in God on the basis of a right and title freely given to eternal life. That ground is the imputation of Christ's righteousness and obedience for the justification of life, or the reign of grace through righteousness to eternal life.

Some have complained greatly about the obscurity of Paul's argument in this passage, on account of various omissions, incomplete sentences, reversed constructions, and other figures of speech — whether real or merely imagined — within it. But I cannot help thinking that anyone familiar with the basic principles of the Christian faith, and personally aware of the nature and guilt of our original fall from God, who would read this passage without prejudice, would grant that Paul's purpose is to prove the follow-

ing: just as Adam's sin was imputed to all people to condemnation, so the righteousness and obedience of Christ is imputed to all who believe for the justification of life. Theodoret gives the substance of it well (Dialogue 3): "See how the things of Christ are compared with the things of Adam — medicine with disease, a bandage with a wound, righteousness with sin, blessing with curse, acquittal with condemnation, obedience with transgression, life with death, a kingdom with the grave, Christ with Adam, man with man."

The differences among interpreters about this passage relate to certain particles, prepositions, and the connection between one clause and another — none of which affects the confirmation of the truth we are arguing for. Paul's plain purpose and his express statements are such that, if people could simply accept them, this controversy might be settled.

Socinus acknowledges that this passage of Scripture gives the greatest occasion, as he puts it, for our position in this matter — he cannot deny that at least the strong appearance of what we believe is represented in Paul's words. He therefore makes his utmost effort to twist and distort them. Yet though most of his devices have since been carried into the annotations of others on this passage, he himself produces nothing of substance that is not already taken from Origen and the commentary of Pelagius on this epistle — the latter found in Jerome's works — which had been pressed before him by Erasmus. The essence of his argument is this: Adam's actual transgression is not imputed to his descendants, nor is a corrupted nature communicated to them through him. Rather, since Adam incurred the penalty of death, all who derive their nature from him in that condition are also made subject to death. As for the corruption of nature in us — the tendency toward sin — this is

not derived from Adam but is a habit acquired through many repeated acts of our own. Equally, on the other side, the obedience and righteousness of Christ is not imputed to us. Rather, when we make ourselves His children through obedience to Him, and since He obtained eternal life for Himself through His obedience to God, we become partakers of those benefits. This is the substance of his lengthy argument on the subject (*De Servatore*, lib. 4, cap. 6). But this is not an exposition of Paul's words — it is a direct contradiction of them, as will become clear in the examination that follows.

My intention is not to expound Paul's entire argument here, but only those passages in it that clearly declare the way and manner of our justification before God.

Paul here presents and develops a comparison between the first Adam, through whom sin entered the world, and the second Adam, through whom it is taken away. It is a comparison between opposites — similar in some ways and different in others, with both the similarities and the differences illuminating the truth he is declaring. The general proposition is stated in verse 12: "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Sin and its punishment entered the world through one man and through one sin, as Paul later makes clear. Yet they were not confined to that one man — they extended equally to all. Paul expresses this by inverting the order of cause and effect. In describing the entrance of sin, he first states the cause and then the effect: "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin." But in applying it to all people, he states the effect first and then the cause: "death spread to all men, because all sinned." On sin's first entrance, death spread to all — that is, all people became liable to it as the

punishment due to sin. All people who ever existed, exist, or will exist were not personally alive at that moment. Yet on the very first entrance of sin, all of them were made subject to death — liable to punishment. They were so by virtue of God's appointment, on the basis of their federal existence in the one man who sinned. And they actually became subject to that sentence in their own persons when, at their natural birth, they were born as children of wrath.

From this it is clear what sin Paul has in mind: the actual sin of Adam — the one sin of the one common representative while he held that position. Though the corruption and depravity of our nature necessarily follow from that sin in everyone born into the world through natural generation, it is the guilt of Adam's actual sin alone that rendered all people liable to death on sin's first entrance into the world. So death entered through sin — through its guilt, its liability — and that with respect to all people universally.

"Death" here encompasses the whole punishment due to sin, whatever that punishment is — we need not debate it here. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) — and nothing else. Whatever sin deserves in God's justice, whatever punishment God has at any time appointed or threatened for it, is comprised in death: "In the day you eat from it you will surely die." Paul lays this down as the foundation of his discussion and his comparison: through and by the actual sin of Adam, all people are made liable to death — to the whole punishment due to sin. That is, the guilt of that sin is imputed to them. For the imputation of sin to anyone means nothing other than rendering them justly liable to the punishment due to that sin. Correspondingly, not imputing sin means freeing people from liability to punishment. This effectively exposes the emptiness of the Pelagian interpretation — that death

spread to all merely through natural descent from one who had deserved it, with no imputation of the guilt of sin to them. That is a direct contradiction of Paul's plain words, for it is the guilt of sin, not natural descent, that he says is the cause of death.

Having mentioned sin and death — sin as the sole cause of death, the guilt of sin producing the punishment of death, sin deserving nothing but death and death due to nothing but sin — Paul then explains how all people universally became liable to this punishment. The Greek phrase can be translated "in whom all sinned" — referring to the one man in whom all sinned — which is evident from the corresponding effect: "in Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Or as Paul states it here, through his sin death spread to all people. This is the evident sense of the words, with one form used for another as is common in Scripture (see Matthew 15:5; Romans 4:18; 5:2; Philippians 1:3; Hebrews 9:17), and as the best Greek writers often do. So Hesiod uses a similar construction for "moderation is best in all things"; and similarly "it rests with you" and "this rests with me." Augustine contends for this reading against the Pelagians, rejecting their alternative renderings "inasmuch as" or "because." But I will not press the reading of the words. It is the strategy of our opponents to convince people that our entire argument for the imputation of Adam's sin to his descendants rests solely on this one interpretation. I will therefore grant them their preferred reading: "inasmuch as," "because," or "in that all sinned." We simply say that here a reason is given why death spread to all people — namely, because all sinned in that sin through which death entered the world.

It is true that death, by virtue of the original constitution of the law, is due to every sin whenever it is committed. But the present question is how death spread all at once to all people — how they became liable to it on its first entrance through Adam's actual sin. This cannot be explained by their own actual sins. Indeed, Paul states in the following verses that death spread even to those who never actually sinned as Adam did. And if the actual sins of individuals in imitation of Adam's sin were what Paul intends, then people would have been made liable to death before they had sinned — because on sin's first entrance into the world, death spread to all people before anyone but Adam had actually sinned. But for people to be liable to death — which is nothing but the punishment of sin — when they have not sinned is an open contradiction. God in His sovereign power might inflict death on an innocent creature, but that an innocent creature should be guilty of death is impossible, for to be guilty of death is to have sinned. Therefore the expression "because all sinned" — expressing the deserving of death and the guilt of it at the very moment when sin and death first entered the world — can refer to no sin other than Adam's sin and our connection to it: "we were all that one man" (*Eramus enim omnes ille unus homo*). And this can only be the case through the imputation of the guilt of that sin to us. Since Adam's act was not inherently and subjectively ours, we can be affected by its consequences only through the imputation of its guilt. For the communication to us of what is not inherent in us is precisely what we mean by imputation.

This is the main proposition of the comparison Paul intends, and I have spent more time on it because Paul lays it as the foundation for everything he afterwards infers and asserts throughout

the comparison. Some say there is an incomplete sentence here — that Paul states the proposition on Adam's side but does not fully complete the corresponding statement on Christ's side. Origen explains Paul's silence by suggesting that he was careful lest what needed to be said about Christ's side should be abused by anyone as an excuse for laziness and carelessness. For whereas Paul begins with the comparison word "as" — "as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin" — the completion should be: "so through One, righteousness entered the world, and life through righteousness."

Origen acknowledges this as the genuine completion of the comparison, though he says Paul chose not to state it explicitly, lest people abuse it as an excuse for negligence, supposing that what ought to be done was already accomplished for them. But this both plainly contradicts and undermines most of what Paul further asserts in explaining the passage. The apostle did not suppress any truth for such reasons. He plainly states what is implied here in verse 19, and he shows how foolish and wicked any notion is that supposes this doctrine encourages anyone to indulge in sin.

Some therefore grant that Paul does hold back the explicit statement of what is ascribed to Christ in contrast to Adam until verse 19. But in truth it is sufficiently implied at the close of verse 14, where Paul says that Adam in these matters "is a type of Him who was to come." For the way Christ introduced righteousness and life and communicated them to people corresponds to the way Adam introduced sin and death, which spread to all the world. Adam being the type of Christ, what held true for Adam in relation to his natural descendants with respect to sin and death holds true

for the Lord Christ — the second Adam — in relation to His spiritual descendants with respect to righteousness and life. From this we argue:

If Adam's actual sin was imputed to all his descendants so as to be accounted their own sin to condemnation, then the actual obedience of Christ — the second Adam — is imputed to all His spiritual offspring, that is, to all believers, for justification. I will not press this argument further here, because we will encounter its grounds again later.

The next two verses contain an objection and Paul's response to it, which do not directly concern our present argument, so I will pass over them.

Verses 15-16: Paul proceeds to explain his comparison in those points where the two sides differ.

"But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many."

The contrast is between the transgression on one side and the free gift on the other. The difference asserted is not in the opposite effects of death and life, but only in the degree of their effectiveness with respect to those effects. "The transgression" — the fall, the sin, the offense — is the "disobedience of one" (verse 19); it is from Adam's first sin that we get the general term "the fall." What is set over against it is the free gift — the grace of God and the gift by grace through Jesus Christ. While in the next verse this word

for "gift" refers specifically to the righteousness of Christ, here it encompasses all the causes of our justification set in contrast to Adam's fall and sin's entrance through it.

The outcome of the transgression — the fall — is that "many died." By "many" Paul means only that the effects of that one offense were not confined to one person. If we ask who and how many "many" are, Paul tells us elsewhere: all people universally — that is, all the descendants of Adam. Through this one offense, because they all sinned in it, they all died — that is, they all became liable to death as the punishment due to that one offense. This also shows how futile it is to twist the words of verse 12 — "because all sinned" — to mean anything other than the first sin in Adam, since it is given as the reason why death spread to all, and it is plainly stated here that they died, or that death spread to them, through that one offense.

The power of the free gift in contrast to the transgression is described as something that "abounded all the more." Beyond the plain truth being asserted, Paul seems to me to be arguing for the fairness of our justification by grace through the obedience of Christ, by comparing it with the condemnation that came upon us through Adam's sin and disobedience. For if it was just, fitting, and right that all people should be made subject to condemnation for Adam's sin, it is far more fitting that those who believe should be justified by the obedience of Christ through the grace and free gift of God. Paul explains later in exactly what respects the gift by grace exceeded the fall's power to condemn. And it is by that same means alone — by which we are freed from condemnation more fully than we were made liable to it by Adam's sin and fall — that we are justified before God. And that means is the grace of God

and the gift by grace through Jesus Christ alone — which is what we are arguing for. Verse 16 expresses another difference between the two sides of the comparison — or rather gives a specific instance of the general difference asserted before.

"And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification."

"By one who sinned" is equivalent to "by one sin, one offense" — the single sin of that one man. The word translated "judgment" is rendered by most interpreters as guilt or offense — terms related to it. In Hebrew too, the word for "judgment" is used for guilt, as in Jeremiah 26:11: "This man deserves death" — literally, "the judgment of death is on this man, he is guilty of death." The order is this: first the sin, the fall, the one act of the one man who sinned — his actual sin alone. From that followed guilt, which was common to all. In and through that one sin, guilt came upon all. And the outcome to which that guilt led was condemnation — guilt to condemnation — and this guilt to condemnation came upon all through one person's one sin. This is the order of things on Adam's side: first, the one sin; second, the guilt that followed and spread to all; third, the condemnation that guilt deserved. And their counterparts in the second Adam are: first, the free gift of God; second, the gift of grace itself — the righteousness of Christ; and third, the justification of life. Even though Paul distinguishes these things to illuminate his comparison and contrast, what he means by all of them is the righteousness and obedience of Christ, as he states plainly in verses 18-19. In the matter of our justification he calls it

a free gift — with respect to God's gracious and free grant of it; a free gift to us — with respect to our receiving it; and righteousness — with respect to its effect of making us righteous.

So then: through Adam's sin imputed to them, guilt came on all people to condemnation. In what respects was the free gift different? "Not as through the one who sinned" — it differed in two ways. First, condemnation came on all through one offense. But standing under the guilt of that one offense, we also incur the guilt of countless additional sins. If the free gift had addressed only that one offense and gone no further, we could not be fully delivered — therefore it is said to be "from many transgressions," meaning from all our sins and trespasses. Second, Adam and all his descendants in him were in a state of acceptance with God, placed on the path to obtaining eternal life and blessedness, in which God Himself would have been their reward. By the entrance of sin they lost God's favor and incurred the guilt of death and condemnation — these being the same thing. But they did not lose an immediate right and title to life and blessedness — for they had never had that yet, since the course of obedience appointed for them had not been completed. What came upon all through the one offense was therefore the loss of God's favor in the approval of their present state, and the guilt and condemnation of death. But an immediate right to eternal life was not lost through that one sin, for it had never been possessed. The free gift is different: through it we are freed not only from one sin but from all our sins, and through it we also receive a right and title to eternal life — for through it grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life (verse 21).

The same truth is further explained and confirmed in verse 17: "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." Since Paul's purpose has been sufficiently shown in the observations on the previous verses, I will note here only those things that most directly concern our present subject. First, it is worth observing what variety of expressions Paul uses to set forth the grace of God in the justification of believers. Nothing that might in any way express the freedom, sufficiency, and power of grace for that end is left out. Although some of these terms may seem to overlap in meaning and are used interchangeably, each one contains something distinctive, and all of them together set forth the whole work of grace. The word rendered "free gift" seems to Paul in this argument to denote the ground of a case at trial — the matter pleaded on the basis of which the person tried is to be acquitted and justified. This is the righteousness of Christ. "Free donation" excludes all desert and conditions on the part of those who receive it, and it is that by which we are freed from condemnation and given a right to the justification of life. "The grace of God" is the free grace and favor of God, the original and efficient cause of our justification, as was declared in Romans 3:24. "Abundance of grace" is added to assure believers of the certainty of the result — it is that which lacks nothing for our justification. "The gift of righteousness" expresses the free grant of that righteousness which is imputed to us for the justification of life, later called the obedience of Christ. However wise and learned people may be, we all do well to learn our thoughts and words about these divine mysteries — and about this one in particular, concerning

our justification — from this blessed apostle, who understood them better than any of us and who, moreover, wrote by divine inspiration.

It amazes me how people can break through the fence Paul has built around the grace of God and the obedience of Christ in our justification before God, in order to introduce their own works of obedience and find a place for them there. The purpose of Paul and the purpose of some men in declaring this doctrine of justification seem to be entirely at odds. Paul's entire discussion concerns the grace of God, the death, blood, and obedience of Christ — as if he could never fully satisfy himself in setting them out and declaring them — with no mention whatsoever of any works or duties of our own, and no hint of any role they play in justification. But others argue entirely for their own works and duties, and have invented as many terms to dress them up as the Holy Spirit has used to express and declare the grace of God. Instead of the Spirit-given words of wisdom that fill Paul's discussion, their discussions are filled with conditions, preparatory dispositions, merits, causes, and every kind of decoration for our own works. For my part, I will choose to learn from Paul and shape my understanding and expression of gospel mysteries — and of this one in particular, concerning our justification — to follow the one who cannot mislead me, rather than trust any other guide, however impressive its claims.

Second, it is plain in this verse that nothing more is required of anyone for justification than to receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. This is Paul's description of those who are justified — all that is required of them. This excludes all our own works of righteousness, since through none of them do we re-

ceive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. It also excludes the crediting of faith itself to our justification as an act and duty of our own, for faith is the means by which we receive the gift of righteousness — and it will not be denied that we are justified by the gift of righteousness, that is, by the righteousness given to us, through which we have a right and title to life. But our faith is not this gift, for what receives and what is received are not the same thing.

Third, where there is abounding grace — and even superabounding grace — at work in our justification, nothing more is required for it. For how can grace be said to abound — indeed to superabound — not only in freeing us from condemnation but in giving us a title to eternal life, if it must in any part be supplemented and made up by our own works and duties? The realities intended fill these expressions with genuine content, even if to some they seem like empty words.

Fourth, there is a gift of righteousness required for our justification, which all who are to be justified must receive. And all who receive it are justified — for those who receive it will reign in life through Jesus Christ. From this it follows: first, that the righteousness by which we are justified before God can be nothing of our own — nothing inherent in us, nothing performed by us. It is what is freely given to us, and this donation is by imputation: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord credits righteousness" (Romans 4:6). By faith we receive what is so given and imputed, and in no other way do we participate in it. This is what it means to be justified in Paul's sense. Second, it is a righteousness that gives a right and title to eternal life — for those who receive it will reign in life. It cannot therefore consist in the pardon of sin alone. First, pardon of

sin cannot in any reasonable sense be called the gift of righteousness — pardon is one thing and righteousness another. Second, pardon of sin does not give a right and title to eternal life. It is true that the one whose sins are pardoned will inherit eternal life, but not merely by virtue of that pardon — rather through the crediting of righteousness, which inseparably accompanies pardon and is its very ground.

The description Paul gives here of our justification by grace — set in contrast to the condemnation we were made liable to through Adam's sin, and shown to surpass it in the power of grace over that first sin by the forgiveness of not one but all sins, and by the bestowal of a right to eternal life — is this: we receive the grace of God and the gift of righteousness, which gives us a right to life through Jesus Christ. But this is nothing other than being justified by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, received through faith alone.

The conclusion of what has been demonstrated through the comparison Paul has been pursuing is fully stated and further confirmed in verses 18-19.

Verse 18: "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." The Greek manuscripts vary here — some read "by one offense" (which Beza follows and our translation gives in the margin), and most read "by the offense of one." The same variation applies to "righteousness" on the other side. But both amount to the same thing: the one offense intended is the offense of one person, Adam, and the one act of righteousness is the righteousness of one person, Jesus Christ.

The way Paul introduces this statement — as a logical inference — shows that what he is asserting here is the very substance of the truth he has been arguing for. The comparison continues in the same manner as before.

On Adam's side: through the sin or fall of one, guilt came upon all people to condemnation. The word is guilt, and that alone. Through the sin of one, all people became guilty and were made liable to condemnation. The guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all people. There is no other way it could come upon them to condemnation — no other way they could be rendered liable to death and judgment on account of it. As we have established throughout this discussion, by "death and condemnation" Paul means the whole punishment due to sin. This side of the comparison, then, is clear and evident.

