

The Ordo Salutis

OR, RELATION IN THE ORDER OF NATURE OF HOLY CHARACTER AND DIVINE FAVOR

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NATURAL religion in all its forms presupposes holy character and conduct as the essential antecedent condition of God's favor. Christianity in all its genuine forms presupposed the favor of God as the essential antecedent condition of holy character and conduct.

We propose to discuss the following specific problem, involving the general principle just stated. In the application of redemption to the individual sinner, which, in the order of nature, precedes and conditions the other-justification or regeneration?

I. All forms of Christianity necessarily recognize the fact that in general the propitiatory work of Christ precedes and conditions our salvation.

The merits of Christ, on the ground of which God pardons our sins and effectively delivers us from their pollution and power, are equally presupposed in sanctification and in justification. All Christians alike admit in general, that as the moral and spiritual condition of the creature depends necessarily upon the communion of the Spirit of God, and this communion depends upon his favor, the favor of God, the absence of judicial condemnation, and hence forgiveness of sins, must ideally precede spiritual quickening in all its stages. The execution of penalty and the communication of gracious influences cannot proceed at the same time with respect to the same persons; hence it follows that a state of condemnation must cease before a state of grace can be instituted.

Nevertheless the Mediæval and the Protestant forms of the doctrine of redemption appear alike, although in very different degrees, to condition the complete forgiveness of sins and the remission of condemnation upon a work of grace antecedently wrought out in the subject. This, in the Mediæval system, is regarded as a meritorious use of prevenient grace, leading to the desert of more grace, and a divine judgment of legal standing conformed to and grounded upon the degree of actual subjective righteousness attained at any moment by the subject. In the theology of the Reformed and Lutheran churches, justification, or God's sentence pronouncing the sinner released from condemnation, and entitled to the rewards promised to the obedient, is conditioned upon self-appropriating faith; and such faith is of course consequent only to spiritual regeneration.

The *ordo salutis*, therefore, according to the Catholic system, is, (1) Baptism; (2) The cleansing away of pollution of sin; (3) The infusion of gracious habits; (4) The exercise of

these gracious habits in the doing of good works, which merit the favor of God, increase of grace, and finally eternal life; (5) The sacrament of penance in this life, and after death purgatory, by the pains of which the penalties incurred by our sins and the imperfections of our obedience are liquidated, and our guilt expiated, and the legal accounts of our souls finally adjusted.

The order observed in the application of redemption in the theology of the Reformers is, (1) Regeneration; (2) Faith; (3) Justification. The regeneration and faith upon which justification is conditioned begin in no sense causes, either meritorious or efficient, of the remission of sins and imputation of righteousness which ensue, but only conditions *sine qua non*, to which God has been graciously pleased to promise that remission and that imputation, and upon which he has been sovereignly pleased to make them depend.

II. The problem as it stands according to the Mediæval and Romish system.

In fact, according to the Mediæval system, this problem, in the terms of its statement, can have no existence, since they regard justification as a real subjective change of moral character, and since they hold that full remission of the penalty of sin and complete acceptance into divine favor are the result of subsequent penitential expiations and meritorious acts of obedience.

1. They define justification as “not remission of sin merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of grace, and of the gifts whereby man of unjust becomes just, and of an enemy a friend.” “Of this justification, (1) The *final cause* is the glory of God and of Jesus Christ, and eternal life; (2) The *efficient cause* is a merciful God; (3) The *meritorious cause* is his most-beloved and only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when we were enemies, merited justification for us by his most holy passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father; (4) The *instrumental cause* is baptism; (5) The *formal cause* is the righteousness of God – not that whereby he himself is just, but that whereby he maketh us just; that, to wit, with which we, being endowed by him, are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, and according to each one’s proper disposition and co-operation. For although no one can be just but he to whom the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ are communicated, yet this is done in the said justification of the impious, when by the merit of that same most holy passion the charity of God is poured forth by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those that are justified, and is inherent therein; whence man, through Jesus Christ, in whom he is grafted, receives in said justification, together with the remission of sins, all those gifts infused at once – faith, hope, and charity.” (Conc. Trent., Sess. 6, ch. 7.)

