

THE DIFFERENT STEPS IN JUSTIFICATION

EVEN BEFORE Christ came into the world, God had dealings to a certain extent with some of the human race. He dealt with Adam, telling him of the penalty for sin and promising that the Seed of the woman should some day bruise the serpent's head. He dealt also with Enoch, with Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others, centuries before Jesus was born. God did not, however, deal with these men in the particular and special sense in which He has dealt with the Gospel Church, who are privileged to be called "the sons of God." – John 1:12.

The Scriptures state that Abraham believed God, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness. (Gen. 15:6.) God must have had some dealings with Abraham [R5207 : page 92] before he believed or there would have been *nothing for Abraham to believe*. Evidently God had had some communication with him before faith and trust could have brought him into even a *tacitly* justified condition.

Abraham sought to be as nearly perfect in conduct as possible, and to do those things which are pleasing to God. After he had manifested his desire to be obedient, God said, If you will prove your faith by leaving your native land and risking the loss of your present earthly comforts and of the home of your childhood, I will make a Covenant with you. Abraham believed God.

As soon as opportunity was afforded, Abraham left Chaldea and journeyed to Haran. Later, God made him certain promises on condition that he would go into the land of Canaan. After he had entered Canaan, God said, "All the land which thou canst see will I give unto thee and to thy seed after thee." (Gen. 13:15.) Abraham was called "The Friend of God." (James 2:23.) St. Paul tells us that

God preached the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." – Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:3.

FAITH IN GOD THE ESSENCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

So we see that there was a kind of dealing with the Ancient Worthies before Christ came – before there was any *actual* justification to *life*. None could be thus justified until a life had been given as a corresponding price for Adam's forfeited life. Hence the promise of God, so far as these were concerned, was only a *hope*. They understood that in some way He intended to do something for their relief, but did not know how God, who had once condemned them to death, could give them everlasting life. Nevertheless, they had *faith in the promise*, and this God *counted* for righteousness; for faith in God is the essence of all righteousness. By this faith they were justified to *fellowship* with God.

When Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the Prophets manifested their faith toward God, they proved their heart-loyalty, so that long after their death He could say, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob." They believed that some day they would be raised from the dead. If there were no resurrection, God could not have spoken of them as He did; "For He is not a God of the *dead*, but of the *living*." (Luke 20:37,38.) This is the argument with which Jesus offset the teachings of the Sadducees that there will be no resurrection of the dead; but it was not given as a proof that the patriarchs were *in heaven* at the time, for Jesus distinctly tells us that at the time in which He was speaking *no man* had ever ascended into Heaven. – John 3:13.

We see, then, that Abraham had a measure of relationship with God, but not until he had manifested his faith. God had dealt with him, however, *before* this manifestation of heart-loyalty, and that dealing consisted in giving him knowledge of how to become the Friend of God.

In due time God will indicate to the members of the human family that He is willing to accept them on terms by which He will be their God and they shall be His people, but that they must prove their faith by walking before Him to the best of their ability. This is the most that God does for any one – simply to give him knowledge of the steps which he must take in order to have complete justification. He says, "My son, give Me thine heart." (Prov. 23:26.) On this principle God spoke to the Lord Jesus Christ and continues to speak to all who would come unto the Father by Him.

TENTATIVE JUSTIFICATION NOT CONSECRATION

Manifestly, things are somewhat different now from what they were in Abraham's time. Abraham did not become a *son* of God; for he lived before the opening up of the way to life, and that which God *counted* a justifying faith could not bring him redemption. Our Lord had not yet opened up that *living* way. Notwithstanding the fact that the redemption had not taken place, Abraham had God's promise that *in due time* he and his Seed should bless the world.

The Message that *now* goes forth is that God is willing to receive again those who were once His sons, but who lost their sonship through the disobedience of Adam. Therefore, *the very knowledge* of God's Plan is *an offer of salvation* to whosoever may hear of that Plan. God says, in substance, If you wish to become My son, this is the way. "My son, give Me thine heart." After you have made a full consecration, I will reveal to you the deep things of My Word.

We should make a clear distinction between what God *has done* and what He *intends to do*. God considered Abraham and all the faithful of past ages as the *servant* class. (Heb. 3:5.) But with the faithful of the Gospel Age it is different. St. John tells us that "To as many as received Him, to them gave He privilege to become the sons of God." (John 1:12.) Only since Pentecost has opportunity been given for any to become sons. Hence, before that time none could

become "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" – heirs of the Abrahamic Promise. – Rom. 8:17.