On Christ's side, in answer to this, the righteousness of one is set in contrast to the sin of the other, as the cause of justification stands against the cause of condemnation. "By the righteousness of one" — that is, the righteousness that can be pleaded for justification. That is the righteousness pleaded for justification. By this, as our translators supply from the previous verse, "the free gift came upon all" — just as was said on the other side. The Syriac translation renders the words without supplying anything: "Therefore as by the sin of one, condemnation was to all men, so by the righteousness of one, justification to life shall be to all men." The sense is made plain without any additional word supplied. But since the original does not include the full phrase, something from Paul's own preceding words must be supplied to reflect his intention. That something is "the free grant of righteousness" — the free gift of righteousness for justification. The righteousness of the one,

Jesus Christ, is freely granted to all believers for the justification of life. For the "all" here is defined and limited to those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness through Christ (verse 17).

Some vainly argue from this passage that righteousness and life are offered to all people universally, most of whom are never actually made partakers of them. Nothing could be more contrary to Paul's purpose. People are not made guilty of condemnation through Adam's sin by some divine arrangement under which they might or might not be liable depending on conditions. Every person, as soon as he exists and by virtue of being a descendant of the first Adam, is personally liable to condemnation — and the wrath of God rests on him. On the other side, exactly and only those are in view who, through faith and their relationship to the Lord Christ the second Adam, are actually participants in the justification of life. The controversy about the universality of redemption through Christ's death is not at stake here, since those who affirm universal redemption do not claim that it therefore follows that the free gift to the justification of life necessarily comes upon all — they know that it does not. Nor does this passage speak of a provision of righteousness and life for people on condition of believing, though that is true in itself. It speaks only of the certain justification of those who do believe and the way in which it comes. Nor will the analogy of the comparison here support any such interpretation. For the "all" on Adam's side means all and only those who derive their existence from Adam through natural descent — any person who did not do so would have no connection to his sin or fall (as was truly the case with the man Christ Jesus). And the "all" on Christ's side means only those who derive spiritual life from

Christ. Suppose a person does not — he has no part in the righteousness of the One for the justification of life. Our argument from these words is this: just as the sin of the one that came upon all to condemnation was the sin of the first Adam imputed to them, so the righteousness of the one that comes upon all believers for the justification of life is the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. I do not know how Paul could have stated or confirmed this more clearly. Yet verse 19 states it even more plainly.

"For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."

This verse is well explained by Cyril of Alexandria (Commentary on John, book 11, chapter 25): "Just as by the transgression of the first man, as the firstfruits of our race, we were given over to death; so also through the obedience and righteousness of Christ, in that He subjected Himself to the law — though He was the author of the law — the blessing and quickening that comes through the Spirit penetrated our whole nature." And by Leo (Letter 12 to Juvenal): "In order to restore the life of all, He took upon Himself the cause of all; so that just as through the guilt of one all were made sinners, so through the innocence of one all might be made innocent. Righteousness was to flow to humanity from the place where human nature was assumed."

What Paul had previously called the sin or offense of Adam, he now describes as "disobedience" — and what he called the righteousness of Christ, he now calls "obedience." Adam's disobedience was his actual transgression of God's law. Through this, Paul says, "many were made sinners" — sinners in the sense of being liable to death and condemnation. They could not be made liable to death

unless they were first made sinners or guilty. And this could only be the case if they are considered to have sinned in Adam, with the guilt of his sin therefore imputed to them. Paul therefore affirms that Adam's actual sin was the sin of all people in such a way that they were made sinners through it — liable to death and condemnation.

What Paul sets in direct contrast is the obedience of one — that is, of Jesus Christ. And this was the actual obedience He rendered to the whole law of God. For just as Adam's disobedience was his actual transgression of the whole law, so Christ's obedience was His actual fulfillment of the whole law. The antithesis demands this.

Through this, "many will be made righteous." How? By the imputation of that obedience to them. For that — and nothing else — is how people are made sinners by the imputation of Adam's disobedience. And this is what gives us a right and title to eternal life, as Paul declares in verse 21: "so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life." This righteousness is none other than the obedience of the one Christ, as it is called in verse 18. It is said to come upon us — that is, to be imputed to us — for "blessed is the man to whom God credits righteousness" (Romans 4:6). Through this we have not only deliverance from the death and condemnation to which we were liable by Adam's sin, but the pardon of many offenses — that is, all our personal sins — and a right to eternal life through the grace of God, for "we are justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

These things are plainly and fully declared by the apostle, and it is our duty to shape our own understanding and expression to his, as far as we are able. What is offered in opposition to this is so

full of exceptions and evasions, and leads so far away from the plain words of Scripture in tangled disputes, that the conscience of a convicted sinner finds nothing in it to settle on for rest and satisfaction — and cannot tell what to believe for justification.

Piscator in his commentary on this chapter and elsewhere presses what appears to be a strong argument against the imputation of Christ's obedience to our justification. But the argument rests on an obvious mistake and a false assumption, and it contradicts the plain words of the text. It is true, as he observes and proves, that our redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, and justification are frequently and prominently attributed to the death and blood of Christ. The reasons for this have been partly indicated already, and a fuller account will be given shortly. But it does not follow from this that the obedience of Christ's life — in which He fulfilled the whole law, having been made under it for us — is excluded from any causal role in our justification, or that it is not imputed to us. Against this, Piscator argues as follows.

"If the obedience of Christ's life were imputed to us as righteousness, there was no need for Christ to die for us — for He had to die for us as the unrighteous (1 Peter 3:18). But if we were made righteous through His life, no reason remained for Him to die for us, since the righteousness of God does not permit Him to punish the righteous. Yet He did punish us in Christ — that is, He punished Christ for us and in our place, after he had lived righteously, as is certain from Scripture. Therefore we were not made righteous through Christ's holy life. Likewise, Christ died in order to acquire for us that righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). He had not therefore acquired it before His death" (Scholia on Romans 5).

But this entire argument, I say, rests on an obvious mistake. It assumes an order of things in which the obedience of Christ — His righteousness in fulfilling the law — is first imputed to us, and then, on that basis, the righteousness of His death would need to take effect and be imputed to us afterward. On that assumption, he says the latter would be pointless. But no such order or divine arrangement is argued or assumed in our position on justification. It is true that Christ's life and obedience to the law preceded His sufferings and bearing of the curse — it could not have been otherwise, since that order was required by the nature of things. But it does not follow that the same order must be observed in their imputation or application to us. That application is an effect of sovereign wisdom and grace, and it does not follow the natural sequence of Christ's obedience and suffering but rather the moral order of the purposes to which they are appointed. I do not assert — nor do I need to — distinct acts of imputation: one of Christ's obedience for the justification of life and a right to eternal life, and another of His suffering for the pardon of our sins and freedom from condemnation. By both together we receive both, according to the ordinance of God, so that Christ may be all in all. Yet as to the actual experience of the effects, in God's way of bringing sinners to the justification of life, the application of Christ's death to them for the pardon of sin and freedom from condemnation is, in the order of nature and in the exercise of faith, prior to the application of His obedience for a right and title to eternal life.

The condition of the person to be justified is a state of sin and wrath, in which he is liable to death and condemnation. This is what a convicted sinner feels, and it is the first thing he seeks deliverance from: "What must we do to be saved?" The first thing

presented to him in the doctrine and promise of the gospel — which is the rule and instrument of its application — is the death of Christ. Without this, no imputed righteousness — not even the obedience of Christ Himself — can give him relief. He knows he has sinned, fallen short of the glory of God, and stands under the condemning sentence of the law. Until he receives deliverance from that, there is no point in presenting him with what would give him a right to eternal life. But once that is supplied, he is equally concerned with what will further give him that title — so that he may reign in life through righteousness. In this matter, in its proper order, the conscience is no less concerned than it is with deliverance from condemnation. This order is expressed in the declaration of the fruits and effects of Christ's mediation: "to make atonement for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9:24). There is no force in the objection that Christ's obedience in life actually preceded His suffering, for the method of their application is not determined by that temporal sequence — the condition of sinners to be justified and the nature of their justification require a different order, as God has ordained. Moreover, Christ's obedience and sufferings were intertwined from beginning to end, both equally belonging to His state of humiliation, and cannot be separated in reality — only in our thinking. He suffered in all His obedience, and obeyed in all His suffering (Hebrews 5:8). And neither aspect of our justification — freedom from condemnation and a right to eternal life — can exist without the other, according to God's ordinance and constitution. Therefore the whole effect is rightly ascribed together to the whole mediation of Christ, so far as He acted toward God on our behalf — in which He fulfilled the entire law, both as to the penalty demanded of sinners

and as to the righteousness required for life as its eternal reward. There are many reasons why Scripture, by way of special emphasis, attributes our justification to the death and blood of Christ.

First, the grace and love of God — the chief efficient cause of our justification — are most eminently and visibly displayed in Christ's death. Scripture most frequently presents the death of Christ as the supreme instance and undeniable demonstration of divine love and grace. And this is what we are above all to contemplate in our justification, since God's purpose in it is the glory of His grace: "He made us accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Ephesians 1:6). Since grace is the fountain, spring, and sole cause — both of Christ's obedience and of its imputation to us, together with the pardon of sin and righteousness thereby — it is everywhere in Scripture set before us as the primary object of our faith in justification, and is set directly against all our own works. God's whole design is that grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life. Since this is most plainly and visibly accomplished in the death of Christ, our justification is assigned to it in a special way.

Second, the love and grace of Christ Himself are especially exalted in our justification, so that all people may honor the Son even as they honor the Father. These are often expressed for this purpose: 2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:6-7; Revelation 1:5-6. They are most eminently displayed in His death, so that all their effects and fruits are attributed to it in a special way — just as it is common, among many things that together produce an effect, to attribute the effect to the most prominent one, especially when it cannot be conceived as separated from the rest.

Third, Christ's death is the clear testimony that what He did and suffered was for us and not for Himself. Without this, all the obedience He yielded to the law might be viewed as owed only on His own account, and He might seem to be merely the kind of Savior the Socinians imagine — one who does everything for us before God, and nothing with God on our behalf. But His bearing the curse of the law — He who was not only an innocent man but the Son of God — openly testifies that what He did and suffered was for us and not for Himself. It is no wonder, therefore, that our faith with respect to justification is first and primarily directed to His death and blood-shedding.

Fourth, all of Christ's obedience throughout His life had reference to the sacrifice of Himself that was to follow, in which it received its completion and on which its efficacy for our justification depended. Just as no imputation of actual obedience would justify sinners from the condemnation that had passed on them for Adam's sin, so although Christ's obedience was not a mere preparation or qualification of His person for His sufferings, its efficacy for our justification depended on the sufferings that followed — when His soul was made an offering for sin.

Fifth, as was noted before, reconciliation and the pardon of sin through Christ's blood directly address, in the first place, our relief from the condition into which we were cast by Adam's sin — the loss of God's favor and liability to death. This is therefore what a lost, convicted sinner — the kind of person Christ calls to Himself — looks for first. That is why justification is so prominently and frequently presented as the effect of Christ's blood-shedding and death, which are the direct cause of our reconciliation and pardon.

But none of these considerations imply that the obedience of the one man Jesus Christ is not imputed to us — through which grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life.

The same truth is fully stated and confirmed in Romans 8:1-4. But this passage has recently been so thoroughly explained and defended by another in his learned and careful exposition of it — Dr. Jacombe, part 1, verse 4, page 587 and following — that nothing of weight remains to be added to what he has argued there. The answers he appends to the main objections against the imputation of Christ's righteousness are sufficient to satisfy the minds of fair and unbiased readers. I will therefore pass over this testimony, since it has been so recently and ably handled, rather than press the same points again — which might, as often happens, only weaken them.

ROMANS 10:3-4

"For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

What is resolved in these verses, Paul begins to introduce in Romans 9:30. Because what he was about to say was somewhat surprising and contrary to common expectation, he introduces it with the familiar question he uses on similar occasions (Romans 3:5; 6:1; 7:7; 9:14): "What shall we say then?" — meaning: is there unrighteousness with God, as in Romans 9:14? Or: what is to be said about this? His assertion is that the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness attained righteousness — the righteousness that

comes from faith — while Israel, which pursued the law of righteousness, did not attain that law of righteousness, meaning actual righteousness before God.

Nothing could seem more contrary to reason than what the outcome demonstrates here. The Gentiles, who had lived in sin and pleasures without ever once striving to attain any righteousness before God, attained it when the gospel was preached. Israel, on the other hand, which had diligently pursued righteousness through all the works of the law and duties of obedience to God, fell short of it and never attained it. All preparations, all dispositions, all merit with respect to righteousness and justification are excluded from the Gentiles' side — for all of them involve, to some degree, a pursuit of righteousness, which is precisely what is denied of the Gentiles. By faith alone in Him who justifies the ungodly, they attained righteousness — or, as Paul puts it, the righteousness of faith. For to attain righteousness by faith and to attain the righteousness that comes from faith are the same thing. Therefore everything that is included in any way in pursuing righteousness — including all our duties and works — is excluded from any influence on our justification. This is expressed to declare the sovereignty and freedom of God's grace: we are justified freely by His grace, and on our part all boasting is excluded. Whatever people may claim and however they may argue, those who attain righteousness and justification before God while not pursuing righteousness, do so by the free imputation of another's righteousness to them.

Someone may say: it is true that in their pagan days the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness, but when the truth of the gospel was revealed to them, they then pursued righteousness and

attained it. But first, this directly contradicts Paul, because it says they attained righteousness only when they pursued it — whereas he says the exact opposite. Second, it eliminates the distinction Paul draws between them and Israel — namely, that one pursued righteousness and the other did not. Third, to "pursue righteousness" in this passage means to pursue a righteousness of one's own — to establish one's own righteousness (Romans 10:3). And far from being a means of attaining righteousness, this is the most effective obstacle to it.

If those who have no righteousness of their own — who are so far from it that they never even sought it — yet by faith receive the righteousness by which they are justified before God, then they do so by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them. Let someone assign another way if they can.

From the other side of the instance concerning Israel, some must hear — whether they like it or not — what they find unwelcome.

Three things are stated about Israel: first, their attempt; second, their outcome; and third, the reason for it.

Their attempt was this: they pursued the law of righteousness. The word used for their pursuit conveys earnestness, diligence, and sincerity. It is the same word Paul uses to describe his own pursuit and what our pursuit of gospel obedience ought to be (Philippians 3:12). They were not negligent in this — they served God night and day earnestly. Nor were they hypocrites — Paul testifies to this, saying they had a zeal for God (Romans 10:2). What they so earnestly pursued was the law of righteousness — the law that prescribes a perfect personal righteousness before God, the

things that "if a man does them, he will live by them" (Romans 10:5). Paul has no separate regard to the ceremonial law here, except as it was an extension of the moral law by God's will and as obedience to it belonged to that law. When he speaks of the ceremonial law separately, he calls it "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," but it is never called the law of righteousness or the law whose righteousness is fulfilled in us (Romans 8:4). Therefore their pursuit of this law of righteousness was their diligent performance of all duties of obedience according to the directives and requirements of the moral law.

Second, the outcome of their attempt was that they did not attain the law of righteousness — that is, they did not attain a righteousness before God through it. Though the goal of the law was precisely that — a righteousness before God in which a person might live — they could never reach it.

Third, Paul explains why they failed to reach what they so earnestly pursued. There was a double error: first, in the means by which they sought it; second, in the righteousness itself they were seeking. The first is declared in Romans 9:32: "because it was not by faith, but as if it were by works of the law." Faith and works are the only two ways by which righteousness can be pursued, and they are opposite and incompatible. No one pursues righteousness by both at once. They cannot be blended into a single means of attaining righteousness. They stand opposed as grace and works — what belongs to one does not belong to the other (Romans 11:6). Any attempt to combine them is like a badly sewn patch of cloth: it holds together for nothing and tears apart again. The reason is that the righteousness faith seeks — the righteousness attainable by faith — is what is given to us and imputed to us, and which faith

only receives. Faith receives the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. But the righteousness attainable by works is our own — inherent in us, wrought out by us, not imputed to us — for it is nothing but those works themselves in relation to God's law.

If righteousness before God is to be obtained by faith alone — and that in direct contrast to all works, which if a person does them according to the law he shall live by them — then it is by faith alone that we are justified before God, and nothing else on our part is required for it. And what the nature of that righteousness must be is evident.

Furthermore, if faith and works are opposed as contrary and incompatible when considered as the means of attaining righteousness or justification before God — as Paul plainly declares — then it is impossible that we should be justified before God by both in the same way and manner. Therefore when the apostle James says that a person is justified by works and not by faith only, he cannot be speaking about our justification before God, where it is impossible for both to concur. Not only does Paul here declare them incompatible, but to bring them both in would introduce multiple kinds of righteousness for justification that are mutually inconsistent and destructive of each other. This was the first error of the Jews, from which their failure followed — they did not seek righteousness by faith but as though by works of the law.

Their second error concerned the righteousness itself on the basis of which a person might be justified before God. They judged it had to be their own righteousness. Their own personal righteousness — consisting in their own duties of obedience — they regarded as the only righteousness on which they could be justified before God (Romans 10:3). They therefore set about establishing

this righteousness, just as the Pharisees did (Luke 18:11-12). And this error, along with their determined effort to establish their own righteousness, was the chief reason they rejected the righteousness of God — as it is with many to this day.

Whatever is done in us or performed by us as obedience to God is our own righteousness. Even if it is done by faith and with the help of God's grace, it is subjectively ours — and as a righteousness it is our own. But any righteousness that is our own is so far from being the righteousness by which we are to be justified before God that the most earnest effort to establish it — to make it the righteousness by which we might be justified — is actually the most effective means of refusing to submit to and accept the only righteousness by which we can be justified.

This ruined the Jews, and it will ruin all who follow their example in seeking justification through their own righteousness. Yet it is not easy for people to take any other way or to be turned from this one. Paul hints at this in the expression: "they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." This righteousness of God is of such a nature that the proud human heart is entirely unwilling to bow and submit to it. Yet it can be received in no other way than by a submission of mind that includes a complete renunciation of any righteousness of our own. Those who mock others for saying that people pursuing moral or ethical righteousness and resting in it are not on a good path to receiving God's grace through Jesus Christ are, in plain terms, mocking the teaching of the apostle — that is, of the Holy Spirit Himself.

Paul's plain purpose therefore is to declare not only that faith and the righteousness of faith are incompatible with a righteousness of our own through works — in the matter of our justification

before God — but also that any mixing of our own works in the pursuit of righteousness completely diverts us from accepting and submitting to the righteousness of God. The righteousness that is of faith is not our own — it is the righteousness of God, what He imputes to us. The righteousness of works is our own — wrought in us and by us. Just as works have no fitness or aptitude to attain or receive a righteousness that, being not our own, is imputed to us — and are actually opposed to it, since such imputation would undercut their claim to be our righteousness — so faith has no fitness to be an inherent righteousness, or to be regarded and credited as such. The principal nature and power of faith consists precisely in fixing all the soul's trust, confidence, and expectation for righteousness and acceptance with God on another.