Hence justification, (1) Necessarily presupposes the satisfaction rendered by Christ for human guilt; (2) It presupposes the merit of Christ’s obedience and suffering meriting for his people grace and all things necessary for salvation; (3) Its essential nature is (a) the cleansing from pollution, (b) the infusion of grace; (4) It exists in various degrees; (5) Its reception depends upon and its

degrees vary with each one's own proper disposition and co-operation.

2. The work of Christ is the necessary presupposition of justification in the Mediæval and Catholic view of it, as well as in that of Protestant. In consequence of Adam's sin, the whole human race is held under a sentence of forfeiture and of condemnation before God. Thomas Aquinas ("Summa Theologia," Pars III., Qu. 48, Arts. i.-iv.; and Qu. 47, Art. 23) distinguished, in the bearing of Christ's work upon the just and holy God, between its value as satisfaction and its value as merit: (1) As satisfaction, it expiates the guilt of sin and atones for sin as a wrong done the infinite God; (2) As merit, it deserves the favor and gracious help of God in behalf of those for whom it was wrought out. In both elements it is necessarily presupposed by God as the judicial ground of all his gracious dealings with the human race, and with each individual thereof. As satisfaction it removes the sentence pronounced against the sinner which would otherwise necessitate the expression of wrath, and prevent the exercise of grace. As merit it deserves the communication of initial grace to each designated beneficiary, which is effected in baptism, whereby the soul is cleansed from sin and habits of grace are infused; and, further, it deserves the co-operation of additional grace with the obedient will rightly using prevenient grace; and it is the ultimate and absolute meritorious basis upon which the good works of believers secondarily merit increase of grace ultimately eternal life. Aquinas himself affirms that the satisfaction and merit of Christ necessarily antecede and constitute the foundation of any merit subsequently acquired by the believer. Hence that which is ultimately founded upon grace is all of grace, and *si gratia consideratur secundum rationem gratuiti doni, omne meritum repugnat gratia* (Qu. 113, Art.5); and hence absolutely forgiveness of sins precedes and conditions infusion of grace. And yet, with palpable inconsistency, Thomas, and after him the who Romish Church, actually reverse this fundamental order when they proceed to elucidate the actual realization of redemption by the individual believer (Qu. 113, Arts. 2-8): "Therefore the remission of sins cannot be rationally believed unless there be present (first) infusion of grace." "In justification (in the Romish sense) therefore four points are involved: (a) The infusion of grace; (b) The movement of the free will toward God through the awakening of faith; (c) The movement of the free will against sin; (d) *The remission of guilt as the completion of justification.*" (Ritschl., "Hist. Ch. Doc. of Reconciliation," p. 79.)

3. In the actual realization of justification by the individual, according to the Romish scheme, a distinction must be carefully observed between (a) that which in the case of an adult sinner prepares for it, (b) the realization of justification in the first instance, and (c) its subsequent progressive realization in the advance of the gracious soul toward perfection; (d) that which is necessary for the restoration to grace of the baptized Christian after backsliding into sin.

(i) The preparation of the adult sinner for justification proceeds from the prevenient grace of God, without any merit on the part of the subject. This grace conceiving faith through hearing, brings him (a) to know himself to be a sinner and to apprehend the divine justice, and (b) to consider the mercy of God, and to trust that God will be merciful to him for Christ's sakes; and

hence (c) disposes him to co-operate with that grace which inclines him to love God, and moves him to that detestation of sin and penitence which must be experienced before baptism, and finally (d) leads him to determine to receive baptism and to lead a new life. (Con. Trent., Sess. 6, chaps. 5 and 6.)