To those who have come into Christ since Pentecost the assurance is given that they shall be made joint-heirs with the Lord if they continue faithful to the *end*, that if they *suffer* with Him, they shall also be glorified together with Him. (Rom. 8:17.) The only ones who have full relationship with God are the consecrated, who have received the full life-justification possessed by none others in the world.

Just as God dealt in the past with those who dealt with Him, and as He gave them encouragement and directed them by His Voice, so now He gives those who deal with Him particular information respecting His will through the Son and through faith in the blood of our Lord Jesus. Whoever thus starts out *now* is beginning to come into a justified condition; and every step of progress that he takes brings him nearer to consecration.

FROM KNOWLEDGE TO TENTATIVE JUSTIFICATION

The first step leading to justification is the gaining of a little knowledge; for *no man can be justified in ignorance*. This *knowledge* leads to a step of *faith*. With each advance in faith based upon that knowledge comes greater opportunity for increase of knowledge and faith. Thus we learn to walk by faith rather than by sight.

All of these steps, however, lead up to a full and perfect justification. First we come to a faith in God, believing [R5207 : page 93] that there is a Great Creator, that we are His creatures, and that He has merciful intentions toward us. Then other steps lead us to see that God has made arrangements for receiving us back into fellowship with Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ and His work of grace. We see that "Christ died for our sins according to the

Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3.) This is a step of greater knowledge and leads to another step of *obedience*. Thus we draw nearer to God. As St. James says, "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." (James 4:8.) Each step enables us to see that we are getting nearer to the blessing.

After seeing that the Lord Jesus has prepared the way for the forgiveness of sin, we learn that there are *certain terms* upon which *our sins* will be forgiven. This is another step of knowledge. Then we are brought to the point where the Lord tells us by His own Word and the words of the Apostles that this forgiveness is based upon faith in Him and full acceptance of His finished work, that the only way by which we may become sharers in that work is by the consecration of ourselves and all that we have to the Father, and that we take up our cross and follow Jesus. We also learn that unless we take this step we cannot reach *full* justification.

TENTATIVE JUSTIFICATION DEFINED

When one has been drawn to the Father through His Word and His providences, and has accepted the blood of Jesus Christ as his only means of salvation, he comes to the place where he must decide whether he will present himself to God or whether he will wait for the Millennial blessings of Restitution. What he will do is uncertain. He is *tentatively* (that is *temporarily*) justified for a purpose – that of considering which step he will take. He is still on the *human plane* – a natural man.

Tentative justification, then, is for the purpose of giving a standing with God, from which a believer in our Lord's Ransom-sacrifice as his only hope of salvation may ascertain whether he has that spirit of sacrifice which will lead him to full consecration. The believer is at liberty to choose which course he will take. He may offer himself in consecration or he may decide not to do so. But should he decide to wait for Restitution, he thereby proves that he has not appreciated God's offer.

The object in preaching the Gospel during this Gospel Age – or at all – is to give an opportunity to whosoever will hear to attain to the privilege of spirit nature. Whoever hears the call and neglects to take advantage of it has evidently received the grace of God in vain. He suffers the loss of whatever he might have profited by accepting the offer. If for the doing of a certain piece of work a reward is promised, the one who fails to perform the work loses the reward, the honor, the money, or whatever was promised for doing the work.

God does not intend to inflict punishment on those who decide not to make the sacrifice of their humanity. But this class cannot gain the prize offered to those who do so. Only those who *use* their opportunity to be dead with Christ shall live with Him – become participators in the glorious things that are His. Those who take this step constitute the Church at the present time.

For the others, however, we trust that they will have opportunities in the future, in the Millennial Age. Under the favorable conditions of that time we hope that they will do better than they have done in this Age. Yet our [R5208 : page 93] thought is that the person who has come to a knowledge of God's grace and has had a measure of light respecting it, but has *rejected* it, will be in a worse position than those who have never heard of it.

Nevertheless, we do not wish to discourage any one who experiences faith in Restitution, in a future life, in good works. We would not discourage any one who hopes for earthly life, Restitution blessings. We believe that there are a great many people who are living noble lives, but who have neither faith nor light regarding the high calling. They are not on that account to suffer forever, except in the sense that they will have lost the opportunity of attaining the *Kingdom blessing*.

VITALIZED JUSTIFICATION

The Lord says that one should take the step of consecration only after *counting the cost*. (Luke 14:27-33.) After one has decided to take this step, he presents himself to the Lord. If his consecration is accepted, the Lord imputes enough of His merit to make the sacrifice perfect; for nothing imperfect can be presented to Jehovah. At the very moment of his acceptance as perfect through the imputed merit of Christ, he is reckoned alive in the full sense of the word; he has received *actual* justification in a *legal* sense. His justification is said to be *vitalized*. In other words, as soon as our Lord Jesus becomes his Advocate, God is reconciled to that sinner and treats him as one actually perfect. Full *justification* means full *making right* in the sight of Jehovah.