This was the ruin of those Jews: they judged it a better, more reliable — indeed, more righteous and holy — course to keep striving for a righteousness of their own through duties of obedience to God's law, than to imagine they could come to acceptance with God by faith in another. For tell them — and those like them — whatever you will: if they do not have a righteousness of their own that they can stand on its feet and make to stand before God, the law in their minds will not have its fulfillment, and so will condemn them.

To demolish this last stronghold of unbelief, Paul concedes that the law must reach its end and be completely fulfilled — otherwise there is no appearing before God as righteous — and at the same time shows how this is done and where alone it must be sought. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). We need not labor over the various senses in which Christ can be called "the end" — the comple-

tion, the fulfillment, the goal — of the law. Paul defines his own meaning sufficiently by saying not merely that Christ is the end of the law, but that He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. The matter in question is a righteousness by which we can be justified before God. This is acknowledged to be the righteousness the law requires. God requires no other righteousness from us than what is prescribed in the law. The law is nothing but the rule of righteousness — God's prescription of righteousness and all its duties to us. That we should be righteous by it before God was the law's first and original purpose. Its other current purposes — convicting of sin and condemning for it — were incidental to its original constitution. This righteousness, which the law requires and which is the only righteousness God requires of us, the fulfillment of this end of the law — the Jews sought by their own personal performance of the law's works and duties. But in doing so, however hard they tried, they could never fulfill this righteousness or attain this end of the law — yet those who fail to do so must perish forever.

Paul therefore declares that all of this is accomplished another way — the righteousness of the law is fulfilled and its end, with respect to righteousness before God, is attained in and through Christ. What the law required, He accomplished — and that is credited to everyone who believes.

In this, Paul brings the entire inquiry about a righteousness by which we may be justified before God to its conclusion — and in particular, how the law's demands are satisfied. What we could not do, what the law could not bring about in us because it was weak-

ened by the flesh, what we could not attain by our own works and duties — all of this Christ has done for us, and so He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The law demands a righteousness from us; the fulfillment of that righteousness is the goal it aims at, and it is necessary for our justification before God. This cannot be attained by any works of our own, by any righteousness of our own. But the Lord Christ is this for us and to us. How He can be this except through the imputation of His obedience and righteousness in the fulfillment of the law, I cannot understand — and I am sure Paul gives no other explanation.

The way by which we attain this end of the law — which we cannot achieve by our utmost efforts to establish our own righteousness — is by faith alone, for "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." To mix anything with faith in this matter is contrary both to the nature of faith and works with respect to their fitness for attaining righteousness, and is as directly contradictory to Paul's expressed purpose and words as anything that can be devised.

Let people please themselves with distinctions I cannot follow — and perhaps I should be embarrassed to admit that, except that I am convinced those who use them do not understand them either — or with objections, quibbles, and invented implications that I do not regard. Here I desire to fix my soul forever and find rest: Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. I believe that all who rightly understand what God's law requires of them, how essential it is that it be fulfilled and its end accom-

plished, and the utter inadequacy of their own efforts for that purpose — at the very least when the time for arguing is over — will take themselves to the same refuge and rest.

The next passage I will consider in this epistle is 1 Corinthians 1:30: "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

Paul's purpose in these words is to show that whatever we lack — on any account — in order to please God, live to Him, and come to the enjoyment of Him, we have in and through Jesus Christ. And this is ours on God's part from pure, free, and sovereign grace, as verses 26-29 make clear. We have all these things by virtue of our ingrafting or union with Him — the phrase means "from" or "by" Him. He by His grace is the chief efficient cause. The effect is that we are "in Christ Jesus" — grafted into Him, united to Him as members of His mystical body, which is the consistent meaning of that expression throughout Scripture. The benefits we receive through this union are listed in the words that follow. But first the means by which we are made partakers of them — or by which they are communicated to us — is stated: God has "made" Him all this to us. It is God's ordination that Christ Himself should become all of this to us and for us. Socinus says this refers to a general act of God's providence, by which it has come about that Christ may in some way or other be said to be all this to us. But what is intended is a specific ordinance and institution of God's sovereign grace and wisdom, appointing Christ to be all this to us and for us, with actual imputation following from that appointment — and nothing else. Therefore our entire interest in Christ and every benefit we receive through Him depend wholly on God's sovereign grace and

appointment, not on anything in ourselves. Since we have no righteousness of our own, He is appointed of God to be our righteousness and is made so to us — which can only mean that His righteousness is made ours. For He is made righteousness to us in this way: so that all boasting in ourselves is utterly excluded, and whoever boasts should boast in the Lord (verses 29, 31). There is a kind of righteousness — a way of being righteous — that gives grounds for boasting (Romans 4:2) and that does not exclude it (Romans 3:27). And that is possible only when our righteousness is inherent in us. For however it may be procured, purchased, or produced in us, it is our own, as far as anything can be our own while we are creatures. This kind of righteousness is therefore excluded here. The Lord Christ being made righteousness to us by God in such a way that all boasting and self-glorying is excluded — indeed, being made so for that very purpose — it can only be by the imputation of His righteousness to us. That is how the grace of God and the honor of Christ's person and mediation are exalted, and all occasion for boasting in ourselves is completely removed. All we ask from this testimony is this: that since we are in ourselves without any righteousness in God's sight, Christ is by a gracious act of divine imputation made righteousness to us by God — in such a way that all our glorying ought to be in the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ Himself. Bellarmine offers three responses to this testimony. The first two amount to the same thing, and in the third, pressed by the weight of truth, he concedes and grants everything we are arguing for. First, he says Christ is called our righteousness because He is the efficient cause of it, just as God is called our strength — so there is a figure of speech in the words where the effect stands for the cause. I grant that the Lord

Christ, by His Spirit, is the efficient cause of our personal, inherent righteousness. His grace produces and works it in us; He renews our natures into the image of God; without Him we can do nothing. So our habitual and actual righteousness comes from Him. But this personal righteousness is our sanctification and nothing else. Although the same internal disposition of inherent grace, along with its corresponding acts, is sometimes called our sanctification and sometimes our righteousness — with respect to those acts — it is never divided into our sanctification and our righteousness as two separate things. But in this passage, His being made righteousness to us is explicitly distinct from His being made sanctification to us — that inherent righteousness produced in us by the Spirit and grace of Christ. And His working personal righteousness in us, which is our sanctification, and the imputation of His righteousness to us, by which we are made righteous before God, are not only consistent but inseparable — one cannot exist without the other.

Second, Bellarmine argues that Christ is said to be made righteousness to us in the same sense He is made redemption to us — and since He is our redemption because He has redeemed us, so He is made righteousness to us because through Him we become righteous, or as another puts it, because through Him alone we are justified. This is essentially the same argument as the first: there is a figure of speech in all these expressions, and the effect stands for the cause. What cause they mean by this, in the phrase "through Him alone we are justified," I am not sure. But Bellarmine is drawing closer to the truth here — for just as Christ is said to be made redemption to us by God because through His blood we are redeemed, freed from sin, death, and hell, by the ransom He paid for

us — having redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins — so He is said to be made righteousness to us because through His righteousness granted to us by God (since God's making Him righteousness to us, our becoming the righteousness of God in Him, and the imputation of His righteousness to us that we may be righteous before God — these are all the same thing) we are justified.

His third response, as noted earlier, concedes the whole of our argument. It is the same answer he gives to Jeremiah 23:6, which he joins with this passage as having the same sense and weight, surrendering his entire position in the words already quoted above (*De Justificatione*, lib. 2, cap. 10).

Socinus prefaces his response to this testimony with an expression of astonishment that anyone would use it in this argument, claiming it is entirely irrelevant. Pretending to hold his opponents' arguments in contempt is in fact the main technique Socinus employs throughout his replies and evasions — and I am sorry to see that most of those who, with him, oppose the imputation of Christ's righteousness have adopted the same approach. And lately, the use of this testimony — which pressed Bellarmine so hard — is treated with the same dismissive tone, on the sole grounds Socinus offers against it. Yet his objections are such that I cannot help wondering, on the other hand, that any learned person could be troubled or misled by them. His entire argument is this: if Christ is said to be made righteousness to us because His righteousness is imputed to us, then He is likewise said to be made wisdom to us because His wisdom is imputed to us, and the same for His sanctification — which no one would allow. Indeed, on the same logic, He would have to be redeemed for us and His redemp-

tion imputed to us. But there is no force or truth in this objection. It rests solely on the assumption that Christ must be made all these things to us in the same way and manner — whereas they are of such different natures that it is utterly impossible for that to be so. For instance, He is made sanctification to us in that by His Spirit and grace we are freely sanctified. But He cannot be said to be made redemption to us in the same way — in that by His Spirit and grace we are freely redeemed — because redemption is something external, not wrought in us. Christ can only be made redemption to us by the imputation to us of what He did for our redemption — by reckoning it to our account. Not that He was redeemed for us, as Socinus childishly objects, but that He did what was necessary for our redemption. And if Christ is said to be made righteousness to us because by His Spirit and grace He works inherent righteousness in us, then that is plainly the same as His being made sanctification to us — not something distinct from it. Socinus himself does not believe Christ is made all these things to us in the same way, and that is why he does not specify any particular way but hides his answer in the vague expression that Christ becomes all these things to us through God's providence. But if you ask him specifically how Christ is made sanctification to us, he will tell you it was through His teaching and example alone, with whatever general assistance of the Spirit he is willing to allow. That is no way at all, however, by which Christ was made redemption to us. Therefore Christ is made righteousness to us by God in the way that the nature of the thing requires. Some say it is because through Him we are justified. But the text does not say "through Him we are justified" — it says He is made righteousness to us by God, which is not our justification but the ground, cause, and rea-

son on which we are justified. Righteousness is one thing and justification is another. We must therefore ask how we come to have the righteousness by which we are justified. The same apostle tells us plainly: by imputation — "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord credits righteousness" (Romans 4:6). It follows, then, that Christ being made righteousness to us by God can have no other meaning than that His righteousness is imputed to us — which is what this text undeniably confirms.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

The truth we are arguing for is stated here with even greater emphasis: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Augustine's paraphrase of these words gives their meaning: "He Himself became sin, that we might become righteousness — not our own righteousness but God's; not in ourselves but in Him — just as He Himself became sin, not His own but ours, not in Himself but in us" (Enchiridion to Laurentius, chapter 4). Chrysostom's comments on this passage to the same effect have been cited at length earlier.

To express the greatness of God's grace in our reconciliation through Christ, Paul describes Him with the phrase "who knew no sin." He knew sin intellectually — He understood its nature. He knew it experientially — He endured its effects and suffered them. But He did not know it in the sense of committing it or being guilty of it. So "He knew no sin" means simply: He did no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth (1 Peter 2:22); He was holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners (Hebrews 7:26). Yet there is an emphasis in the expression that should not be overlooked. As

Chrysostom observed — noting it as a figure of intensification — and as many learned scholars after him have noted, those who genuinely desire to understand the excellence of God's grace here will find that this emphatic phrase, which the Holy Spirit chose to use for that very purpose, leaves an impression on the mind that should not be dismissed.

"He made Him to be sin" — many expositors take this to mean He was made a sacrifice for sin. Ambrose comments on this passage: "Just as He was offered for sins, He is not inappropriately said to have been made sin, because even the animal in the law that was offered for sins was called the sin-offering." The sin offering and trespass offering in the Hebrew are indeed often expressed simply by the words for sin and guilt. I will not dispute this interpretation, since what it signifies is true. But there is another more precise meaning: the word for sin standing for sinner — that is, passively rather than actively, by imputation rather than by inherent quality. This is what the structure of the expression and the force of the antithesis seem to require. Estius himself, speaking of this sense, adds his own endorsement: "This understanding is to be explained by the commentary of the Greek fathers — Chrysostom and the rest — because they interpret 'sin' emphatically as meaning 'great sinner,' as if the apostle were saying God treated Him on our account as if He were sin itself — that is, as a man marked out as utterly sinful, as One on whom He laid the iniquities of us all." If this is the interpretation of the Greek commentators — as indeed it is — then Luther was not the first to say that Christ was made the greatest sinner, meaning by imputation. I will allow the earlier interpretation, however, provided the true nature of a sin offering or expiatory sacrifice is properly understood.

For though such a sacrifice neither was nor could consist in the transfer of the inherent sin of the person to the animal, it did consist in the transfer of the guilt of the sinner to it, as is fully described in Leviticus 16:20-21. I grant this interpretation only to avoid unnecessary argument. For when some say the Greek word for sin can mean both sin and a sacrifice for sin, this requires careful examination. In the first Hebrew verbal stem, the root means to err, to sin, to transgress God's law; in the intensive stem it has the opposite meaning — to cleanse from sin, to make expiation for sin. The Greek word correspondingly carries its most common meaning of sin, transgression, and guilt from the first sense, but sometimes carries the sacrificial meaning from the second — a sacrifice for sin, to make expiation. The Septuagint accordingly renders the sacrificial sense sometimes as "for sins" (Ezekiel 44:27), sometimes as "propitiation" or "propitiatory sacrifice" (Exodus 30:10; Ezekiel 43:23), and sometimes as "purification" or "cleansing" (Numbers 19:19). But used absolutely, the Greek word nowhere in any reliable author or in Scripture means a sacrifice for sin — unless it is allowed to do so in this one passage. For the Septuagint, when translating the Hebrew where it means sin, consistently uses the Greek word for sin alone; but where the Hebrew denotes a sin offering and they retain the Greek word, they use a phrase with a preposition — a construction they coined precisely because they recognized the word on its own neither did nor could mean a sacrifice for sin (Leviticus 4:3, 14, 32, 35; 5:6-11; 6:30; 8:2). They never omit the preposition unless they name the sacrifice itself. The same pattern is followed by the apostle in the New Testament: on the two occasions he expresses the sin offering by this word, he uses the full phrase (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10:6) — he never uses

the word alone for that purpose. If it carries that meaning in this passage, it does so here alone. As for those who think the Greek word corresponds to the Latin *Piaculum*, this is also a mistake — the first meaning of the Greek word is acknowledged to be sin, and they imagine it is secondarily used to mean a sacrifice for sin. But *Piaculum* properly means a sacrifice or anything that expiates sin or makes satisfaction for it, and only very rarely and derivatively is it used to mean a sin or crime that deserves public expiation — as in Virgil: "He deferred the atoning penalties to a late death." But we need not argue about words as long as we can agree on the substance.

The only question is how God made Him to be sin. "He made Him to be sin" — so an act of God is intended. This is expressed elsewhere as God laying all our iniquities on Him, or causing them to meet on Him (Isaiah 53:6). This was by the imputation of our sins to Him — just as the sins of the people were placed on the head of the goat so that they should no longer be theirs but his, and he was to carry them away. Whether you take "sin" in either sense previously mentioned — a sacrifice for sin, or a sinner — the imputation of the guilt of sin, prior to and in order to its punishment, must be understood. For in every sin offering there was an imposition of sin on the animal before it was sacrificed and suffered death. Therefore with every offering for sin, the one who brought it was required to lay his hand on its head (Leviticus 1:4), and that this symbolized the transfer of the guilt of sin to the offering is explicitly stated in Leviticus 16:21. Therefore if God made the Lord Christ a sin offering for us, it was by the imputation of the guilt of our sins to Him prior to His suffering. No offering could be made for sin without a symbolic transfer of the guilt of sin to it.

That is also why, when an offering was made for the expiation of guilt in the case of an unsolved murder, those responsible by law — the elders of the nearest city to where the man was slain — were not to offer a sacrifice, since there was no one to confess guilt over it or lay guilt upon it. Instead, the neck of a heifer was struck to declare the punishment due to bloodshed, and they were to wash their hands over it to testify to their own innocence (Deuteronomy 21:1-8). But a sacrifice for sin without the imputation of guilt was impossible. And if the word is taken in the second sense — as sinner, meaning by imputation and in God's reckoning — it still must be by the imputation of guilt. No one can be called a sinner in any sense merely from suffering. No one claims Christ was made sin by the imputation of punishment to Him — that has no proper sense. What they say is that sin was imputed to Him with respect to punishment — which is in fact to say that the guilt of sin was imputed to Him. For the guilt of sin is its relation to punishment — the obligation to punishment that attaches to it. That anyone should be punished for sin without having the guilt of it imputed to him is impossible, and were it possible it would be unjust. It is not possible that anyone should be properly punished for sin that is not in any way his own. And if sin is not his by inherence, it can be his only by imputation. One may suffer on occasion of another's sin without that sin being made his in any way — but he cannot be punished for it, since punishment is the recompense for sin on account of its guilt. And even if it were possible, where is the justice of punishing anyone for what does not belong to him in any way? Beyond this, the imputation of sin and the punishment for it are

distinct acts — the former precedes the latter — and therefore the imputation is only of the guilt of sin. The Lord Christ was therefore made sin for us by the imputation of the guilt of our sins to Him.

It is objected that if the guilt of sin were imputed to Christ, He is excluded from all possibility of merit, since He only suffered what was due to Him — and so the whole work of Christ's satisfaction is undermined. This would follow if God in judgment reckoned Him guilty and a sinner in His own person. But there is an ambiguity in these expressions. If it means that God reckoned Him inherently guilty and a sinner in His own person, nothing of the kind is intended. What happened is that God laid all our sins on Him and did not spare Him from what was due to those sins. So He did not suffer what was due to Him on His own account, but what was due to our sin — which is impious to deny, for if it were not so, He died in vain and we remain in our sins. And while His satisfaction consists precisely in this — and could not exist without it — it does not in the least diminish His merit. Given the infinite dignity of His person and His voluntary assumption of our sin to answer for it — which did not alter His own state and condition — His obedience in all of this was supremely meritorious.

In answer to Christ's being made sin for us, and by virtue of it, we are made the righteousness of God in Him. This was the purpose of His being made sin for us. By whom are we made so? By God Himself — for it is God who justifies (Romans 8:33) and God who credits righteousness (Romans 4:6). Therefore it is God's act in our justification that is intended here. To be made the righteousness of God is to be made righteous before God — stated emphatically in the abstract form to correspond to what was said of Christ being made sin for us. To be made the righteousness of God

is to be justified. And to be made it in Him — just as He was made sin for us — is to be justified by the imputation of His righteousness to us, just as our sin was imputed to Him.