(2) The justification of the sinner according to the Romish system, as above shown, is the infusion of gracious habits, the pollution of sin having been washed away by the power of God, on account of the merits of Christ, through the instrumentality of baptism, which operates its effects by an effective energy made inherent in it by the institution of God. After this, inherent in it by the institution of God. After this, inherent sin being removed, remission of guilt follows necessarily as its immediate effect. Guilt is the relation which sin sustains to the justice of God. The thing being removed, the relation ceases *ipso facto*. (Bellarmin, “De Amissione gratia et statu peccati.”)

(3) Having been thus justified and made a friend of God, he advances from virtue to virtue, and is renewed from day to day, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith co-operating with good works, which truly merit and receive as a just reward increase of grace, and more and more perfect justification. His *first* justification was for Christ’s sake, without any co-operation of his own merit, but by consent of his own will. His continued and increasing justification is for Christ’s sake, through and in proportion to his own merit, which deserves increase of grace and acceptance in proportion (a) to his personal holiness and (b) to his obedience to ecclesiastical rules. (Conc. Trent., Sess. 6, chap. 10, and can. 32.)

(4) In the case of those who, having been justified, have sinned, the grace lost is restored, for the merits of Christ, through the sacrament of penance, which is provided as a second plank to rescue those who by sin have shipwrecked grace. the penance includes (a) sorrow for sin; (b) confession of all known sins – at least the desire to do so – to a priest having jurisdiction; (c) sacerdotal absolution; (d) satisfaction by alms, fasts, prayers, etc., and finally by purgatorial fires – which all avail for the avenging and punishing of past sins, as well as for the discipleship of the new life, and are meritorious satisfactions to divine justice, canceling the *temporal* punishments involved in the guilt of the sins for which they are undergone, the *eternal* punishment whereof having been freely and at once remitted, either by the sacrament itself, or by the honest desire for it. (Conc. Trent., Sess. 6, chaps. 14 and 16, and can. 30, Sess. 14, chaps 1-9.)

This system, involving the logical contradiction already pointed out, we acknowledge to be Christian (generically), because it builds ultimately upon the satisfaction and merits of Christ, which alone it regards as absolute.

But we unhesitatingly pronounce it at the same time to be anti-Christian – *i.e.*, a system which substitutes that which is not Christ in his place and stead, inasmuch as it, (1) After building upon, overlays out of sight the true foundation with human merits and penances, without authority,

destitute of all meritorious desert. (2) Because it interposes between the soul of the repentant sinner and Christ many false mediators, as Mary, the saints, and priests. (3) Inasmuch as it teaches that divine grace operates *magically*, through sacraments, *ex opere operato*; and not, as is the fact, *ethically* through the truth revealed in the inspired Word, apprehended through spiritual through spiritual illumination, and received by faith, and loved and obeyed in the heart and life.

III. The problem considered in the form it has assumed in the Reformation Theology.

I. Observe the distinctive principle of the Theology of the Reformers.

(1) The movement of Luther and Calvin, and even of Zwingli, was one primarily of inward practical personal religious experience, and not of systematic theological thinking. The phrase “justification by faith,” therefore, in the first instance expressed a religious conviction corresponding to a felt religious necessity of baptized Christian men, already within the church and diligently serving God, who had been brought to estimate their own religious works at their true value – as imperfect, and utterly inadequate. The holiness of God condemns as worthy of reprobation the least imperfection. The whole heart and all the works of the most earnest Christian are imperfect, and worthy of condemnation. There is consequently no ground of confidence for a sinner, no matter what be the character or stage of his religious experience, but the righteousness of Christ, imputed by God and appropriated by faith. (Ritschl., “Hist. Ch. Doc. Reconciliation,” chap. iv.)