Let us be sure that we clearly understand this important point. Justification is said to be vitalized when, by the imputation of the merit of Christ, one who has made a full consecration receives by faith *his share* of the redemptive work of Christ. Those who have received *vitalized* justification can have *no part in Restitution*. Since that which is vitalized is *made alive*, justification that is vitalized is said to be *unto life*, for one's future existence depends upon his *retaining* that justification after our Lord's merit has been imputed. Abraham's justification, on the contrary, was *not* unto life, but only to fellowship with God. Christ had not died in Abraham's day and, therefore, merit could not have been imputed to any one.

By means of the various steps by which God has led us to Himself we reach the fulness and completeness of justification. That justification is vitalized by Jesus, who imputes to us a sufficiency of His merit to cover our deficiency. At the same moment God accepts that sacrifice which has already been offered to Him through the Advocate. This acceptance is indicated by the begetting of the Holy Spirit.

The one thus covered with the imputed merit of Christ and begotten of the Holy Spirit is thenceforth a New Creature. (2 Cor. 5:17.) If he continues faithful to his consecration vow, he will ultimately be presented to the Father as a member of the Bride class. Those who fail to keep their vow will be put through severe trials, great tribulation, which will eventually prepare them for a lesser place than they would have had if they had kept their robes unspotted.

During this Gospel Age only those who have presented their bodies as living sacrifices are given the Holy Spirit. This power operates in their lives for their development as New Creatures, to bring them into harmony with God and to prepare them for membership in the Body of Christ.

SANCTIFICATION A GRADUAL PROCESS

In the early stages of the Church there were "gifts of the Spirit," necessary to the inauguration of the Church. These *gifts* of the Spirit ceased, however, as soon as the Church had been established and the New Testament had been completed. We no longer have the gift of healing, of speaking with tongues, etc., but we have something more valuable than are *gifts*. These were for the infantile [R5208 : page 94] condition of the Church. Instead, we have today the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit, which are developed and matured gradually as the result of labor.

In some characters the period of maturing fruit of good size and flavor is longer than in others. Nevertheless, as surely as we receive the Holy Spirit into good and honest hearts and are submissive to the prunings of the Great Husbandman, so surely shall we bear large, luscious fruit *in due time*. The fruits of the Spirit, the Apostle says, are manifest; that is, they can be seen in our lives. They are meekness, self-control, faith, goodness, gentleness, long-suffering, brotherly-kindness and love.

At the beginning of our existence as New Creatures the fruits of the Holy Spirit germinate within us, but these must grow to maturity. We must bear fruit. The Lord says, "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away" – cuts it off – "and every branch that beareth fruit, He pruneth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:2.) There is more or less pain in the prunings and testings of loyalty and obedience, but every manifestation of obedience helps to prepare us for membership in the Bride Class.

The work of actual justification and of actual sanctification and growth in grace is gradual. Completeness will be attained only in the First Resurrection, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." (I Cor. 15:50.) Those who will constitute the First Resurrection are the blessed ones – the holy ones, who have cultivated the fruits and graces of the Spirit. As St. Peter tells us, "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren [idle] nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 1:5-8.

GETHSEMANE!

Gethsemane! The Garden's lonely shade the world's
Redeemer sought that night. He went alone to pray
For grace and strength to drink the last drop in His Cup.
Great souls crave solitude in sorrow's hour! Not e'en
His well-beloved three might share the sacredness
Of that deep woe, – He bade them *tarry*, while He went
A little farther on, and fell upon His face.

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Gethsemane! A solitary place, apart,

No *mortal* feet may press in sympathy that dark,
Encrimsoned earth. No human hand the fevered brow
May cool, no other heart can share its agony,
No voice but God's may break the solemn silence there, –
A place where every soul must drink *alone* the Cup
The Father's hand hath poured, and given to His child.
Gethsemane! A desert place, alone, apart?
Ah, no! The anguished heart doth never cry in vain
To Him who marks the smallest sparrow when it falls,
For He shall send His Angel with the message, "Fear
Thou not, for I am with thee! I will *ne'er forsake*,
Nor let thee fail! My right hand shall uphold, My love,
My power shall *keep thee, even to the bitter end!*"

GERTRUDE W. SEIBERT.

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