No one can assign any way other than imputation by which Christ was made sin — especially His being made so by God — except by God laying all our iniquities upon Him, that is, imputing our sin to Him. How then are we made the righteousness of God in Him? By the infusion of a habit of grace, say the Roman Catholics generally — but then, following the logic of the antithesis, He must have been made sin by the infusion of a habit of sin, which would be a blasphemous idea. By His meriting, obtaining, and purchasing righteousness for us, say others — but that way we might be made righteous by Him, not righteous in Him. Being righteous in Him can only be through His righteousness, as we are in Him and united to Him. To be righteous in Him is to be righteous with His righteousness, as we are one mystical person with Him. Therefore...

To be made the righteousness of God in Christ — just as He was made sin for us and because He was — can only mean being made righteous by the imputation of His righteousness to us, as we are in Him and united to Him. All other interpretations of these words are both thin and strained, drawing the mind away from their first, plain, and obvious meaning.

Bellarmino objects to this interpretation — it is his first argument against the imputation of Christ's righteousness (*De Justificatione*, lib. 2, cap. 7): "Fifth, it is refuted because if the righteousness of Christ were truly imputed to us so that we might be held and reckoned as righteous through it — as if it were properly our own intrinsic and formal righteousness — we would cer-

tainly have to be held and reckoned as no less righteous than Christ Himself. Consequently we would have to be called and regarded as Redeemers and Saviors of the world, which is utterly absurd." Protestant theologians have given such a full and frequent answer to this objection that I would not have mentioned it, except that some among us have been pleased to borrow it from him and make use of it themselves. They say: if the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us so as to be made ours, then we are as righteous as Christ Himself, because we are righteous with His righteousness. Answer, first: Scripture plainly affirms both of these things together — that in ourselves and as to ourselves, we are all like an unclean thing and all our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6); and that in the Lord we have righteousness and strength, and in the Lord we are justified and glory (Isaiah 45:24-25); that if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and yet that we are the righteousness of God in Christ. These things are therefore consistent, whatever objections human cleverness may raise against them. They must be accepted as consistent, unless we choose to follow Socinus's rule of interpretation — that where anything seems contrary to our reason, however plainly affirmed in Scripture, we are not to receive it but must find some interpretation, however forced, to bring the words into line with our reason. Second, notwithstanding the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us and our being made righteous through it, we are still sinners in ourselves — greatly so, as the Lord knows, even the best of us — and therefore cannot be said to be as righteous as Christ. We are made righteous in Him while being sinners in ourselves. Third, to say we are as righteous as Christ is to make a comparison between Christ's personal righteousness and our personal righteousness —

if the comparison is between things of the same kind. But this is foolish and impious. Despite all our personal righteousness, we are sinful; He knew no sin. And if the comparison is between Christ's personal inherent righteousness and righteousness imputed to us, it is a pointless comparison between things of entirely different kinds — inherence and imputation are not the same category. Christ was actively righteous; we are passively so. When our sin was imputed to Him, He did not thereby become a sinner as we are — actively, inherently sinful — but only passively and in God's reckoning. As He was made sin yet knew no sin, so we are made righteous yet are sinful in ourselves. Fourth, the righteousness of Christ as it was personally His was the righteousness of the Son of God, which in that respect had in itself infinite perfection and value. But it is imputed to us only with respect to our personal need — not in all its satisfying worth for all, but as our souls stand in need of it and are made partakers of it. There is therefore no basis for any such comparison. Fifth, as for Bellarmine's addition that on this basis we might be called Redeemers and Saviors of the world, the absurdity he points to falls back on himself. He himself plainly states elsewhere (*De Purgatorio*, lib. 1, cap. 14) that a person may rightly be called his own Redeemer and Savior, which he tries to prove from Daniel 4. And some in his church say the saints may in an improper sense be called Redeemers of others. But this is no concern of ours — for from the imputation of Christ's righteousness it follows only that those to whom it is imputed are redeemed and saved, not at all that they are Redeemers and Saviours. It also belongs to the defense of this passage to answer Bellarmine's seventh argument in the same chapter, which some among us also use: if by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to

us we may truly be said to be righteous and children of God, then by the imputation of our unrighteousness to Christ He may be said to be a sinner and a child of the devil. Answer, first: what Scripture affirms concerning the imputation of our sins to Christ is that He was made sin for us. The Greek expositors — Chrysostom, Theophylact, Oecumenius, and many others — take this to mean He was made a sinner. But all of them affirm that this designation comes from imputation only: sin was imputed to Him and He bore the punishment due to it, just as righteousness is imputed to us and we enjoy its benefit. Second, the imputation of sin to Christ did not bring with it any pollution or filth of sin to be communicated to Him by transfusion — something impossible — so that no designation can arise from it that includes any reference to such things. Even to think of this is impious and dishonoring to the Son of God. His being made sin through the imputation of the guilt of sin is His honor and glory. Third, the imputation of the sins of fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, and so on — such as the Corinthians had been before their conversion to Christ — does not on any account bring Him under a designation drawn from those sins. They were active, inherent, and subjective sinners and were called so on that basis. But for the One who knew no sin — who voluntarily undertook to answer for the guilt of those sins, which was on His part an act of righteousness and the highest obedience to God — to be called an idolater and so on is a foolish idea. The designation "sinner" from inherent, actively committed, soul-defiling sin is a reproach that marks the utmost unworthiness. But the designation "sinner" by imputation — without the least personal guilt or defilement, undertaken voluntarily by the One to whom it is imputed in an act of the highest obedience, and tending to the greatest glory of

God — is supremely honorable and glorious. Fourth, the imputation of sin to Christ was prior to any real union between Him and sinners — on that basis He took their sin on Himself as He chose and for the ends He chose. But the imputation of His righteousness to believers follows in the order of nature from their union with Him, through which it becomes theirs in a special way. The two cases are therefore not parallel — there is no equal reason why He should be considered a sinner as there is for believers to be counted righteous. Fifth, we rest in this: on the imputation of sin to Christ, Scripture says God made Him to be sin for us — which He could only become in that way. He was so by a passing act whose effects lasted only for the time during which He underwent the punishment due to that sin. But on the imputation of His righteousness to us, we are made the righteousness of God with an everlasting righteousness that remains ours always. Sixth, to be a child of the devil through sin is to do the works of the devil (John 8:44). But the Lord Christ, in taking our sins upon Himself when imputed to Him, performed the work of God in the highest act of holy obedience — demonstrating Himself to be the Son of God and destroying the work of the devil. How foolish and impious it is to suppose that any absolute change of state or relationship in Him followed from this.

That by "the righteousness of God" in this passage, some mean our own faith and obedience according to the gospel, is so completely foreign to the context and the meaning of the words that I will not examine it in detail. The righteousness of God is revealed to faith and received by faith — it is therefore not faith itself. And the force of the antithesis is entirely destroyed by this interpretation. For what kind of parallel would it be that Christ was made sin

by the imputation of our sin to Him, and we are made righteous by the imputation of our own faith and obedience to ourselves? Just as Christ had no connection to sin except that God made Him sin — it was never inherent in Him — so we have no interest in this righteousness as something inherent in us. It is only imputed to us. Beyond this, the act of God in making us righteous is His act of justifying us. But this is not by the infusion of the disposition of faith and obedience, as has been proved. And what act of God those people have in mind who claim that the righteousness of God we are made consists in our own righteousness, I do not know. It cannot be the constitution of the gospel law, for that makes no one righteous. The persons of believers are the object of this act of God, and that as they are considered in Christ.

GALATIANS 2:16

The entire letter of the same apostle to the Galatians is devoted to vindicating the doctrine of justification by Christ without the works of the law, and to explaining how that doctrine is to be used and applied. The sum of his whole purpose is laid out in his recounting of the words he spoke to the apostle Peter on the occasion of Peter's failure: "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

What Paul asserts here was such a well-known and foundational truth among all believers that their conviction and knowledge of it was the very ground and occasion of their turning from Judaism to the gospel and to faith in Jesus Christ.

In these words Paul settles the great question: how, or by what means, is a person justified before God? The subject is stated in the most general terms: a man — any person, whether Jew or Gentile, believer or unbeliever. This includes the apostle who spoke, those to whom he spoke, the Galatians to whom he wrote — all of whom had believed and professed the gospel for some time.

The answer is both negative and positive, both stated with the highest assurance as the common faith of all Christians — except those who had been led astray by false teachers. Paul declares this cannot and does not come about by the works of the law. What he means by the law in these discussions has been explained and established earlier. The law of Moses is sometimes specifically in view — not as an end in itself, but as the current form in which people clung to the law of righteousness instead of submitting to the righteousness of God. But the idea that Paul ever excludes the moral law and its duties from his argument is a weak notion. In fact, it would exclude the ceremonial law itself, for observing the ceremonial law while it was in force was a duty of the moral law.

The works of the law are the works and duties of obedience that God's law requires, performed in the manner it prescribes — namely, in faith and from love to God above all else, as has been proved. To say Paul excludes only works that are absolutely perfect — which no one has ever performed or could perform since sin entered — is to suppose him arguing with great urgency and many arguments against a position that no one held and that he never once mentions. Nor can he be said to exclude only works that are considered meritorious, since he excludes all works precisely so that there may be no place for merit in our justification, as has also been proved. Nor were the Galatians he was writing to and correct-

ing seeking justification from any works other than those they were already performing as believers. Therefore all kinds of works are excluded from any role in our justification. Paul places so much weight on this exclusion that he says admitting works would overthrow the whole gospel: "if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Galatians 2:21). It is dangerous to venture too close to that edge.

Not this or that kind of works — not this or that manner of performing them — not this or that degree of involvement in justification — but all works of every kind, however performed, are excluded from any consideration in our justification as our works or duties of obedience. What the Galatians Paul was correcting wanted was simply that, in the justification of a believer, works of the law or duties of obedience might be admitted alongside faith in Christ Jesus. There is no hint that they wanted to exclude faith in Christ and assign justification to works without it — that idea is foolish. In contrast, Paul positively and absolutely attributes our justification to faith in Christ alone. "Not by works but by faith" is equivalent to "by faith alone." That the particle used is not exceptive but adversative has not only been conclusively proved by Protestant theologians but is acknowledged by those in the Roman church who engage with this controversy with any honesty. Estius's words on this passage deserve to be quoted: "Unless through faith in Jesus Christ the little word 'unless' (which the Vulgate renders where the Greek has 'but' or 'but only') makes the meaning obscure — for if it is taken in its precise Latin sense it creates an exception to what precedes, so that the meaning would be that a man is not justified by the works of the law unless faith in Christ is added to them, and if it is added he is justified through

the works of the law. But since this sense divides justification, attributing it partly to the works of the law and partly to faith in Christ, which is contrary to the apostle's definite and absolute statement, it is clear that this interpretation must be entirely rejected as contrary to the apostle's meaning and purpose. It is well established that the little word 'unless' is frequently used in Scripture in an adversative sense, meaning the same as 'but only.'" So he, with his characteristic candor and honesty.

There is little prospect of ending these disputes in this world when people will not accept such plain resolutions of them given by the Holy Spirit Himself.

The interpretation given here as Paul's meaning — that people cannot be justified by works they cannot perform, that is, perfectly performed works, but that they can be and are justified by works they can and do perform, even if not in their own strength but with the help of grace; and that faith in Christ Jesus, which Paul sets in absolute opposition to all works, actually includes within it all those works he excludes, and in respect of the very same end for which he excludes them — this interpretation can hardly be thought to reflect the mind of the Holy Spirit.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Unless the Holy Spirit had chosen to anticipate in advance every evasion and escape that human cleverness might invent in future ages to distort the doctrine of our justification before God, and to refute them all, it is hard to see how they could have been more plainly forestalled than they are in this passage. If we approach it with a little honest consideration, I believe the truth of what is affirmed will be evident.

It cannot be denied that Paul's purpose from the beginning of this chapter through the end of verse 11 is to declare how lost and condemned sinners come to be delivered from that condition and brought into a state of acceptance with God and eternal salvation. He begins by fully describing their natural state and their exposure to God's wrath from that state. It was Paul's consistent practice to preface any declaration of God's grace with a consideration of our sin, misery, and ruin. Others today are less comfortable with this method — but that does not change the fact that it was his. He declares to the Ephesians that they were dead in trespasses and sins, describing sin's power over their souls with respect to spiritual life and all its activities — and that they lived and walked in sin and on every count were children of wrath, liable to eternal condemnation (Ephesians 2:1-3). What such people can do toward their own deliverance has attracted many creative descriptions, all beyond my understanding — since Paul's entire purpose is to prove they can do nothing at all. He finds the cause — or causes — of their deliverance elsewhere, in direct and explicit contrast to anything that might be done by themselves for that end. "But God" (Ephesians 2:4) — it is not a work for us to undertake; it is not something we can contribute anything to. "But God, who is rich in mercy." The adversative word sets an opposition against everything on our part

and assigns the whole work to God. If people had rested in this divine revelation, the church of God would have been spared many of the perverse opinions and contentious disputes that have troubled it. But people are not easily willing to give up the thought of some role in being the authors of their own happiness. There are two things to observe in Paul's assignment of the causes of our deliverance from a state of sin and acceptance with God.

First, he assigns the whole of this work absolutely to grace, love, and mercy — with an explicit exclusion of anything on our part, as we will see immediately in verses 5 and 8.

Second, he magnifies this grace in a remarkable way. He expresses it by every name and title that signifies it — mercy, love, grace, and kindness — so that we would look only to grace in this matter. He attributes to the divine mercy and grace — the sole cause of our deliverance in and by Jesus Christ — qualities and descriptions that make it uniquely worthy of adoration: "rich in mercy"; "great love with which He loved us"; "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness" (Ephesians 2:4-7). It cannot reasonably be denied that Paul's design is to fill the minds and hearts of believers with a deep sense of the grace and love of God in Christ as the only cause of their justification before God. I cannot think of words capable of expressing the thoughts that this portrayal of grace evokes. Whether those who barely mention the grace of God — and then only to diminish its power — and for whom such ascriptions as Paul makes here are objects of contempt, think it any part of their duty to have the same mind as the apostle in this, is not hard to judge.

It may be said: these are fine words, but they are only general — there is no real argument in all this adoration of God's grace in salvation. So it may seem to many. But to speak plainly, there is more argument for me in this one consideration — the way God's grace is ascribed to in this passage — than in a hundred clever arguments that suit neither the expressions of Scripture nor the experience of those who believe. Anyone gripped by a proper understanding of the grace of God as it is displayed here, and who senses that the Holy Spirit's purpose in doing so was to render it glorious and to be trusted alone, will not easily be persuaded to supplement it with additions from our own works and obedience, as some would suggest. But we may look further into the words.

The case Paul is addressing — the question he has in hand, on which he declares the truth and instructs the Ephesians and through them the whole church of God — is this: how can a lost, condemned sinner come to be accepted by God and thereby saved? This is the one and only question we are, and intend in this controversy to be, concerned with. We will not be drawn beyond it, either by invitation or by provocation. His position and conclusion about this is: we are saved by grace.

Paul first inserts this truth incidentally while listing the benefits we receive through Christ (verse 5). But not content with that, he asserts it again directly in the same words in verse 8 — as though he had already considered how slow people would be to accept a truth that at one stroke strips away all grounds for boasting in themselves.

What Paul means by our being saved must be examined. It would not hurt but actually advance the truth we are arguing for if eternal salvation were meant here. But that cannot be the primary

sense in this passage — except as that salvation is included in its causes, which operate in this life. Nor do I think Paul intends only our justification by "by grace you have been saved," though justification is principally in view. Conversion to God and sanctification are also included, as is evident from verses 5-6, and these are no less the result of sovereign grace than justification itself. Paul is speaking of what the Ephesians, now as believers and by virtue of being so, had been made partakers of in this life. This is evident from the whole context. Having described in the chapter's opening their condition in common with all of Adam's descendants by nature (verses 1-3), he further describes their particular condition as Gentiles — idolaters and those without God (verses 11-12). Their present deliverance through Jesus Christ from this entire miserable state and condition — both what they shared with all humanity and what aggravated their own particular misery — is what he means by their being saved. The main point of describing that condition was that it had exposed them to the wrath of God, leaving them guilty before Him and subject to His judgment (verse 3). In keeping with that account and those grounds, Paul follows the same approach he uses everywhere in declaring the doctrine of justification (Romans 3:19-24; Titus 3:3-5).

From that condition they received deliverance through faith in Christ Jesus — "to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). "He who believes in Him is not condemned" — that is, he is saved in Paul's sense here (John 3:15). "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" — he is saved — "but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). This is how "saved" and "salvation" are frequently used in Scripture. Beyond this, Paul

gives such a full description of the salvation he intends from verse 13 to the end of the chapter that there can be no doubt about it. It is our being brought near by the blood of Christ (verse 13), our peace with God through His death (verses 14-15), our reconciliation through the blood of the cross (verse 16), and our access to God with all the spiritual privileges that follow from it (verses 18-20).

Paul's question and his answer therefore concern the causes of our justification before God. He declares and settles them both positively and negatively. Positively: first, the supreme moving cause on God's part — His free, sovereign grace and love, which he illustrates through the attributes and qualities already mentioned. Second, the meritorious procuring cause — Jesus Christ in the work of His mediation, as God's ordained means of making this grace effective to His glory (verses 7, 13, 16). Third, the only means or instrument on our part — faith. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (verse 8). And lest he seem to take anything away from God's grace by affirming the necessity of faith, he adds the corrective phrase: "and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The communication of this faith to us is no less an act of grace than the justification we receive through it. So he has secured the whole work to the grace of God through Christ, in which we participate through faith alone.

But he is not satisfied with this positive statement alone — he also describes the work negatively, adding an explicit exclusion of whatever might be thought to have a role in it. Three things are stated distinctly here: first, what is excluded; second, the reason for excluding it; and third, the confirmation of that reason, along with his response to an objection that might arise from it.

First, what is excluded is works: "not as a result of works" (verse 9). What works he principally means, Paul himself indicates. Some say works of the law — the law of Moses. But what did the Ephesians have to do with that law, that Paul should tell them they were not justified by its works? They had never been under that law, never sought righteousness through it, and had no connection to it except that they had been delivered from it. Perhaps then he means works done in the strength of natural ability alone, without the help of grace, and prior to believing. But what the Ephesians' works were before they believed, Paul tells us plainly: dead in trespasses and sins, they walked according to the course of this world in the lusts of the flesh, gratifying the desires of the flesh and the mind (Ephesians 2:1-3). It is obvious enough that these works have no influence on our justification, and equally obvious that Paul had no reason to exclude them as though anyone could suppose they contributed to a justification that consists precisely in deliverance from them. Therefore the works Paul excludes here are the works the Ephesians were now performing as believers, made alive with Christ — the very works God had ordained that they should walk in, as he expressly states in verse 10. And he excludes these works not only in opposition to grace but also in opposition to faith: "through faith, not as a result of works." He therefore rejects not only their merit as incompatible with grace, but their concurrent role alongside or subsequent to faith in our justification before God.