(2) In connection with this personal experience of faith appropriating the righteousness of Christ, the moral and Christian sense of the Reformers was outraged by the then prevalent abuses of papal indulgences – a corollary of the doctrine of penance, which we have shown above to be an essential element in the Mediæval and Romish doctrine of justification. The horrible immoralities inseparable from the system enabled the Reformers to estimate more adequately its essentially irreligious character. The fact that all these ecclesiastical penances are inadequate, and therefore ineffectual, led them to see more clearly that they are unauthorized, and unnecessary because anticipated by the perfect work of Christ.

Hence, from this practical ground, there was subsequently elaborated the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith, which was afterwards adjusted into its systematic relations with the scriptural teaching as to the satisfaction of Christ, Predestination, Vocation, Faith, Adoption, and Sanctification by the great systematic divines of the seventeenth century. The two principles which give character to Protestant soteriology, and distinguish it generically from Romish soteriology on the one hand, and from that of the Socinians and Rationalists on the other, are:

(1) The clear distinction emphasized between the change of relation to the law, signaled by the word justification; and the real subjective change of personal character, signaled by the words regeneration and sanctification. With the Protestants, justification is a forensic act of God,

declaring that the law as a covenant of life is satisfied, and that the subject is no longer subject to its penalty, but entitled henceforth to the rewards conditioned upon obedience. Regeneration, on the other hand, is a subjective change in the moral character of the subject, the gracious commencement of his complete restoration to the moral image of God, effected by the Holy Spirit in progressive sanctification.

(2) The second characteristic mark of Protestant soteriology is the principle that the change of relation to the law signaled by the term justification, involving remission of penalty and restoration to favor, necessarily precedes and renders possible the real moral change of character signaled by the terms regeneration and sanctification. The continuance of judicial condemnation excludes the exercise of grace in the heart. Remission of punishment must be preceded by remission of guilt, and must itself precede the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Hence it must be entirely unconditioned upon any legal standing, or moral or gracious condition of the subject. We are pardoned in order that we may be good, never made good in order that we may be pardoned. We are freely made co-heirs with Christ in order that we may become willing co-workers with him, but we are never made co-workers in order that we may become co-heirs.

These principles are of the very essence of Protestant soteriology. To modify, and much more, of course, to ignore or to deny them, destroys absolutely the thing known as Protestantism, and ought to incur the forfeiture of all recognized right to wear the name.

2. The application of redemption to the individual beneficiary is variously conceived of by Arminian and Calvinistic Protestants.

(1) According to Arminians, Christ satisfied divine justice in behalf of all men, the fallen race in mass, so as to place all individuals whatsoever in a salvable state, and to impetrate sufficient grace, forgiveness of sins, renewal of nature, and the adoption of sons and all the means thereto for all men, subject to the use which each man makes of the "gracious ability" thus redemptively secured for him. The order, therefore, stands thus: (a) The satisfaction and merit of Christ; (b) Sufficient grace conferred upon all for Christ's sake, and endowing each man, at least at some point of his life, with "gracious ability;" (c) The voluntary use of the gracious ability thus secured issuing in (d) regeneration, and hence (e) in faith, and hence in (f) justification and sanctification.

(2) According to Calvinists, Christ obeyed and suffered in the stead of, and in behalf of his elect, according to the terms of a covenant engagement formed in eternity between his Father and himself. He impetrated for his people individually complete salvation and all the means thereof, to be applied to them severally at such times and under such providential and gracious conditions as were determined in the covenant.

Hence the application of redemption to each beneficiary proceeds on the presupposition of a merit and right previously impetrated by Christ and conceded by the Father. Every element of

God's gracious dealings with the elect, from their birth to their glorification, is exercised toward them *in* Christ as their head, is *on account of* Christ as the one procuring it by his merit, and *through* Christ as the one efficaciously applying it. Hence the application of redemption is the designed end and effect of the impetration of it by Christ.

The parts of the application are two: (a) Union with Christ, and (b) communion in the benefits secured by his obedience and suffering.

