

A SERMON ON THE SALVATION OF MANKIND BY ONLY CHRIST OUR SAVIOR FROM SIN AND DEATH EVERLASTING

Part I

Because all men are sinners and offenders against God, and breakers of His law and commandments, no one can by his own acts, works, and deeds, regardless of how good they are, be justified and made righteous before God. Everyone must seek another righteousness or justification to be received at God's own hands, that is to say, the remission, pardon, and forgiveness of his sins and trespasses. And this justification or righteousness, which we so receive by God's mercy and Christ's merits, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted, and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.

To better understand justification we must remember the great mercy of God; how that, when all the world was wrapped in sin by breaking of the law, God sent his only Son our Savior Christ into this world to fulfill the law for us, and by shedding of His most precious blood to make a sacrifice and satisfaction or (as it may be called) amends to His Father for our sins, to assuage His wrath and indignation conceived against us for the same. Infants, being baptized and dying in their infancy, are by this sacrifice washed from their sins, brought to God's favor, and made His children and inheritors of His kingdom of heaven. And all who commit sin after their baptism, when they turn again to God in sincerity, are likewise washed by this sacrifice from their sins so that there remains no spot of sin to be imputed to their damnation. This is that justification or righteousness of which St. Paul speaks when he says that no man is justified by the works of the law, but freely by faith in Jesus Christ, saying further, "We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."¹ Although this justification is free to us, it does not come so freely that no ransom is paid at all.

But this line of reasoning brings consternation. If a ransom is paid for our redemption, then it is not given to us freely. A prisoner who pays his ransom is not let go freely, for what does going freely mean unless to be set at liberty without payment of ransom? This difficulty is satisfied by the great wisdom of God in the mystery of our redemption, in that He has so tempered His justice and mercy together that He would neither by His justice condemn us unto the everlasting captivity of the devil and his prison of hell, remediless forever without mercy, nor by His mercy deliver us clearly without justice or payment of a just ransom, but with His endless mercy He joined His most upright and equal justice. He showed us His great mercy in delivering us from our former captivity without requiring us to pay any ransom or make any amends; indeed, it was impossible for us to do so. And because we could not pay the price, He provided a ransom for us, the most precious body and blood of His own most dear and best beloved Son Jesus Christ; who, besides His ransom, fulfilled the law for us perfectly. And so the justice of God and

¹ Galatians 2:16

His mercy embraced and fulfilled the mystery of our redemption. In Romans 3, St. Paul speaks of this justice and mercy of God knit together:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.²

He also speaks of it in Romans 10: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth,”³ and in Romans 8:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.⁴

In these Scriptures, the Apostle covers three things that must go together in our justification: upon God’s part, His great mercy and grace; upon Christ’s part, justice, that is, the satisfaction of God’s justice, or the price of our redemption by the offering of His body and shedding of his blood with fulfilling of the law perfectly and thoroughly; and upon our part, true and lively faith in the merits of Jesus Christ; which yet is not ours but by God’s working in us. So that our justification involves not only God’s mercy and grace, but also his justice, which the Apostle calls the justice of God; and it consists in paying our ransom and fulfilling of the law. Thus the grace of God does not shut out the justice of God in our justification, but only shuts out the justice of man, or more specifically, the justice of our works as merits deserving our justification.

St. Paul declares here nothing upon the behalf of man concerning his justification, but only a true and lively faith; which nevertheless is the gift of God, and not man’s only work without God. That faith, however, does not shut out repentance, hope, love, dread, and the fear of God, which all accompany faith in everyone who is justified. These do not, however, accomplish justification. Similarly, that faith also does not shut out the justice of our good works, which are our duty towards God, commanded in Holy Scripture all the days of our life; but it excludes them so that we may not do them to the intent of being made good by doing them. For all the good works that we can do are imperfect, and therefore do not merit our justification. Rather, our justification comes freely, by the mere mercy of God. This mercy is so great and free mercy that even though no one in the whole world was able to pay even a part of the ransom, and none of us deserved to be ransomed, our heavenly Father was pleased to prepare for us the most precious jewels of Christ’s body and blood, by which our ransom might be fully paid, the

² Romans 3:23–26

³ Romans 10:4

⁴ Romans 8:3–4

law fulfilled, and His justice fully satisfied. As a result, Christ is now the righteousness of everyone who truly believes in Him. He paid their ransom by His death. He fulfilled for them the law in His life. Now in Him and by Him every true Christian may be called a fulfiller of the law. Whatever we lacked in our infirmity, Christ's justice has supplied.