If we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, to the exclusion of all works of obedience, then such works cannot be the whole or any part of our righteousness for the justification of life. We must therefore have another righteousness, or perish forever.

Many things are offered here, and many distinctions coined, to retain some role for works in our justification before God. But whether it is safer to trust those distinctions or this plain, express, divine testimony, will not be hard for anyone to decide when they make the question their own.

Second, Paul adds a reason for this exclusion of works: "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." God has ordained the order and method of our justification through Christ in this way precisely so that no one might have any ground, reason, or occasion to glory or boast in himself. This is expressed in the same way in 1 Corinthians 1:21, 30-31 and Romans 3:27. To exclude all glorying and boasting on our part is God's design. Boasting consists in ascribing to ourselves something that is not in others, with respect to justification. And it is works alone that can give any occasion for this boasting — for if Abraham had been justified by works, he would have had something to boast about (Romans 4:2). Boasting is excluded only by the principle of faith (Romans 3:27), for faith by its very nature looks for righteousness in another. Works, when brought into justification, naturally tend to produce this kind of boasting in the human heart. And where this boasting arises, God's design toward us in His work of grace is frustrated on our part.

The main point I draw from this is that Scripture fixes no boundary for the role of works in justification beyond which boasting would not be implied. Roman Catholics make works meritorious of justification — at least of what they call the second justification. Some say this should not be admitted, since merit and boasting are inseparable. Others therefore propose that works are only a necessary prior condition, or our evangelical righteousness before God on which we are evangelically justified, or a subordinate right-

eousness through which we gain a share in Christ's righteousness, or are included in the condition of the new covenant by which we are justified, or are included in faith as its form or its essence — people express themselves with great variety here. But as long as our works are in any of these ways asserted as contributing to our justification, how can a person be certain they do not include boasting? And that such proposals express the true sense of these words, "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"? Some kind of self-ascription in this matter is boasting. If someone says they know what they are doing and know they are not boasting in what they ascribe to works, I cannot in general accept that. The Roman Catholics themselves insist they are furthest from boasting — yet I am thoroughly persuaded that merit and boasting are inseparable. The question is not what people think they are doing, but what Scripture says about what they are doing. And if someone argues that what is in us is also the grace and gift of God and is acknowledged as such — which excludes boasting in ourselves — I say that the Pharisee also acknowledged this, and yet he was a terrible boaster. Therefore, however those works may be supposed to be produced in us, if they are also produced by us and so constitute the righteous works that we have done, I am concerned that bringing them into our justification involves boasting — precisely because of Paul's statement, "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Therefore, since this is a dangerous area, unless people can give us clear, direct, and indisputable boundaries for the introduction of our works into justification that definitively exclude any boasting, the safest course is to exclude them entirely. I see no danger of error in following the Holy Spirit's plain words:

"not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." For if we were carelessly led into this boasting, we would lose all the benefit we might otherwise receive through the grace of God.

Third, Paul gives another reason why justification cannot be by works, and at the same time heads off an objection that might arise from what he declared in verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The force of his reasoning lies in this: all good works — the evangelical works he is discussing — are the effects of God's grace in those who are in Christ Jesus and who are therefore already truly justified prior to those works in the order of nature. But what he principally intends in these words — something he is always mindful of wherever he deals with this doctrine — is to head off an objection he foresaw: if good works are excluded from our justification before God, what use are they? We may live as we please, utterly neglect them, and still be justified. This very objection continues to be pressed with great force against the same doctrine by some today. In this cause nothing is more frequently argued than this: if our justification before God in no way depends on works — if they are not required beforehand, if they are not a prior condition — then there is no need for them, and people may safely live in complete neglect of all obedience to God. People tend to enlarge greatly on this theme who otherwise give little evidence of their own practical obedience to the gospel. I find it remarkable that they do not notice to whose party they are effectively lending support in pressing this objection — namely, the very opponents of the doctrine of grace that Paul was teaching. This must be examined more fully elsewhere. For now I will only say: if the answer Paul gives here is not satisfying to

them, and if the grounds and reasons for the necessity and use of good works he declares here are not judged sufficient to establish them in their proper place and order, I will not consider myself obligated to attempt their further satisfaction.

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-9

"More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:8-9).

This is the last testimony I will examine at length. Although it is of great importance, I will be relatively brief, since it has recently been argued and defended by another whose work I do not expect any adequate reply to. What has since been attempted in response by one writer carries no weight. The observations I want to draw from this testimony may be organized under the following headings.

First, Paul's purpose from the beginning of this chapter — and in these verses especially — is to declare what it is on account of which we are accepted by God and have cause to rejoice. He settles this in general as resting in and participating in Christ by faith, in direct contrast to all the legal privileges and advantages in which the Jews he was addressing boasted and rejoiced. "Rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

Second, Paul assumes that for the acceptance before God in which we are to rejoice, a righteousness is necessary, and that whatever that righteousness is, it is the sole ground of that acceptance. To demonstrate this:

Third, he declares there are two kinds of righteousness that might be relied on for this purpose: first, our own righteousness which is of the law; and second, that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. He asserts these are opposite and incompatible with respect to the goal of our justification and acceptance with God: "not having my own righteousness, but that which..." He acknowledges no intermediate righteousness between them.

Fourth, placing the example in himself, he declares with emphatic urgency — and there is hardly a more forceful expression anywhere in all his writings — which of these two he adhered to and placed his confidence in. In addressing this subject, several things engaged his earnest and holy mind toward an intense exaltation of the righteousness of God by faith and a corresponding rejection of his own righteousness.

First, this was the turning point on which he and others had left their Judaism and turned to the gospel. It had to be pressed as the central instance in the greatest controversy the world had ever seen. He expresses this in Galatians 2:15-16: "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law." Second, this doctrine had faced fierce opposition from the Jews in every place, and in many places the minds of multitudes

had been turned away from the truth — toward which most people are naturally prone in this case — and misled from the simplicity of the gospel. This weighed heavily on Paul's holy soul, and he addresses it in most of his letters. Third, the weight of the doctrine itself — along with the natural unwillingness of human hearts to embrace it, since it strikes at the root of all spiritual pride, self-elevation, and self-pleasing — also affected him deeply. This unwillingness has given rise to countless evasions, then and now, to avoid the force of this teaching and to keep people from the complete surrender to sovereign grace in Christ that they are naturally so resistant to. Fourth, he had himself been a great sinner in the days of his ignorance, through his particular opposition to Christ and the gospel. He was deeply aware of this, and correspondingly aware of the excellence of the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ by which he had been delivered. People must have some experience of what he felt in himself regarding sin and grace before they can fully understand his expressions about them.

Fifth, it is for these reasons that in many places in his writings, but especially in this one, he treats these things with greater earnestness and intensity of spirit than usual. On Christ's side, which he would exalt, he mentions not merely knowledge of Him but "the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" — with emphasis on every word. The repeated expressions — "all loss for Him," "that I may gain Him," "that I may be found in Him," "that I may know Him" — all reflect the working of his heart under the direction of faith and truth toward resting in Christ alone as all and in all. Some measure of this frame of mind is necessary for those who would receive his doctrine. Those who are complete strangers to the one will never accept the other. On the other side,

with the same intensity of spirit, Paul casts contempt on everything that is our own and is not Christ — privileges and duties, however good, useful, and excellent they may be in themselves. In comparison with Christ and His righteousness, and with respect to standing before God and being accepted by Him, Paul calls them scraps fit only for dogs — those he calls dogs, that is, evil workers, those of the circumcision, the wicked Jews who clung stubbornly to the righteousness of the law (verse 2). I thought it necessary to give this account of Paul's earnestness in this argument and the intensity of his expressions, as it illuminates his entire purpose.

Sixth, the question being so stated, the inquiry is what anyone who desires acceptance with God — a righteousness on the basis of which to be justified before Him — ought to do. He must choose one of the two paths offered. Either he must agree with Paul's resolution to reject all his own righteousness and commit himself to the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ alone, or he must find — or have someone find for him — some exception to Paul's conclusion, or some distinction that preserves a place for his own works in some way or other in his justification before God. Every person must choose for himself. In the meantime, we argue as follows. If our own righteousness and the righteousness of God by faith — the righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus, namely the righteousness God imputes to us (Romans 4:6) or the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness which we receive (Romans 5:17) — are opposite and incompatible in the matter of justification before God, then we are justified by faith alone through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. The conclusion follows

plainly from the removal of all other ways, causes, means, and conditions as incompatible with it. And Paul explicitly states the premise: "not my own, but that of God." Furthermore:

That by which and with which we are found in Christ is that by which alone we are justified before God — for to be found in Christ expresses the state of the person who is to be justified before God. The opposite is to be found in oneself. And God's judgment concerning us corresponds to these two different states. As for those who are found in themselves, we know what their portion will be. But in Christ we are found by faith alone.

Every kind of evasion is used by some to escape the force of this testimony. It is said in general that no sane person could imagine Paul did not desire to be found in gospel righteousness, or that his "own righteousness" referred to it — since gospel righteousness alone entitles us to the benefits of Christ's righteousness. I would rather this had not been said. First, this judgment is too sweeping to be leveled without exception against all Protestant writers who have expounded this passage, as well as all others except a few of late who have been shaped by the heat of the controversy they are engaged in. Second, if by "gospel righteousness" they mean his own personal righteousness and obedience, there is a lack of thought in saying he did not desire to be found in it. What we are found in is what we will be judged by — to be found in our own evangelical righteousness before God is to enter into judgment with God on that basis, which those who understand anything rightly about God and themselves will be reluctant to do. And to make his words mean "I desire not to be found in my own righteousness which is after the law, but I desire to be found in my own righteousness which is according to the gospel" — when, as

inherent personal righteousness, both are the same thing — does not appear to be a proper interpretation of his words, and it will be immediately disproved. Third, that our personal gospel righteousness entitles us to the benefits of Christ's righteousness with respect to our justification before God is an assertion without scriptural support — not a single testimony of Scripture can be produced that gives the slightest warrant for it. That it contradicts many express testimonies and is inconsistent with the freedom of God's grace in justification as Scripture presents it has been proved earlier. Nor do any of the passages that assert the necessity of obedience and good works in believers — that is, in already-justified persons — in any way prove this assertion or so much as hint at it. In particular, this assertion is directly contradicted by what Paul says in Titus 3:4-5. But I will leave this and proceed to the specific answers given to this testimony, especially those of Bellarmine, to which I have not yet seen anything added with any genuine force.

First, some say that by "his own righteousness" which Paul rejects, he means only his righteousness expressed through the works of the law — and that this was only an outward, external righteousness consisting in the observance of rites and ceremonies, without reference to the inner disposition or obedience of the heart. But this is an impious idea. The righteousness that is by the law is the righteousness the law requires — those works of it which, if a person does them, he will live by them, since the doers of the law will be justified (Romans 2:16). God has never given any law of obedience to humanity that did not require them to love the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul. It is so far

from true that God required only external righteousness through the law that He frequently condemns such external righteousness as an abomination to Him when it stands alone.

Second, others say the righteousness Paul rejects is whatever kind of righteousness he had during his years as a Pharisee. Even if he is granted to have lived in good conscience during that period — serving God earnestly night and day, attending to both internal and external duties of the law — all of those works, being prior to faith and prior to conversion to God, may rightly be rejected as having no place in our justification. But works done in faith, by the help of grace — evangelical works — are a different matter, and together with faith are the condition of justification.

Answer, first: that in the matter of our justification Paul sets evangelical works in opposition not only to the grace of God but also to the faith of believers was proved in examining the previous testimony.

Answer, second: he makes no such distinction as the one proposed — that works are of two kinds, one to be excluded from justification and another not. Nowhere else in his treatment of this same subject does he hint at any such distinction. On the contrary, he declares the role of all works of obedience in believers in a way that leaves no room for any such distinction. And in this passage he directly states his rejection of "my own righteousness" — that is, his personal, inherent righteousness, whatever it is and however it was produced.

Third, Paul makes a clear distinction between his two states: his earlier state of Judaism before conversion, and his present state through faith in Christ Jesus. In considering the first state, he

declares what judgment he made about its privileges when Christ was revealed to him — "I considered all of them, with all the advantages, gain, and reputation they brought, but rejected them all for Christ, because esteeming and continuing in them as privileges was incompatible with faith in Christ Jesus." He then goes on to give an account of himself and his thoughts with respect to his present condition. For someone might suppose that although he had given up all his legal privileges for Christ, now that he was united to Christ by faith he had something of his own in which he could rejoice and on the basis of which he might be accepted by God — the very thing being inquired about — or else he had given up everything for nothing. Paul, who had no intention of holding anything back to boast about, plainly declares his judgment about all his present righteousness and the works of obedience he was now engaged in, with respect to the ends in question (verse 8). The idea of reading verse 8 as still referring to his pre-conversion Jewish privileges is the result of a very superficial reading of the context. The expression used here is unmistakably a transition word meaning "beyond" or "more than that" — Paul could hardly more plainly signal that he is heightening what he has just said by moving to further considerations or to himself in a different state. Moreover, the change in verb tense from the past — what he had already rejected and left behind — to the present, where he has only his current state in view, makes his advance to a consideration of new matters evident. So he adds to his rejection of all his former Jewish privileges his judgment about his own present personal righteousness. And whereas it might be objected that by rejecting everything both before and after his conversion he was left with nothing to rejoice in, glory in, or rely on for acceptance with

God, he assures us of the opposite — that he found all of these things in Christ and in the righteousness of God that comes by faith. When Paul says "not having my own righteousness which is by the law," he is so far from intending only the righteousness he had before his conversion that he is not referring to it at all.

The words of Davenant on this passage of the apostle, which I judge to be not only sober but weighty, I will transcribe: "Here the apostle teaches what righteousness we must rest on before God — namely, that which is apprehended by faith, and this is imputed. He also shows why it rightly becomes ours — because we belong to Christ and are found in Christ; because, being grafted into His body and growing together with Him into one person, His righteousness is therefore reckoned as ours" (*De Justificatione, Habituali*, cap. 38). For some have begun to interpret our being in Christ and being found in Him as meaning nothing more than our outward profession of the gospel faith — but the faith of the catholic church in all ages concerning the mystical union of Christ and believers is not to be dismissed with a few empty words and unproved assertions.

The answer to the general objection — that Paul rejects our legal righteousness but not our evangelical righteousness — is therefore full and clear. First, Paul disclaims and disowns nothing absolutely — neither the one nor the other — but only in comparison with Christ and with respect to the specific goal of justification before God, of a righteousness in His sight. Second, in that sense he rejects all of our own righteousness — and our evangelical righteousness, in the sense being argued for, is our own, inherent in us, performed by us. Third, our legal righteousness and our evangelical righteousness, insofar as inherent righteousness is in view, are

the same thing — the distinction between them refers only to the different ends and uses of the same righteousness. What is evangelical in terms of its motives, ends, and the particular causes of its acceptance by God is legal in terms of its original rule, prescription, and measure. If anyone can point to any act, duty, disposition, or effect that is not required by the law that commands us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves, they will be given a hearing. Fourth, Paul elsewhere excludes from justification the works of righteousness that we have done (Titus 3:5) — and our evangelical righteousness consists precisely in such works of righteousness that we do. Fifth, he disclaims everything that is our own. And if the evangelical righteousness in question is our own, he sets up a different righteousness in contrast to it — one that therefore is not our own except as it is imputed to us. I will add some further reasons that expose the futility of this proposed interpretation or show its falsehood.

First, where Paul does not distinguish or qualify what he says, what basis do we have for distinguishing or qualifying his statements? He says "not by works" — sometimes absolutely, sometimes as "works of righteousness which we have done" — meaning not by some particular kind of works, say those who argue the contrary. But by what authority? Second, the works they claim are excluded — as constituting the rejected personal righteousness — are works done without faith and without the help of grace. But these are not good works, and no one can be called righteous through them alone, since without faith it is impossible to please God. To what end would Paul exclude wicked and hypocritical works from our justification? Who ever imagined that anyone could be justi-

fied on the basis of those? There might have been some ground for this interpretation if Paul had said "his own works" — but since he rejects "his own righteousness," to confine that to works that are not righteous, that make no one righteous, that are no righteousness at all, is thoroughly absurd. Third, works done in faith, if applied to our justification, give more occasion for boasting than any others, since they are better and more praiseworthy. Fourth, Paul elsewhere excludes from justification the works Abraham had done after many years as a believer, and the works of David when he described a person's blessedness in terms of the forgiveness of sins. Fifth, the question Paul handles in his letter to the Galatians was explicitly about the works of those who did believe. He was not arguing with the Jews, who would not have felt the force of his arguments at all — that if the inheritance were by the law the promise would be void, and if righteousness were by the law Christ died needlessly. They would readily grant those things. He was addressing those who were believers, with respect to works they wanted to join with Christ and the gospel in order to justification. Sixth, if Paul's intention had been to exclude one kind of works while asserting the necessity of another kind for the same end, why did he never once say so — especially given how necessary it would have been to do so, in order to answer the very objections against his doctrine that he himself acknowledges and addresses on entirely different grounds, without the slightest hint of any such distinction?

Bellarmino addresses this testimony in three places (*De Justificatione*, lib. 1, cap. 18; lib. 1, cap. 19; lib. 5, cap. 5), and he offers three answers that contain the substance of everything others argue to the same end. First, he says that the righteousness which

is by the law — set in opposition to the righteousness by faith — is not the righteousness written in the law or which the law requires, but a righteousness achieved without the help of grace, by knowledge of the law alone. Second, that the righteousness which is by faith in Christ consists in our own righteous works done in faith — what others call our evangelical works. Third, that it is blasphemous to call the duties of inherent righteousness loss and rubbish. But all his cleverness labors in vain. As to the first answer: first, the claim that by "righteousness which is by the law" Paul does not mean the righteousness the law requires is a bold assertion directly contradicted by Paul himself in Romans 9:31 and 10:5, where in both places he declares the righteousness of the law to be the righteousness the law requires. Second, the works he excludes he calls "works of righteousness that we have done" (Titus 3:5) — which are precisely the works the law requires. As to the second answer: first, the substance of it is that Paul should be understood as saying "I desire to be found in Christ, not having my own righteousness, but having my own righteousness" — since evangelical inherent righteousness was genuinely his own. I am sorry that some think Paul was in these words expressing a desire to be found in his own righteousness before God for the purpose of his justification. Nothing could be more contrary to the whole tenor and design of all his discussions of this subject, or to the testimony of all other godly people in Scripture to the same effect, as we proved earlier. I also believe there are very few true believers today whom they will find willing to join them in this desire to be found in their own personal evangelical righteousness — the works of righteousness they have done — when put on trial before God for their justification. We would do well to examine our own hearts as carefully

as we read other people's books in this matter. Second, the righteousness which is of God by faith is not our own obedience or righteousness but what is set in direct contrast to it — what God imputes to us (Romans 4:6), what we receive as a gift (Romans 5:17). Third, that by "the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ Jesus" Paul does not mean our own inherent righteousness is evident from the fact that Paul excludes all of his own righteousness — as and when he was found in Christ, that is, including everything he had done as a believer. And if there is not a clear opposition in these words between a righteousness that is our own and one that is not our own, I do not know how it could be expressed. As to the third answer: first, Paul does not call our inherent righteousness rubbish, nor do we say he does — he counts it as rubbish. Second, he does not count it as rubbish absolutely, which would be entirely foreign to him, but only in comparison with Christ. Third, he does not regard it as rubbish in itself, but only as the object of trust for one specific end — our justification before God. Fourth, the prophet Isaiah in the same sense calls all our righteousness filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), and that expression conveys just as much contempt as Paul's does here.