This "union" is effected by the Holy Ghost in effectual calling. Of this "calling" the parts are two: (a) The offering of Christ to the sinner, *externally* by the Gospel, and internally by the illumination of the Holy Ghost; (b) The reception of Christ, which on our part is both passive and active. The *passive* reception is that whereby a spiritual principle is ingenerated into the human will, whence issues the *active* reception, which is an act of faith with which repentance is always conjoined.

The "communion" of benefits which results from this union involves (a) a change of state or relation, called justification; and (b) a change of subjective moral character, commenced in regeneration and completed through sanctification.

Justification is by all Calvinists defined a gracious sentence pronounced by God, whereby he pardoneth the sins of the believer and receives him as righteous in his sight only for the sake of the righteousness of Christ imputed to him as a believer. ("Medulla Amesii," chap. 26, De Vocatione.)

3. Hence the apparent circle in the reasoning involved in the evangelical or Protestant soteriology, and the interest thence arising in the problem proposed in this article.

(1) Christ satisfies divine justice and merits grace and salvation for his elect by his sufferings on the cross.

(2) In consideration of this meritorious work of Christ, and in execution of the grace therein impetrated, God deals with the elect sinner from his birth in a method of forbearance and special providential discipline, and at the predetermined time he regenerates him as still a sinner for Christ's sake antecedent to faith.

(3) In consideration of the same meritorious work of Christ and the grace thereby impetrated, God graciously declares the relation of the now regenerated believer to the law to be changed, and the righteousness of Christ to be credited to him, for the sake of Christ, now apprehended by faith.

Thus it follows that the satisfaction and merit of Christ are the antecedent cause of regeneration; and yet, nevertheless, the participation of the believer in the satisfaction and merit of

Christ (*i.e.*, his justification) is conditioned upon his faith, which in turn is conditioned upon his regeneration. He must have part in Christ so far forth as to be regenerated in order to have part in him so far forth as to be justified.

This question is obviously one as to order, not of time, but of cause and effect. All admit, (1) That the satisfaction and merit of Christ are the necessary precondition of regeneration and faith as directly as of justification; (2) That regeneration and justification are both gracious acts of God; (3) That they take place at the same moment of time. The only question is, What is the true order of causation? Is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us that we may believe, or is it imputed to us because we believe? Is justification and *analytic* judgment, to the effect that this man, though a sinner, yet being a believer, is justified? Or is it a *synthetic* judgment, to the effect that this sinner is justified for Christ's sake (Ritschl., chap. 6, §42). Our catechism suggests the latter by the order of its phrases. God justifies us, "only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone." The same seems to be included in the very act of justifying faith itself, which is the trustful recognition and embrace of Christ, who had previously "loved *me*, and given himself for *me*" (Gal. 2:20).

The biblical phrase, "justified by faith," applies strictly, of course, to our relations to God as these are realized in the sphere of human consciousness. Faith is at once the act whereby we apprehend Christ, and the effect of our being antecedently apprehended of him. The act of faith is the one thing we do, but it is preceded in the order of causation (a) by the impetration of salvation by Christ, and (b) by the first stages of the work of the Holy Spirit in applying it. Faith is the organ whereby we recognize Christ as meriting our salvation, and the Father as reconciled for Christ's sake; but, of course, the salvation was merited and the Father was reconciled, and both were long since engaged with the Holy Spirit in carrying on the work of the personal application of grace, or we could not recognize them as so doing.

4. The analogy of the imputation of Adam's sin to us and of our sins to Christ must be borne in mind when reflecting on the conditions of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to us.