Fifth, some say all works are excluded as meritorious of grace, life, and salvation, but not as the condition of our justification before God. But first, whatever Paul excludes, he excludes absolutely and in every respect, because he sets up something else in direct opposition to it. Second, there is no basis for any such distinction in this passage. All that Paul requires for our justification is: first, that we be found in Christ, not in ourselves; second, that we have

the righteousness of God, not our own; and third, that we be made partakers of this righteousness by faith. This is the substance of everything we are arguing for.

CHAPTER 19: OBJECTIONS AGAINST JUSTIFICATION BY IMPUTATION ANSWERED



What remains to bring this discussion to a close is the consideration of some objections raised against the truth we have been defending. We have already encountered and answered many of them along the way — including the most important ones currently pressed against us. The Scripture passages cited by those of the Roman church in favor of justification by works have been answered so fully and so often by Protestant writers that there is no need to revisit them, especially since no new arguments have recently been added. What we are mainly dealing with now are sophisticated objections based on supposedly absurd consequences, not genuine theological arguments. Some who try to walk carefully between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and justification by our own works are in such a precarious position that they sometimes seem to be on one side and sometimes the other — or else they express themselves so cautiously that it is very difficult to know what they actually believe. Going forward, I will not presume to say that a particular opinion belongs to a particular person, however clearly their words seem to indicate it —

but I will say plainly which opinions I approve or disapprove, whoever may hold them. I will also say this: the drift away from the common Protestant doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness moves steadily toward a direct assertion of justification by works. It has no stable resting place until it arrives there. This is more clearly visible in the objections people raise against the truth than in the positive positions they defend. In their positive statements they speak cautiously, with a pretense of avoiding extremes. But in their objections they rely entirely on arguments that resolve into a straightforward assumption of justification by works. To address every specific objection would be endless, and as noted, most of the significant ones have already been handled. There are only two objections that all parties — Roman Catholics, Socinians, and others — consistently press, and those are the ones I will address. The first, which underlies all the others, is that the doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness makes personal righteousness unnecessary and destroys any need for a holy life. The second is that the apostle James in his epistle plainly attributes justification to works, and what he says there is inconsistent with the meaning we have assigned to the many other Scripture passages we have argued from.

Regarding the first objection: although those who oppose the truth we are defending proceed from various contradictory principles among themselves regarding what they offer as an alternative, they all agree in pressing this objection vigorously. As for those of the Roman church who revived this charge — which others had invented long before them — every honest person must acknowledge that as they have managed it, it amounts to open slander. The most learned among them, those who can hardly have been unaware of

the truth, such as Bellarmine, Vasquez, and Suarez, openly claim that Protestant writers deny all inherent righteousness (Bellarmine makes an exception for Bucer and Chemnitius); that Protestants maintain men may be saved regardless of how they live; that nothing more is required of them than believing their sins are forgiven; and that as long as they hold this belief, even if they give themselves over to the most sensual vices and depravity, they may be assured of their salvation.

"To such great evils could religion persuade men."

Out of a misguided zeal for promoting their own religious interests, men will willingly descend to the worst of evils — false accusation and open slander. That is exactly the nature of these claims, which nothing in the writings or preaching of those accused ever gave the slightest grounds for. Whether forging and spreading such brazen falsehoods is a useful strategy for obtaining justification by works before God, those who continue in this practice would do well to consider. For my own part, I will say again what I believe I have said before: it makes no difference to me what religion a man professes if he can justify himself in such conduct. As for those among our own camp who are pleased to use this objection, they either understand the doctrine they are opposing or they do not. If they do not understand it, the wise man's verdict applies: whoever answers a matter before hearing it fully brings folly and shame upon himself. If they do understand it, it is clear they are not acting in good faith but are using manipulation and false pretenses to gain advantage in their handling of sacred matters — which is a disgrace to religion. Socinus presses this charge fiercely against the doctrine of the Reformed churches (*De Servatore*, par. 4, cap. 1). He made it the foundation and justifica-

tion for his rejection of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's satisfaction — though he also flatly denies that any such satisfaction exists. He wrote a full treatise to the same effect, which Schlictingius defended against Meisnerus. He takes the same dishonest approach others used before him. He charges the Protestant theologians with teaching that God justifies the ungodly not only while they are ungodly but even if they remain ungodly; that they require no inherent righteousness or holiness in anyone; that they cannot require it on their own principles, since the imputed righteousness of Christ is sufficient even for those who continue to live in sin, who are not cleansed, and who do not pursue obedience to God — and thus that Protestant doctrine introduces libertinism and antinomianism into the church. He thinks it a sufficient refutation of this doctrine to cite the fact that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, and so forth will not inherit the kingdom of God. These are some of the practices that have made the management of religious controversy scandalous and repugnant — practices no wise or good person will engage in unless compelled to do so for the necessary service of the church. These claims are openly false, and they are deployed with shameless dishonesty to advance a corrupt agenda. When I find men engaged in this kind of argument, I have very little interest in anything else they say, whether true or false. Their standard is whatever serves their own purpose and promotes the position they have already committed to, right or wrong. As for Socinus himself: there is not a single article of the Christian faith — most of which he rejects — on the basis of which he more confidently condemns us to eternal ruin than this one: the satisfaction of Christ and its imputation to those who believe. Such is the darkness that remains in most men's minds. So many deep-

rooted prejudices burden them from various sources — especially when they are not guided by the same enlightening Spirit — that some will confidently condemn others to eternal flames for the very things on which those others, on infallible grounds, rest their hope of eternal blessedness, and through which they know they love God and live for Him. Yet this wretched tactic of condemning all dissenters to hell is eagerly seized upon by every kind of party. By it they quietly secure their own entire camp in the assurance of eternal salvation, whatever else may be true of them. For if the absence of their particular brand of faith will certainly damn a man no matter how he lives or how good his life is, many will easily fall for the foolish reasoning that the faith they profess will assuredly save them regardless of how they live — since that conclusion fits so naturally with human inclinations. By the same means they may also frighten simple-minded people into compliance by loudly pronouncing damnation on them unless they conform. And it is generally those who denounce condemnation most fiercely against others for not believing as they do who live in such a way that, if Scripture is true at all, it is impossible they could be saved themselves. For my part, I believe this: among those who outwardly profess Christianity, all who are unregenerate and unbelieving, who do not obey the gospel, will be condemned — whatever their religion — and none others. All who are truly born again, who truly believe and obey the gospel, will be saved — whatever their religion, with respect to the differences that exist among Christians today. The way that most effectively promotes these things is the way every person concerned for their own salvation ought first to embrace. If any church or way obstructs these things, that church or way is, to that extent, to be forsaken. And if any form of profes-

sion or visible church requires as essential to its members anything absolutely destructive of or incompatible with these things, then no salvation can be obtained in that way and by virtue of it. In everything else, every person must walk according to the light of their own conscience, for whatever is not of faith is sin. But I return from this digression, prompted by the forcefulness of the man with whom we have been dealing.

The objection itself, stripped of its dishonest handling, amounts to this and nothing more: if God justifies the ungodly purely by grace through faith in Christ Jesus — so that works of obedience are not required before justification and form no part of the righteousness on the basis of which a person is justified — then works are not necessary at all, and people may be justified and saved without them. The claim is that there is no real connection between faith as we describe it and the necessity of holiness, righteousness, or obedience — that grace sets us free to live however we please, even in all manner of sin, while still being assured of salvation. For if we are made righteous with another's righteousness, we have no need of any righteousness of our own. It would do well if many who press this objection would also show by their own lives that they actually value the holiness they are arguing for — because arguing for the necessity of holiness while neglecting it personally is inconsistent.

My answer to this objection will be brief, because it has already been sufficiently answered and preempted in what was said earlier about the nature of justifying faith and the continuing force of the moral law as a rule of obedience for all believers. An unprejudiced reading of what has been presented on those topics will clearly expose the injustice of this charge and show that the doctrine we are

defending gives it no support whatsoever. I should also let the reader know that some time ago I published a complete work on the nature and necessity of gospel holiness — its grounds and reasons — which is entirely consistent with the doctrine of justification set out here. I see no need to add to it, and I am confident that reading it will thoroughly expose the emptiness of this charge (*The Dispensation of the Holy Spirit*, book 5). A few further observations are appropriate for the present occasion.

First, I do not claim that all who have professed this doctrine, now or in earlier ages, have demonstrated it through a holy and fruitful life. It is to be feared that many among them have lived and died in sin. Nor do I doubt that some have misused this doctrine to excuse their sins and neglect of duty. No holy truth can be entirely protected from abuse as long as the devil's craftiness has influence over the lusts and corrupt minds of men. This happened among some in the early church who turned the grace of God into license, using its doctrine to sanction their ungodly behavior. From the very beginning the whole gospel of the grace of God was misused in this way. Not everyone who professed it was immediately made holy and righteous. From the start, many lived in a way that made plain their belly was their god and their end was destruction. There is a difference between having the conviction of truth in the mind and having the power of it in the heart. The former produces an outward profession; only the latter produces an inward renewal of the soul. However, to this concession I must add three things.

First, I am not aware that any of those who currently oppose this doctrine surpass — in holiness, righteousness, the exercise of faith, love, zeal, self-denial, and all other Christian graces — those in past generations, both in this country and others, who firmly

held to it and who consistently testified to the powerful influence it had on their walk before God. Nor do I know of any person from earlier times who was eminent in holiness — and there were many such — who did not wholeheartedly accept the imputation of Christ's righteousness that we are defending. I have no doubt that many who differ considerably from others in explaining this doctrine may be, and are, genuinely and eminently holy — or at least sincerely so, which is the most any of us can claim. But it is hardly fitting when some who give little evidence of earnestly pursuing that holiness without which no one will see God loudly denounce as destructive of holiness the very doctrine that was so productive of it in former times.

Second, it does not appear that attempts to introduce a doctrine contrary to this one have achieved any great success in reforming people's lives. Personal righteousness and holiness have not noticeably flourished under its leadership, as far as one can observe. It will be time enough to gain credibility by attacking what formerly produced better fruit once this alternative doctrine has commended itself a little more by its own results.

Third, it would not be a bad idea if this part of the controversy could be settled among us all by the advice of the apostle James in James 2:18: "Show me your faith by your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." Let us all work to let our fruits settle the question of our doctrines, at least with regard to their practical usefulness for righteousness and holiness. For a faith that does not demonstrate itself through works — that lacks the visible mark James calls for by which it can be identified and tested — counts for nothing in this discussion. Second, this same objection was leveled against the apostle Paul's doctrine from the very beginning,

and that very same charge was pressed against it — which is strong evidence that it is the same doctrine now under attack. Paul himself notes this more than once. In Romans 3:31 he asks, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith?" — anticipating an objection to his doctrine of the free justification of sinners through faith in the blood of Christ. The substance of that charge was that he was destroying the law, eliminating all obligation to obedience, and introducing antinomianism. Again in Romans 6:1 he asks, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" Some thought this was the natural and obvious consequence of everything he had just taught about justification. If his teaching about God's grace in our justification is true, the argument went, not only would there be no need to turn from sin — continuing in sin would actually increase the grace he had so highly praised. He repeats the same objection in Romans 6:15: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?" He addresses the same objection in various other places as well, including Ephesians 2:9-10. We have no reason to be surprised by this objection and charge, nor should we be greatly unsettled by it — it is nothing other than what was raised against the apostle Paul's own doctrine, however much it is now reinforced by clever arguments and rhetorical exaggeration. It is evident, however, that there are deeply ingrained prejudices in the human mind against this aspect of the gospel mystery — prejudices that showed themselves early and did not stop until they had corrupted the entire doctrine of the church on this point. It would not be difficult to identify the main ones, were that our present task; but it has already been done in part earlier.

Third, it is granted that this doctrine — whether taken alone or together with everything else relating to God's grace in Christ Jesus — is open to abuse by those in whom spiritual darkness and the love of sin dominate. From the very beginning of the Christian faith, some imagined that bare intellectual assent to the gospel was the faith by which they would be saved, and that they could live on in sin and neglect all duties of obedience while still being saved. This is evident especially from the letters of John, James, and Jude. Against this dangerous error we can offer no guaranteed remedy as long as people choose darkness over light because their deeds are evil. And it would be foolish to imagine that reconfiguring the doctrine in one way or another will prevent such abuse in the future. If it could, it would only be by making it no longer part of the gospel — for the gospel has always been liable to abuse by exactly the kind of people we are describing.

These general observations are sufficient on their own to dismiss this objection from the minds of thoughtful people. I will add only a consideration of the answers the apostle Paul gives to it, with a brief application to our purpose.

The objection brought against the apostle was that he nullified the law, made good works unnecessary, and that on the assumption of his doctrine men could live in sin to the advancement of grace. Regarding his response to this, we may observe the following.

First, Paul never once gives the answer that some consider the only adequate response to this objection: namely, that our own personal righteousness, obedience, or works are necessary for our justification before God. To claim that when he says "faith without works" he actually means faith combined with works is an unrea-

sonable interpretation. If anyone still wants to insist that Paul gave such an answer, let them produce the evidence — it has not been shown. Is it not remarkable that if this were actually his doctrine — if personal righteousness, holiness, and works had any influence on our justification and served in any way as our righteousness before God — that Paul, who more consistently and thoroughly than any other New Testament writer presses the necessity of holiness and shows its true nature and use in both general and specific duties, never once made use of this truth in answering an objection that charged him with making all such things needless and useless? His doctrine was attacked with this objection, as he himself acknowledged, and many rejected it on that basis (Romans 10:3-4; Galatians 2:3). He knew well that the corrupt desires and depraved minds of many would generate clever arguments against it. Indeed, as the Holy Spirit revealed to him, he foresaw that it would be distorted and abused — as is evident in many places in his writings. It was certainly incumbent on him to do everything in his power to prevent these evils and to frame his doctrine in response to this objection in a way that could never be taken to support it. Is it not strange that he never once, anywhere, gave even the slightest indication that although he rejected the works of the law, he still maintained the necessity of evangelical works for our justification before God as a condition of it, or as the means by which we are justified according to the gospel? If this were truly his doctrine — and if it would so easily resolve this difficulty and answer this objection, as some claim — then neither his wisdom nor his care for the church under the guidance of the infallible Spirit would have allowed him to omit this reply, had it been consistent with the truth he had delivered. He is so far from offering any such re-

sponse that when the most unavoidable opportunity was given for it, he not only passes over it entirely but in its place affirms something that makes clear he did not accept it. See Ephesians 2:9-10: having positively excluded works from our justification — "not of works, so that no one may boast" — and with the natural follow-up question arising as to what purpose works then serve and whether they are even necessary, instead of distinguishing between legal and evangelical works in relation to justification, he asserts the necessity of the latter on entirely different grounds, reasons, and motives, making clear that it was precisely these works that he had excluded, as we saw in our examination of that passage. Therefore, so that we may not abandon his pattern and example in this same cause — since he was wiser, holier, knew more of the mind of God, and had more zeal for personal righteousness and holiness in the church than any of us — if we are pressed a thousand times with this objection, we will never answer it by conceding that such things are the condition or cause of our justification, or the matter of our righteousness before God, since he himself refused to do so.

Second, we may observe that in his answers to this objection — whether he addresses it explicitly or preempts it tacitly — Paul never relies on the general principle of moral obligation, but only on those motives and reasons for holiness, obedience, and good works that are specific to believers. The question was not whether all humanity is obligated to obedience to God by the moral law. The question was whether the gospel places on believers a particular obligation to righteousness, holiness, and good works — one suited to move and constrain their minds toward them. We accept no other framing of the question but this: whether, given our free justification through the imputation of Christ's righteousness,

there are in the gospel grounds, reasons, and motives that both require and effectively move believers' minds toward obedience and good works. As for unbelievers, they are not our concern in this matter. We do not claim that gospel motives are suited or effective to move them to obedience — we know the contrary, and that they are prone to both despise and abuse them (see 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Such persons are under the law, and we leave them there under the authority of God in the moral law. That Paul confines his inquiry to believers is clear in every place he addresses it: "How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus..." (Romans 6:2-3); and "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10). We will not, therefore, debate what power gospel motives and reasons have over unbelievers when it comes to duties of holiness — whatever the truth may be in that case. Our concern is with their power, force, and effectiveness toward those who truly believe.

Third, the positive answers the apostle gives to this objection — in which he declares the necessity, nature, ends, and use of gospel righteousness and good works — are extensive and comprehensive, covering a large portion of the whole doctrine of the gospel. I will only mention the main points, which are the same ones we press in defense of the same truth.

First, he appeals to God's appointed order: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). God has designed in the ordering of the causes of salvation that those who believe in Christ should live in, walk in, and abound in good works and all duties of obedience to God. To this end,

commands, directions, motives, and encouragements are multiplied throughout Scripture. We therefore say that good works — including the gradual progressive renewal of our nature, our growth and increase in grace, and our fruitfulness in life — are necessary because God has ordained and commanded them. What more needs to be debated about the necessity of good works among those who understand what it means to believe, or what regard believers' consciences have for the commands of God?

But what force, some ask, does God's command or ordained order carry when, regardless of whether we obey, we will be justified by the imputation of Christ's righteousness and may therefore be saved without obedience? My answer: first, as already noted, this inquiry concerns believers alone, and not one of them will regard this as anything other than a completely unreasonable and senseless objection — one that arises from a total ignorance of their standing and relationship to God. To suppose that believers' minds are not as powerfully and effectively moved by God's authority and commands toward duty and obedience as they would be if those commands were all given as conditions of justification — this is to misunderstand what faith is, what it means to be a believer, what relationship we stand in to God through faith in Christ Jesus, and what arguments and motives primarily move the minds of such persons. This is the answer the apostle gives at length to this objection in Romans 6:2-3. Second, the entire fallacy of this objection lies in two errors: first, in separating what God has joined inseparably — namely, our justification and our sanctification. To suppose that one can exist without the other is to overturn the whole gospel. Second, in confusing what are actually distinct things — namely, justification and final actual salvation. Works and obedi-

ence do not relate to both in the same way, as has already been explained. The idea that God's commands to duty — however given and for whatever ends — are any less binding on believers' consciences than they would be if they were all given as conditions for justification before God is an absurd fiction that every true believer rejects. In fact, these commands have greater power over believers than they could have if the duties required were conditions of justification and therefore had to precede it. If that were the case, they would have to exert their force before a person truly believes — for to say that someone can be a true believer and yet not be, in the very same moment, absolutely justified is not to be disputing some theological fine point but plainly denying the whole truth of the gospel. It is faith alone that gives power and effectiveness to gospel commands to move the soul genuinely toward obedience. Therefore, this obligation is more powerfully constraining when given to those who are already justified than it would be if given to produce their justification.

Second, the apostle answers as we do: "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" (Romans 3:31). Although the law is principally established in and through the obedience and sufferings of Christ (Romans 8:3-4; 10:3-4), it is not rendered void toward believers by the doctrine of faith and the imputation of Christ's righteousness for justification. Neither of these things frees believers from their obligation to universal obedience as prescribed in the law. They are still obligated by it to love the Lord their God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves. They are freed from the law and all its commands in their original form — "do this and live," the reverse of which is "cursed is everyone who does not

abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them" (Galatians 3:10). For whoever stands under the law's obligation as a means to justification and life inevitably falls under its curse at the first transgression. But we are set free to give obedience to the law on gospel motives and for gospel ends, as the apostle explains at length in Romans 6. And the law's obligation to all believers is such that the smallest transgression of it has the nature of sin. But does that mean believers are therefore bound over by the law to everlasting punishment? Or, as some put it, will God damn those who transgress the law — without which all of this means nothing? I ask them what they think about this; and if they answer yes, what they further think will become of themselves. For my part I say no — in the words of the apostle: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Where then, they will say, is the necessity of obedience from the law's obligation, if God will not condemn those who transgress it? I would simply say it would benefit some people to understand what they are actually saying in these matters — or to be willing to remain silent for a while until they do. The law requires obedience in all its demands equally, or it requires none at all. As to its binding power, it admits neither dispensation nor relaxation so long as the essential distinctions between good and evil remain. If no one can be bound to duty by the law's commands without falling under its curse at every transgression, then either no one is obligated at all or no one can be saved. But although we are freed from the curse and condemning power of the law by Him who has put an end to sin and brought in everlasting righteousness, we are still, while we

are pilgrims on the way toward the fulfillment of God's purpose to restore His image in us, obligated to pursue all the holiness and righteousness the law requires.

Third, the apostle answers this objection by unfolding the necessary relationship that faith has to the death of Christ, the grace of God, the nature of sanctification, and the excellence, use, advantage, and God-appointed end of gospel holiness. He does this at length throughout the entire sixth chapter of Romans, with the specific purpose of demonstrating that justification by faith alone is fully consistent with the necessity of personal righteousness and holiness. A proper treatment of these things would require a thorough exposition of that chapter, in which the apostle has gathered together the chief sources and reasons for gospel obedience. I will only say this: those who find that the reasons and motives for obedience expressed in that chapter — all of which are fully in harmony with the doctrine of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness — are not effective in moving them personally to obedience, and who do not see in them an unquestionable necessity for it, are so out of touch with the gospel, the nature of faith, the character and inclination of the new creature (for let people mock as long as they will: whoever is in Christ Jesus is a new creature), the constraining power of God's grace and Christ's love, and the economy of God in ordering the causes and means of our salvation — that I will not trouble myself to argue with them about these things.

I had intended to add several other considerations to the same effect, including: first, that in proving the necessity of inherent righteousness and holiness we use only the arguments Scripture itself provides; second, that we use all of them in the sense and for

the ends for which they are urged in Scripture, in perfect harmony with what we teach about justification; third, that all arguments and motives for gospel holiness that are inconsistent with the imputation of Christ's righteousness actually obstruct and undermine it; fourth, that the holiness we regard as necessary for the salvation of believers is of a far more excellent, sublime, and heavenly character — in its causes, essence, operations, and effects — than what is acknowledged or believed by most of those who oppose the doctrine of justification; and fifth, that the holiness and righteousness advocated by the Socinians and those who follow them does not rise above the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, nor on their own principles can anyone go beyond it. However, since this discussion has already grown much longer than I originally intended, and since I have already treated the doctrine of the nature and necessity of gospel holiness at length elsewhere, I will set aside these remaining points for now and rest content with the answers the apostle himself gives to this objection.

CHAPTER 20: JAMES ON FAITH AND WORKS; ITS AGREEMENT WITH PAUL



The apparent difference between the apostle Paul and James in what they teach about faith, works, and justification requires our attention. Many people take advantage of certain words and expressions in James to directly oppose the doctrine fully and plainly set out by Paul. But whatever has been claimed along these lines has already been answered so thoroughly by others that there is little need to go over it again. And while I expect that debate and writing on these questions will continue as long as our knowledge remains partial, I must say that in my judgment the standard resolution of this apparent difficulty — which secures the doctrine of justification by faith through the imputation of Christ's righteousness from any contradiction in James chapter 2, verse 14 to the end — has not been undermined in the least, nor has any new difficulty been raised against it in recent discussions. I would therefore have left the matter entirely alone were it not that some treatment of it is expected in a work of this kind, and I also hope to contribute something to the clarity and defense of the truth. To that end, it should be observed, first, that all parties agree there is no real conflict or contradiction between these two apostles. If there were, the writings of one of them would have to be falsely at-

tributed — not genuinely written by the person named — and therefore uncanonical, as the authority of James's epistle has been rashly questioned by some, both in early times and more recently. Their words are therefore certainly capable of a just reconciliation. Our failure to achieve or agree on that reconciliation comes from the darkness of our own minds, the weakness of our understanding, and for too many people, from the power of prejudice.

Second, it is also universally agreed on all other occasions that when there is an apparent conflict or contradiction in any passages of Scripture — where some passages treat directly, deliberately, and at length on the matter in question, while others mention the same things only incidentally and in passing, in pursuit of other aims — the truth is to be learned, established, and determined from the former passages. In other words, the interpretation of passages where a truth appears only incidentally, in relation to other things or ends, must be drawn from and shaped by those other passages where the inspired writer's purpose is specifically to declare that truth for its own sake and to guide the faith of the church. Among all the interpretive rules generally agreed upon for reading Scripture, this is one of the most rational and natural.

Third, by this rule it is beyond question that the doctrine of justification before God is to be learned from the writings of the apostle Paul, and that his treatment of it should illuminate all other Scripture passages where it is mentioned incidentally. This is especially true given how precisely his doctrine represents the whole scope of Scripture and how it is confirmed by countless incidental testimonies throughout. It must be acknowledged that Paul wrote about our justification before God specifically to declare it for its own sake and for its use in the church — and that he does so

fully, extensively, and repeatedly, in consistent harmony of expression. He himself explains what drove him to such thoroughness and precision. First, the importance of the doctrine itself. He makes clear that our salvation directly depends on it and that it is the hinge on which the whole doctrine of the gospel turns — the article by which the church stands or falls (Galatians 2:16, 21; 5:4-5). Second, the persuasive and dangerous opposition that was then being mounted against it. This opposition was so skillfully conducted, with such plausible pretexts, that many were won over and turned from the truth by it — as happened with the Galatians — and many others were kept from the faith of the gospel because they disliked it (Romans 10:3-4). Those familiar with such situations know what care and diligence the declaration of a truth under such conditions demands. How much zeal, care, and watchfulness it aroused in the apostle is evident throughout his writings. Third, the misuse that fallen human nature is prone to make of this doctrine of grace — and which some people actually did pervert it to. Paul himself takes note of this and thoroughly vindicates the doctrine from giving any support to such distortions and impositions. Certainly, no person was ever under a greater obligation to teach and declare a doctrine fully and plainly than Paul was at that time, given his position and calling. And if we truly believe he was divinely inspired and divinely guided to reveal the truth for the instruction of the church, there is no reason we should not learn this truth primarily and first from his declaration and defense of it.

As for what the apostle James delivers, insofar as our justification is involved, the situation is quite different. He does not set out to declare the doctrine of our justification before God. Rather, having a different purpose in view — as we will see momentarily — he

defends it from the misuse that some in his day were making of it, just as others turned other doctrines of God's grace into license. Therefore, it is from the writings of the apostle Paul that we must primarily learn the truth in this matter, and the interpretation of other passages must be shaped by what he has plainly declared.

Fourth, some recent writers take the opposite position: they argue earnestly that Paul should be interpreted by James, not the other way around. To support this they tell us that Paul's writings are obscure, that various ancient writers noted this, that many have drawn erroneous conclusions from them — along with various similar claims, which in fact bring discredit on Christianity. They also claim that James, writing after Paul, is presumed to be interpreting his statements, and that Paul should therefore be understood in light of James's interpretation. In response: first, regarding the defense of Paul's writings, which are now frequently criticized with considerable severity (a symptom of the quiet spread of atheism in our time) — as there is no need for such a defense here, it is reserved for a more fitting place. I will only say that I cannot understand how anyone with the slightest acquaintance with the ancient writers can appeal to a passage from Irenaeus where he was plainly mistaken, or to an offhand remark from Origen, or anything similar, as grounds for questioning the clarity of Paul's writings — when they cannot but know how easy it would be to overwhelm them with testimonies to the contrary from the major writers of the church across multiple centuries. To take one example: Chrysostom in forty places explains why some people failed to understand Paul's writings, which in themselves were so gloriously clear and transparent. For their benefit I will simply refer them to his preface to the exposition of Paul's epistles, and they

will be directed to more of the same in due course. But Paul does not need the testimony of men, nor of the whole church together. His safety and security belong to those who build on the doctrine he taught. In the meantime it would be interesting to note — though the perverseness of the human mind gives more cause for sorrow than amusement — how those with the same agenda reach contradictory conclusions about his writings: some claim that if not all, then most of his epistles were written against the Gnostics and to refute their errors; others claim that the Gnostics drew their errors from his writings. Such liberties will people take with divine things to serve an immediate interest.

Second, this was not the view of the ancient church for the first three or four centuries. Paul's epistles were always regarded as the church's primary treasure and the great guide and rule of the Christian faith, while the epistle of James was barely accepted as canonical by many and was doubted by most — as both Eusebius and Jerome testify.

Third, the purpose of the apostle James is not at all to explain what Paul meant in his epistles, as is claimed, but only to defend the doctrine of the gospel from those who were abusing their freedom as a cover for malice — turning the grace of God into license and continuing in sin on the pretense that grace had increased as a result.

Fourth, the apostle Paul himself, as we have shown, defends his own doctrine against the objections and abuses that people either raised against it or distorted it to support. And we have no other doctrine in his epistles than what he preached throughout the world, and by which he laid the foundation of the Christian faith especially among the Gentiles.

With these points established, I will briefly demonstrate that there is not the slightest conflict or contradiction between what these two apostles declare regarding our justification and its causes. I will do this, first, by some general observations about the nature and direction of both their discussions; and second, by a close examination of the context in James. Under the first heading I will show: first, that they do not have the same scope, purpose, or goal in their discussions — they do not address the same question, state the same case, or resolve the same inquiry, and therefore since they are not speaking to the same thing, they cannot be contradicting each other; second, that since faith is a word with various meanings in Scripture and, as we have shown earlier, refers to things of different kinds, they are not speaking of the same faith or the same kind of faith — and therefore no contradiction can exist between what the one attributes to it and what the other denies of it, since they are speaking of different things; third, that they do not use justification in the same sense or with reference to the same ends; and fourth, that regarding works, both apostles mean the same thing — namely, works of obedience to the moral law.

The scope and purpose of the apostle Paul, the question he answers, and the case he sets out and resolves, are evident throughout his writings — especially his letters to the Romans and Galatians. His entire aim is to declare how a guilty, convicted sinner comes through faith in the blood of Christ to have all his sins pardoned, to be accepted by God, and to obtain a right to the heavenly inheritance — that is, to be acquitted and justified before God. Since this doctrine was central to the gospel, whose declaration to the Gentiles was especially entrusted to Paul, and since — as we just noted — he had particular reason to press it given the opposi-

tion mounted against it by Jews and Judaizing Christians who attributed this privilege to the law and to our own works of obedience, this is the case he states and the question he resolves in all his discussions of justification. In explaining it he also declares its nature and causes, and defends it against every objection. Because people of corrupt minds who want to indulge their desires — and all people naturally desire what God has made eternally incompatible: to live in sin now and arrive at blessedness hereafter — might conclude that if what Paul declared were true, and we are freely justified by God's grace through the imputation of a righteousness not originally and inherently our own, then nothing more would be required of us: no turning from sin, no pursuit of righteousness and holiness. Paul preempts these godless suggestions and shows they do not follow from the doctrine he taught. But he does not do this anywhere by suggesting or conceding that our own works of obedience or righteousness are necessary for or have any causal role in our justification before God. If there had been any truth in such a position — if it were not actually incompatible with and destructive of his whole doctrine — he would not have omitted it, nor should he have, as we have shown. And to suppose that anyone else needed to vindicate his doctrine from the same objections he himself addressed — by appealing to a position he himself would not use but explicitly rejected — is both foolish and misguided.

The apostle James, on the other hand, had no such purpose or design, nor any such occasion for what he wrote on this matter. He does not raise or even hint at the question of how a guilty, convicted sinner whose every excuse has been silenced may come to be justified before God — that is, receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness leading to life. To resolve that ques-

tion by pointing to our own works would overthrow the entire gospel. James had a completely different matter in hand. As we noted, many people in those days professed the Christian faith or claimed to believe the gospel, and on that basis assumed they were already justified and that nothing more was needed for their salvation. They imagined they had reached a desirable condition that suited all the desires of the flesh — one that allowed them to live in sin, neglect all duties of obedience, and still be saved in the end. Some suppose this harmful idea was absorbed from the poisonous teachings that had begun to circulate, as the apostle Paul predicted would happen (2 Timothy 4:1-3). It is generally believed that Simon Magus and his followers had by this time infected many minds with their corrupt teachings. Among them, and not the least dangerous, was the idea that faith meant freedom from the law and freedom to sin — or, for those who held it, the abolishing of any difference between good and evil. This was later developed by Basilides, Valentinus, and the rest of the Gnostics. Or perhaps it was simply the corruption of people's own hearts and lives that led them to seek such a cover for their sin. I believe it was the latter. There were among professing Christians in those days the same kind of people the world is now full of — those who suppose that their faith or the religion they profess, whatever it may be, will save them even if they live in open wickedness and are utterly fruitless when it comes to good works and duties of obedience. No other occasion for what James writes is suggested in the letter — he makes no mention of deceivers, as John does explicitly and repeatedly some time later. Against this kind of person — or for their correction — James has two goals: first, to prove in general that works are necessary for all who profess the gospel or faith in

Christ; and second, to expose the emptiness and absurdity of their claim to justification — that is, that they were justified and would be saved on the basis of a faith that so far from bearing good fruit was actually invoked by them to excuse their sins. All of his arguments serve these ends and no others. He effectively proves that a faith which is entirely barren and fruitless in obedience — and which people invoke to cover themselves in sin — is not the faith by which we are justified and saved, but a dead shell, of no use or benefit, as he declares in the conclusion of his entire argument in the last verse of the chapter. He does not direct anyone on how to be justified before God. Rather, he convinces some that they are not justified by relying on such dead faith, and declares the only way anyone can truly demonstrate and show that they genuinely are justified. His purpose is so plain that nothing could be more obvious, and those who miss it in their expositions of this passage have missed the whole point of the apostle. Since the two apostles' primary purposes are so different, there is no real conflict in their statements, even though their words create an appearance of one. They are not speaking to the same thing or from the same perspective. James never once addresses how a guilty, convicted sinner condemned by the law may come to be justified before God — and Paul speaks of nothing else. Apply the expressions of each to their proper purpose and scope, as we must do — or else we abandon all sound principles of interpretation and make it impossible to understand either of them correctly — and there is no disagreement between them, nor even any appearance of one.

Second, they are not speaking of the same faith. Therefore no discrepancy can exist between what one ascribes to faith and what the other denies of it, since they do not mean the same thing by the

word — they are speaking of different kinds of faith. If one person affirms that fire burns and another denies it, there is no contradiction between them as long as one means real fire and the other means something painted or depicted, and both make this clear. We have already shown that there are two kinds of faith by which people are said to believe the gospel and profess it, and that what belongs to one does not belong to the other. No one, I think, will deny that when Paul speaks of faith in relation to justification, he means genuine saving faith — what Scripture calls the faith of God's elect, precious faith more valuable than gold, the faith that purifies the heart and works through love, the faith through which Christ dwells in us and we abide in Him, through which we live to God: a living faith. That is the only faith he has in mind, and to it he ascribes all these things and countless other spiritual effects as the only means on our part of justification before God. But regarding the faith James has in view, he assigns none of these qualities to it. In fact, his only argument for why people cannot be saved by this faith is precisely that none of these things are found in it. What James has in mind is what he himself calls it: a dead faith, a lifeless shell, the faith of demons, a verbal faith — no more truly deserving the name than it is true charity to send away the naked and hungry with a wish for warmth and food but nothing more, and even that accompanied by mockery. He is well within his rights to deny justification in any sense to this faith, however confidently it is claimed — while justification may rightly be ascribed to the faith Paul speaks of.