However much various schools of theologians may differ as to the grounds and nature of our union with Adam, and hence as to the reason in law of our responsibility for his apostatizing act, the whole Church has always maintained that the depravity of moral nature innate in his posterity is the penal consequence of his first sin. Beza on Rom. v. expresses the faith of the whole church when he says: "As Adam, by the commission of sin, first was made guilty of the wrath of God" (*i.e.*, righteously exposed to that wrath), "then as being guilty underwent as the punishment of his sin the corruption of soul and body, so also he transmitted to his posterity a nature *in the first place* guilty, and *next* corrupted." The imputation of the guilt (just liability to punishment) of Adam's apostatizing act to his whole race in common leads judicially to the spiritual desertion of each new-born soul in particular, and spiritual desertion involves inherent depravity as a necessary and

universal consequence. In like manner the imputation of our sins in common to Christ lead to his spiritual desertion (Matt. 27:46), but his temporary desertion as a man by the Holy Ghost lead in his case to no tendency however remote to inherent or actual sin, because he was the God-man. By consequence, the imputation of Christ's righteous to us is the necessary precondition of the restoration to us of the influences of the Holy Ghost, and that restoration leads by necessary consequence to our regeneration and sanctification.

The notion that the necessary precondition of the imputation to us of Christ's righteousness is our own faith, of which the necessary precondition is regeneration, is analogous to the rejected theory that the inherent personal moral corruption of each of Adam's descendants is the necessary precondition of the imputation of his guilt to them. On the contrary, if the imputation of guilt is the causal antecedent of inherent depravity, in like manner the imputation of righteousness must be the causal antecedent of regeneration and faith.

This is obviously true in the case of a person regenerated in infancy, as must be true of all who dies in infancy, and of many others whose early regeneration is attested by their subsequent life. In their case the unquestionable order was as follows: The guilt of Adam was imputed at birth, and they at once lost original righteousness and became spiritually dead. Then the righteousness of Christ was imputed, and they were regenerated and in due course sanctified by the Holy Ghost. In the justification, therefore, of that majority of the elect which dies in infancy personal faith does not mediate. It cannot, therefore, ever mediate in the justification of any of the elect as an element *absolutely* necessary to the thing itself. In the case of the adult, faith is the first and invariable exercise of the regenerate and justified soul, whereby the righteousness of Christ imputed and the justification it effect are consciously received and appropriated, and the organ through which the Holy Spirit subsequently acts upon the soul, now spiritually alive, in, promoting its progressive sanctification.

Dr. Dorner ("Hist. of Protest. Theo.," vol. ii., pp. 156, 160) says, "It is evident that God must himself already have been secretly favorable and gracious to a man, and must already have pardoned him in *foro divino*, for the sake of Christ and his relation to human nature, in order to be able to bestow upon him the grace of regeneration." "In fact, viewed as an *actus Dei forensis*, there is a necessity that it should be regarded as existing prior to man's consciousness thereof – nay, prior to faith. For faith is nothing more than the commencement of such consciousness, and could not arise at all unless preceded objectively by justification before God – in other words, by a divine and gracious purpose, special with regard to the individual sinner, existing on God's part as an accomplished act of pardon, and then applying to man by the exhibition and offer of the benefits of redemption. The vocation of the individual to salvation could not result unless God had already, in preventing love, previously pardoned the sinner for Christ's sake, *i.e.*, for the sake of that fellowship of Christ with the sinner which the latter had not yet rejected. It is only when *Justificatio forensis* maintains its Reformation position at the head of the process of salvation that it has any firm

or secure standing at all. If removed from this, it is gradually driven to a greater and greater distance, till at last, as in Storr's divinity, it takes its place at the end."