Bellarmino uses several arguments to prove that the faith James has in mind is true justifying faith considered in itself — but all of them are hopelessly weak, being built on the assumption that

genuine justifying faith is nothing more than a real assent to the Catholic doctrine or divine revelation (*De Justificatione*, lib. 1, cap. 15). His first argument is that James calls it faith without qualification, and that the unqualified use of the word in Scripture always refers to true faith. In response: first, James calls it a dead faith, the faith of demons, and heaps contempt upon it, which he would never have done to any genuinely evangelical grace or duty. Second, every faith that is real as an act of intellectual assent to the truth is not thereby living, justifying, or saving — as has been proved. Third, people are said to believe, or to have faith, without qualification, who never had true and saving faith (John 2:23; Acts 8:13). Bellarmine then presses that in the same passage and chapter James discusses the faith of Abraham and affirms that it worked together with his works (James 2:22-23). A mere shadow of faith does not do this, he argues — therefore James must be speaking of true faith, the most properly so-called. This is a transparently weak argument. The apostle does not offer Abraham's faith as an example of the dead faith he has been reproaching so severely, but as the direct opposite of it — using it to prove that the empty faith he had critiqued is of no use or benefit to those who hold it. Abraham's faith produced good works; the other faith produced none at all. Third, Bellarmine presses James 2:24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." He argues that the faith James speaks of justifies along with works, but a false faith — a mere shadow of faith — does not, and therefore James must be speaking of true saving faith. He is entirely mistaken. The apostle does not ascribe justification partly to works and partly to faith. Rather, he ascribes justification in the sense he intends wholly to works, in direct contrast to the kind of faith he is

discussing. There is a plain opposition in the words between works and faith as James uses justification. A dead faith, a faith without works, the faith of demons, is excluded from having any bearing on justification. Fourth, Bellarmine adds that the apostle compares this faith without works to a wealthy man who gives nothing to the poor (James 2:16) and to a body without a spirit (James 2:26). Therefore, just as the knowledge by which a rich man recognizes the needs of the poor is real and genuine, and a dead body is still a body, so faith without works is still true faith and is treated as such by James. These examples actually destroy the point they are meant to support, though the Cardinal rescues them with a little sleight of hand. Where the apostle compares this faith to the charity of a man who gives nothing to the poor, Bellarmine substitutes his knowledge of their poverty. But that knowledge may be perfectly real and accurate — and the more real and certain it is, the more false and hollow is the charity he pretends by saying "Go, be warm and well fed." That is precisely the kind of faith James is describing. And while a dead body is a true body in the sense of its matter or substance — a corpse — it is not a constituent part of a living human being. A corpse is not the same in nature or kind as the body of a living person. We assert no other difference between the faith James speaks of and justifying faith than the difference between a dead, breathless corpse and a living, animated body capable of all vital functions. It is therefore beyond all reasonable dispute — for those not intent on being argumentative — that what James denies to faith with respect to justification applies only to a dead, barren, lifeless faith of the kind typically invoked by ungodly

people to excuse themselves in their sins. The faith Paul asserts is not in view at all. Observing the current state of faith in the world today will guide us to the best understanding of this passage.

Third, they do not speak of justification in the same sense or for the same purpose. Paul treats exclusively of our absolute justification before God — the justification of our persons, our acceptance with Him, and the granting of a right to the heavenly inheritance. He declares all the causes of this: everything that contributes to it on God's side and on ours. He does not in those discussions treat of the evidence, the knowledge, the sense, the fruit, or the manifestation of justification in our consciences, in the church, or to others who profess the faith — though he addresses those things separately as they arise on other occasions. The justification he treats of is a single, once-for-all act before God that changes the standing of the person justified, and it may be evidenced in various ways to the glory of God and the comfort of true believers. James does not deal with this at all. His entire inquiry concerns the nature of the faith by which we are justified — and specifically the only way by which it can be shown to be genuine and of the right kind, the kind a person may safely trust. Therefore James treats of justification only as to its evidence and demonstration. He had no occasion to treat of it in any other way. This is evident from both of the examples he uses to support his point. The first is Abraham, in James 2:21-23. James says that in the manner and way in which he shows Abraham to have been justified by works, the Scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. If his intention were to prove that we are justified before God by works rather than by faith, because Abraham was so, the evidence he cites directly contradicts what he

is trying to prove — and it is cited by Paul to demonstrate precisely the opposite: that Abraham was justified by faith without works, as the words plainly state. No one can explain how the truth of the proposition "Abraham was justified by works" — understood as absolute justification before God — was what fulfilled the Scripture "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness," especially given the opposition everywhere made between faith and works in this matter. Moreover, James asserts that Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son on the altar — as do we. But we simply ask in what sense he was so justified. It was approximately thirty years after it was testified of him that he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. And when righteousness was credited to him, he was justified. He could not have been twice justified in the same sense, in the same way, with the same kind of justification. How then was he justified by works when he offered his son on the altar? The only conceivable answer is that through his act of offering his son, he was evidenced and declared — before God and men — to be justified. Any other reading is beyond my comprehension, since it is beyond question and universally agreed that he was truly justified long before. He was then, as I say, justified in the sight of God in the way declared in Genesis 22:12, and he gave a striking testimony to the sincerity of his faith and trust in God, demonstrating the truth of the Scripture: "he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." In citing this testimony, James openly acknowledges that Abraham was genuinely accounted righteous — that righteousness was imputed to him and he was justified before God — long before the justification James attributes to his works (whose reasons and causes James therefore does not consider). That justi-

fication by works can only be the evidencing, proving, and manifesting of his prior justification. This also shows the nature of the faith by which we are justified, which is the apostle's main purpose to declare. In brief: the Scripture that Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness was fulfilled when he was justified by works in offering his son — and this must have occurred either by imputation of righteousness, or by an actual working of righteousness in him, or by the manifestation and evidence of his prior justification, or by some other means yet to be identified. First, that it was not by imputation at that time — that righteousness leading to life was not first credited to him then — is clear from the text, for it had been credited to him long before, and in such a way that Paul uses it to prove righteousness is credited apart from works. Second, that he was not justified by an actual working of an inward habit of righteousness in him — as if he had previously been unrighteous and was now made righteous inherently — is also clear, because he had been righteous in that sense long before and had abounded in works of righteousness to God's praise. It remains, therefore, that by the act mentioned, he was justified in the sense of evidencing and manifesting his faith and the justification that rested on it. James's other example is Rahab, of whom he asserts she was justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them away. But she received the spies by faith, as the Holy Spirit testifies in Hebrews 11:31. She therefore had true faith before they arrived — and if so, she was already truly justified, since for anyone to be a true believer and yet not be justified destroys the foundation of the gospel. It was in this condition that she received the messengers and made a full declaration of her faith to them (Joshua 2:10-11). After her believing and the jus-

tification that followed, and after the confession of her faith she had made, she risked her life by hiding them and sending them away. By this she proved the sincerity of her faith and confession, and it is in that sense alone that she is said to be justified by works — and it is in no other sense that the apostle James speaks of justification in this passage, which he also mentions only incidentally.

Fourth, regarding the works mentioned by both apostles: they have the same works in mind, and there is no disagreement between them on this point at all. James means by works the duties of obedience to God according to the law, as is evident from the entire first part of the chapter, which occasions the discussion of faith and works. Paul means the same, as we have shown earlier. And as for the necessity of works in all believers — as evidence of their faith and justification as well as for other purposes — this is pressed no less by the one apostle than the other, as has been made clear.

With these general points established, we may observe some particulars from James's discussion that make sufficiently clear there is no contradiction between it and what Paul declares about justification by faith and the imputation of righteousness apart from works — and no contradiction with the doctrine we have learned from Paul and set out here. First, James makes no combination or joining of faith and works in justification, but sets them in opposition, affirming one and rejecting the other in relation to justification. Second, he makes no distinction between a first and second justification, or between the beginning and continuation of justification — he speaks of one justification only, which is our first personal justification before God. No other justification concerns us in this matter. Third, he attributes this justification entirely to

works in direct contrast to faith — as far as the sense of justification he intends and the kind of faith he is discussing are concerned. Therefore, fourth, he does not at all raise or resolve the question of how a sinner is justified before God, but rather how those who profess the gospel can prove and demonstrate that they are indeed justified — and that they are not deceiving themselves by trusting to a lifeless and fruitless faith. All of this will be further confirmed in a brief examination of the passage itself, with which I will bring this discussion to a close.

From the beginning of the chapter through verse 13, James rebukes those to whom he writes for many sins committed against the law — the rule of their sin and obedience — or at minimum warns them of these sins. Having shown the danger they were in because of them, he identifies the root and main cause of the problem in verse 14: nothing other than a foolish and self-deceiving presumption that the faith required by the gospel amounted to mere intellectual assent to its teaching, which they imagined freed them from all obligation to moral obedience or good works, so that they could live in whatever sins their desires inclined them to without any danger to their eternal standing (James 4:1-4; 5:1-5). The condition of such people — which is the entire issue he is addressing and which governs the interpretation of everything he goes on to argue — is stated in verse 14: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but has no works? Can that faith save him?" Suppose any one of those guilty of the sins he charged them with in the preceding verses were to say or boast that he has faith — that he professes the gospel, that he has left Judaism or paganism and embraced the Christian faith — and therefore, although he has no good works and lives in sin, he is accepted by God and will

be saved. Will this faith actually save him? That is the question being raised: since the gospel plainly says that the one who believes will be saved, the question is whether a faith that is compatible with and even invoked to excuse sinful indulgence and neglect of obedience is the faith to which the promise of life and salvation is attached. From this the inquiry follows: how can anyone — and specifically anyone who claims to have faith — prove and demonstrate that he has the faith that will secure his salvation? The apostle denies that a faith consistent with the absence of works is such a faith, and that anyone can demonstrate he has true faith by any means other than works of obedience. Proving this is the entire purpose of everything he goes on to say. Not once does he set before the reader the means and causes of a convicted sinner's justification before God — he had no occasion to do so. Therefore his words are openly distorted when they are applied to any such intention.

That the faith James has in mind and describes is entirely useless for the end it is claimed to achieve — namely, salvation — he proves by an example and by comparing it to a similar kind of love or charity in James 2:15-16: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" This love or charity is not the gospel grace required of us by that name. For whoever behaves this way toward the poor does not have the love of God dwelling in him (1 John 3:17). Whatever name it bears, whatever it claims to be, whatever it is professed or accepted as — it is not love and has none of love's effects. It is useless and worthless. From this the apostle concludes in verse 17: "Even so faith, if it has no

works, is dead, being by itself." This was precisely what he undertook to prove — not that we are not justified by faith alone without works before God, but that faith which stands alone without works is dead, useless, and worthless.

Having given this first argument for the conclusion he set out to prove in general terms, he restates the question and presents it in a more concrete form to give it fuller demonstration in verse 18: "But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" It is unmistakably clear that the apostle is here again raising his main question, but now on the assumption of the dead and useless faith he had already established. The remaining inquiry is simply how true faith — faith of the right gospel kind — may be shown, evidenced, or demonstrated, so that the folly of trusting in any other kind of faith becomes apparent. The answer: demonstrate your faith to be genuine by the only means available, which is works. Therefore, although he says "you have faith" — meaning you profess and boast of having the faith by which you may be saved — and "I have works," he does not say "show me your faith by your works, and I will show you my works by my faith," which the strict antithesis would require. Instead he says "I will show you my faith by my works," because the entire question was about demonstrating faith, not demonstrating works.

He further proves that this faith — the faith that cannot be evidenced by works, that bears no fruit, and that consists only in bare intellectual assent to divine revelation — is not the faith that justifies or will save us, by pointing out that it is no different from what the demons themselves have. No one can hope to be saved by something shared with demons, in which they even excel: "You be-

lieve that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). Belief in one God is not the whole of what the demons believe, but is singled out as the foundational truth, assent to which necessarily carries assent to all divine revelation. This is his second argument proving that an empty, barren faith is dead and useless.

Having given his second confirmation of his main assertion, James restates it in the form and terms that set up its final and definitive proof: "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:20). We should observe three things in these words. First, the person he is addressing — whose conviction he is seeking — he calls a foolish fellow. Not in the general sense in which every person is altogether vain, but as someone who is specifically puffed up in his own carnal thinking: a person who has entertained the foolish delusion that he can be saved by an empty profession of the gospel without any fruit of obedience. Second, his purpose with respect to this foolish man is to bring him to his senses — to convict him of the foolish and destructive error he has embraced: "Are you willing to recognize...?" Third, the one and only thing he sets out to convince him of is that faith without works is useless — that is, the faith which is without works, which is barren and fruitless, is dead and worthless. This is all, and the only thing, he undertakes to prove by the arguments and examples that follow — and they prove nothing more. To force his words into any other purpose, when they are all perfectly suited to what he states as his sole aim, is to do violence to them.

He proves this, therefore, by examining the faith of Abraham in James 2:21: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" Several observations are needed to clarify the apostle's meaning. First, it is certain that Abraham was justified many years before the act here cited was performed. Long before it, the testimony was given of him: "he believed in the Lord; and He credited it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). The imputation of righteousness upon believing is the whole of the justification we are discussing and contending for. Second, it is certain that in the account of the story James refers to here, not a single word is said about Abraham being justified before God by that act or by any other work. Third, it is plain and clear that in the passage James cites, Abraham was declared to be justified — by an open attestation to the genuineness and sincerity of his faith and fear of God, attested in the sight of God Himself, which God condescends to express using human terms: "Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (Genesis 22:12). That this is the justification the apostle intends cannot be denied except by someone determined to argue. It was the manifestation and declaration of the truth and sincerity of the faith by which he had been justified before God. And by this the apostle directly and unmistakably proves exactly what he cited this example to prove — namely, that faith without works is dead. Fourth, it is no less clear that the apostle has said nothing up to this point about our justification before God and the means by which it is obtained. It is therefore absurd to imagine he is introducing that subject here in order to prove what he had previously asserted — since it does not prove that at all. Fifth, the safest rule for interpreting the apostle's meaning — next

to the scope and purpose of his present discussion, which he makes plain through his repeated statement of it — is the scope of the actual events, their circumstances, and what he draws his proof from. And these are plainly the following and nothing else. Abraham had long been a justified believer — about thirty years separated the testimony given in Genesis 15 from the story of the sacrifice of his son in Genesis 22. Throughout all that time he walked with God and lived in a course of holy, fruitful obedience. Yet it pleased God, after many other tests, to subject his faith to a new one — his greatest and final trial. It is God's way in the covenant of grace to test the faith of believers in ways He sees fit. By this He shows how precious faith is — the testing of faith showing it to be more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7) — and He raises glory to Himself, which it is the very nature of faith to give Him (Romans 4:20). This is the state of the case as the apostle presents it: how it may be tested whether the faith a person professes is genuine, precious, more precious than gold — truly of the kind to which the gospel promise of salvation is attached. Second, this test came through works — through one significant act of obedience prescribed to Abraham for that very purpose. For Abraham was to serve as a pattern for all who would believe after him. God provided a singular way to test his faith: by an act of obedience that was so far from being required by the moral law that it seemed contrary to it. If Abraham is held up as a pattern of justification by works before God, it must be by means of works that God has not required in the moral law — works that actually seem contrary to it. Nor can anyone be encouraged to expect justification by works by being told that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up his only son to God, since it is easy to reply that no such work

was ever performed by anyone else, nor was any such work ever required of anyone else. Third, when Abraham complied with God's command given to him as a test, God Himself declared the sincerity of his faith and his justification on that basis, or His gracious acceptance of him. This is the entire purpose of the passage the apostle applies to his argument, and it contains the whole of what he needed to prove — nothing more. The passage clearly concedes that we are not justified by our works before God, since the example James uses is of a work performed by an already-justified believer approximately thirty years after he had been absolutely justified before God. But this is what the passage clearly proves: that faith without works is dead. For justifying faith — as is evident in Abraham's case — is precisely the faith, and only that faith, which produces works of obedience. It is on the basis of such faith alone that a person is evidenced, declared, and pronounced to be justified and accepted by God. Abraham was not first justified then. He was not said to be justified then. He was declared to be justified — and that by and through his works. This is the whole of what the apostle intends to prove.

There is therefore not even the appearance of the slightest contradiction between James and Paul, who explicitly asserts that Abraham was not justified before God by works. James only declares that by the works he performed after he was already justified, he was manifested and declared to be so. That this was the whole of his purpose, he makes clear in the next verses, where he states what he has proved by this example in James 2:22: "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected." He presses two things as proved for the conviction of the person he is addressing. First, that true faith will op-

erate through works — as Abraham's did: it was active in obedience. Second, that it was made perfect by works — that is, evidenced to be so. "Made perfect" in Scripture does not refer to the internal, formal completing of something, but only to its external completion, fulfillment, or manifestation. Abraham's faith was complete in its proper effect when he was first justified; now it was shown to be so. See Matthew 5:48; Colossians 4:12; 2 Corinthians 12:9. This, says the apostle, is what I have proved by the example of Abraham — namely, that it is works of obedience alone that can show a man to be justified, or to have the faith by which he may be justified. Third, in confirmation of what he has affirmed, he adds in James 2:23: "and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God."

The apostle asserts two things here. First, that the Scripture cited was fulfilled — and it was fulfilled in the justification by works he ascribes to Abraham. But no one can explain how this Scripture was fulfilled — either in terms of the time it was originally spoken or in terms of the event itself — in any other way than that what it had long before asserted of Abraham was then evidenced to be perfectly true, through the works his faith produced. In this way that Scripture was accomplished. For otherwise — taking account of the distinctions James himself makes between faith and works, the opposition he places between them, the interpretation given to this passage by the apostle Paul, and the plain meaning of the words — nothing could be more contrary to his design than the quotation of this testimony, if he intended to prove our justification before God by works. Therefore this Scripture was not and cannot be fulfilled by Abraham's justification by works in any

other way than this: that through and upon those works he was manifested and declared to be justified. Second, James adds that Abraham was therefore called the friend of God — as in Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:7. This carries the same meaning as his being justified by works. For he was not called the friend of God merely as a justified person, but as one who had received singular privileges from God and had answered them with a holy walk before Him. His being called the friend of God was therefore God's approval of his faith and obedience — which is the justification by works the apostle asserts.

From this James draws a double conclusion (the example of Rahab being of the same nature and already addressed, I will not return to it). The first conclusion relates to his present argument in James 2:24; the second to the whole of his purpose in James 2:26. The first: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." That is: you who I intend to convince of the emptiness of the delusion that you are justified by a dead faith — a breathless corpse of faith, a mere assent to the truth of the gospel and profession of it, compatible with all kinds of ungodliness and entirely without good fruit — now you can see what kind of faith is required for justification and salvation. For Abraham was declared righteous, was declared justified, on the basis of a faith that worked through deeds — and not at all on the basis of the kind of faith you are claiming. A man is justified by works as Abraham was when he offered up his son to God: that is, what he truly was by faith long before — as Scripture testifies — was then and by that means evidenced and declared. Therefore let no one suppose that by the faith they boast of, anyone is or can be justified — since that on the basis of which Abraham was declared to be justified was precisely

a faith that evidenced itself by its fruits. The second conclusion is the great summary James has established through his entire argument — the conclusion he set out to confirm from the beginning, in James 2:26: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." A breathless corpse and an inactive faith are alike in this: neither is capable of any of the purposes of natural or spiritual life. This was what the apostle aimed from the beginning to drive home to empty and fruitless professors — and he has provided sufficient evidence and argument to accomplish it.

End.

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