5. The solution of this problem is to be found in the fact, above mentioned, that Christ by his obedience and suffering impetrated for his own people, not only the possibility of salvation, but salvation itself and all it includes, and the certainty and means of its application also. This he did in the execution of the provisions of a covenant engagement with his Father, which provides for the application of the purchased redemption to specific persons at certain times, and under certain conditions, all which conditions are impetrated by Christ, as well as definitely determined by the covenant. The relation of a new-born elect child to Adam, and his participation in the consequences of Adam's apostasy, are the same as that of any other of his co-descendants. But his relation to the satisfaction and merits of Christ is analogous to that of a minor heir under human law to his inheritance secured to him by his father's will. As long as he is under age the will secures the inchoate rights of the heir *de jure*. It provides for his education and maintenance at the expense of the estate in preparation for his inheritance. It determines the previous installments of his patrimony to be given him by his trustee. It predetermines the precise time and conditions of his being inducted into absolute possession. His title rests from first to last upon his father's will. He possesses certain rights and enjoys certain benefits from the first. But he has absolute rights and powers of ownership only when he reaches the period and meets the conditions prescribed for that purpose by the will. The force of this analogy is not weakened, but rather augmented by the fact that the peculiarity in the case of the elect heir of Christ's redemption is that all the conditions of full possession are themselves free gifts, equally with the possession secure by the will, and parts of the inheritance itself. Hence the satisfaction and merit of Christ are imputed to the elect man from his birth, so far as they form the basis of the gracious dealing provided for him in preparation for his full possession. When that time has come, they are imputed to him unconditionally to that end, the consequence being that the Spirit, who had previously striven with him, and finally convinced him of sin, now renews his will, and works in him to act faith, whereby he appropriates the offered righteousness of Christ, and actually and consciously is received into the number, and is openly recognized and treated as one entitled to all the privileges, of the children of God. To this consummating and self-prevailing act of God theologians have assigned the title "Justification" in its specific sense. It is a pronounced judgment of God, raising the subject into the realization of a new relation, yet one long purposed and prepared for. From the first, God had regarded and treated him as an heir of Christ's righteousness. Now he regards and treats him as in the actual possession, and if an adult, he by the gift of faith brings him into conscious possession. The imputation to him as an heir and the imputation to him as in actual possession do not differ so much on God's side as it differs in its effects and consequences in the actual relations and experiences of the subject.

"This gracious sentence was (1) in the mind of God, as a concept, in his purpose to justify

(Gal. 3:8). (2) It was pronounced in Christ our Head when he rose from the dead (2 Cor. 5:19): ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.’ (3) It is virtually pronounced in that first relation which arises from the generation in us of faith (Rom. 8:1). (4) It is expressly pronounced through the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits our reconciliation to God.” (“Medulla Amesii,” chap. 27. §9.)

“It is moreover to be observed that justification, if we take it whatever can be comprised under that name, consists of various articles or periods. And *first*, God’s sentence of absolution regards (1) either all the elect in general collected into one mystical body, or (2) relates to each person in particular.”

“I observe two articles of that general sentence, the *first* of which commenced immediately upon the fall, when Christ, having entered into suretyship engagements for elect sinners, obtained . . . that Satan should be condemned in the serpent, etc. The *second* article of this general justification relates to the time when God declares that full satisfaction had been made to his justice by the dying Christ (2 Cor. 5:19).”

“The other justification, applied to every believer in particular, has its distinct articles. The *first* is when the elect person, who is redeemed, regenerated, and united to Christ by a living faith, is declared to have now actually passed from a state of condemnation and wrath to a state of grace and favor.”

“The *second* is when this sentence is intimated and insinuated to the conscience by the Holy Ghost. The *third* is when the sinner, being actively and passively justified, is admitted to familiar intercourse with God. The *fourth* is immediately after death. The *fifth* and last is on the day of judgment, when the elect shall be publicly justified.” (Witsius, “Economy of the Covenants,” book 3, chapter 8, §§ 57-63.)

IV. There is an unhappily significant tendency observable among many modern preachers and writers to ignore, if not positively to deny, the absolute necessity of a gratuitous justification as an essential precondition of the very beginnings of all moral reformation.

As in past times, many have made shipwreck of the faith by refusing to see that the only worthy end and complement of forgiveness of sins and divine acceptance is the actual restoration of the moral image of God, so now many make a shipwreck equally disastrous on the opposite side by refusing to acknowledge that even the first and least improvement in character and life must be preceded by atonement and reconciliation. The prime need for expiation and reconciliation is retired into the shade, ignored, or denied. The cultivation of benevolent and honorable sentiments, and the diligent performance of all the actions to which such sentiments prompt, are insisted upon as the first and last duty and interest of men. It is affirmed that as God will condemn

men in proportion to their want of moral excellence, so he will extend to them his favor in proportion as each one strives with all his ability, under present conditions, to be and to do the best that is for him possible, irrespective of his past record, or the constitutional moral defects of character thence entailed. Concerning this deplorable characteristic of some modern teaching and preaching we have space only to indicate the following unquestionable facts:

1. This characteristic is in marked contrast and in radical opposition to the preaching of the inspired and authoritative representatives of Christianity, as it was promulgated by the immediate disciples of its Founder. It is unquestionable that not the form only, but the entire logic and spirit and practical power of their preaching, was truly represented by their own frequent assertions that they preached, and that they preached *only*, “Christ,” “the cross,” “Christ crucified,” and “the resurrection of Christ” after his crucifixion. Consciousness of guilt and alienation, and the glorious fact of expiation and gratuitous reconciliation already effected, were the immediate practical impressions made on all their hearers, the realization of which was the moral power on which they relied to revolutionize character and make holy living possible.

2. As shown above, this modern tendency is in no less obvious contrast and radical opposition to all the forms which Christianity has assumed in the great historical churches. Whatever the men who thus ignore the cross may call themselves, it is clear that they differ far more radically and upon question of more instant practical importance alike from all legitimate schools of Protestants and Catholics, like Catholics and Protestants differ from each other. If the schism effected at the Reformation was justified by the character of popish errors, or by the extent of the soul-destructive mischief they effected, a more urgent demand for an equally radical purgation of so-called Protestant pulpits appeals to us now.

3. It is evident that the modern rationalistic moral legalism, just as much as the ancient Jewish ceremonial legalism, and on similar principles, makes the cross of Christ of none effect by their traditions. It is evident, also, that the same influences and the same principles which lead to the diminished emphasis or to the virtual ignoring of the great doctrine of the cross, will inevitably result soon in its open and absolute denial. Thus heresy, like sin, “when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

4. The pretence that the modern tendency alluded to is prompted by a higher moral standard or by a superior sense of the essential importance of personal character than that which prompted the preaching of the apostles, and the creeds, hymns, and liturgies of all churches, is precisely the reverse of the truth. The genuine appreciation of the excellence of moral goodness is essentially inseparable from a corresponding appreciation of the abomination and ill-desert of moral evil. A deep sense of sin is in actual sinner the absolutely essential precondition of the first beginnings of moral improvement. A due sense of sin involves essentially a profound personal recognition of its pollution, its guilt, and its power. A man truly loving holiness and hating sin, himself a redeemed

sinner preaching to his fellow-sinners, cannot stultify himself and mock them by telling them to be good as they can with all their might, and God will bless them. He must either preach despair, or an adequate expiation and gracious reconciliation as the basis of all real reform. The opposite method, unhappily becoming less infrequent than hitherto, is an evident symptom of a miserably low moral standard. The age-spirit which doubts about the reality and eternity of future punishment naturally ceases to emphasize justification on the basis of vicarious expiation, and to postpone it as the consequent of regeneration, sanctification, and the life work which follows. The end is evident and inevitable. Without antecedent reconciliation men cannot be truly sanctified. So the same low sense of sin which leads to the ignoring of justification, or to its removal from its position as the beginning and fountain of all practical grace, will necessarily lead to the denial of the soul's need to any grace, and of its obligation to any law. Legalism makes fair professions; but, beginning with the denial of innate sinfulness and moral impotency, it proceeds logically to ignore the abomination of sin and the excellence of virtue, and ends in an abyss of license which confounds all moral distinctions.



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