

## John Bunyan on Justification



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John Bunyan (1628–1688), author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, is one of the best-known Puritans. While much of his work is eclipsed by *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the famous “tinker” from Bedford possessed remarkable theological prowess. His ability to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3) is aptly demonstrated in such works as *Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-Day Sabbath* and his *Exposition of the First Ten Chapters of Genesis*.<sup>1</sup> He had no university degree, yet he clearly grasped the central tenets of the Christian faith and masterfully applied them to his readers. Bunyan was also “very distinctly and consistently a teacher,”<sup>2</sup> whose schoolbook was the Bible. As J. H. Gosden says, “Other authority he seldom adduces...His appeal constantly is: ‘What saith the Scripture?’ ”<sup>3</sup> Bunyan’s ability to wed orthodoxy and orthopraxy made him dangerous to his critics, beloved to his friends, and invaluable to future generations.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Bunyan* (ed. George Offor; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 2:361–85, 413–501, henceforth cited by the title of the individual writing as well as *Works*, volume and page number. References to *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, (ed. Roger Sharrock; 13 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976–1994) will be cited as *MW*, volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> A. R. Buckland, *John Bunyan* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1857), 97.

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Gosden, *Bunyan: His Doctrine* (London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1929), 2.

Of particular interest to us here is Bunyan's concern for vindicating the doctrine of justification. Bunyan readily acknowledges that the term *justification* is used in various ways in the Scriptures; he is primarily concerned with the justification by which "a man stand[s] clear, quit, free, or in a saved condition before [God] in the approbation of his holy law."<sup>4</sup> Justification is the act whereby a person may stand before God's law and be declared "not guilty" or, positively, be declared righteous.

Though Bunyan is not unique in his defense of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, he shows greater clarity and pastoral concern in expounding this doctrine than most of his contemporaries. For this reason alone, Bunyan's doctrine of justification is a worthwhile study. Let us look at how:

- Bunyan's own spiritual experience helped shape his views on justification,
- Bunyan's writings respond to his historical-polemical situation,
- Bunyan's doctrine of justification answers a variety of important questions, and
- Bunyan's pastoral concern to show the comforts flowing from justification is evident.

### I. BUNYAN'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Though Bunyan experienced sporadic convictions of sin in his youth that helped restrain rebellion, he confessed that he was "filled with all unrighteousness" and had "few equals, both for cursing, swearing, lying, and blaspheming the holy name of God."<sup>5</sup> God began to deal with Bunyan's soul in an abiding way when he was in his early twenties, when he realized, in his own words, that "I was lost if I had not Christ, because I had been a sinner; I saw that I wanted a perfect righteousness to present me without fault before God, and this righteousness was nowhere to be found but in the person of Jesus Christ."<sup>6</sup>

About that same time, God greatly blessed to Bunyan's soul the reading of Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, which strongly

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<sup>4</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:301). In addition to this, Bunyan speaks of justification of actions and a justification before men. However, these two concerned Bunyan very little compared to our justification before God.

<sup>5</sup> *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (*Works*, 1:6).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:16.

emphasized the necessity of basing the whole of one's salvation on the imputed righteousness of Christ. Bunyan later wrote: "I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience."<sup>7</sup>

Luther's book, together with the preaching and pastoral ministry of John Gifford, pastor of the Bedford Independent Church, brought Bunyan to see the necessity and beauty of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Bunyan was particularly influenced by a sermon Gifford preached on Song of Solomon 4:1, "Behold thou art fair, my love, behold thou art fair." Nevertheless, Bunyan was greatly assaulted by the devil's wiles before being able to reach a comfortable degree of assurance that he was personally justified before God in Christ's righteousness alone. Happily, the day finally came when this great doctrine of imputed righteousness brought Bunyan into spiritual liberty. Bunyan writes of that unforgettable experience:

But one day, as I was passing in the field... this sentence fell upon my soul: Thy righteousness is in heaven; and methought withal I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ, at God's right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was a-doing, God could not say of me, He wants my righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed, I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away...now I went home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God... I lived for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ; Oh! methought, Christ! Christ! there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes, I was not now only looking upon this and the other benefits of Christ apart, as of his blood, burial, and resurrection, but considered him as a whole Christ!...It was glorious to me to see his exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all his benefits, and that because of this: now I could look from myself to him, and would reckon that all those graces of God that now were green in me, were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence-halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses, when

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 1:22.

their gold is in their trunk at home! Oh, I saw that my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ my Lord and Saviour! Now Christ was all.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Davies comments:

Bunyan's language, at the moment of saving faith in Christ, seems to approach something intensely mystical... [But] we should not let his rhapsodic, ecstatic prose cloud our understanding of the doctrinal point here. In clear, covenant terms Bunyan's conversion has been effected as a shift to grace from the law.<sup>9</sup>

Bunyan saw with the eyes of his heart that the living Christ was his righteousness, not his own works, and his heart rested upon Christ and found peace.

No wonder, then, that the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness lay at the center of Bunyan's teaching and preaching all his life. As Robert Oliver notes, this doctrine was

fundamental to the thinking of a man who took seriously the demands of the Law of God. He knew by painful experience that he had no hope of meeting those demands for 'there is none righteous, no not one.' Only as the Law's demands were met by Jesus Christ and imputed to him could he stand before God. The sufferings of Christ were endured for his sins and Christ's active obedience imputed to him ensured that the Law's demands were met. Only as he grasped these truths for himself could he see that there was 'Grace abounding to the chief of sinners.'<sup>10</sup>

## II. BUNYAN'S HISTORICAL-POLEMICAL CONTECT

Bearing in mind, then, Bunyan's personal experience, let us consider the polemical context in which he found himself—a context that moved him to defend justification by faith alone in three of his books. Bunyan

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1:35–36.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 101.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Oliver, "'Grace Abounding': Imputed Righteousness in the Life and Work of John Bunyan," *The Churchman* 107.1 (1993): 79.

wrote on justification against both the Quakers and the Latitudinarian Anglicans.<sup>11</sup>

The Quaker controversy with Bunyan was led by Edward Burrough (1634–1663) in his *The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace* (1656). Burrough was educated in the Church of England, then joined the Presbyterians, only to be converted to Quakerism by the preaching of George Fox in 1652. He was responding to Bunyan's first book, *Some Gospel-Truths Opened according to the Scriptures* (1656), written after Bunyan had participated in public debates with Quakers. Bunyan also published *A Vindication of the Book Called, Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1657). Burrough then responded with *Truth (the Strongest of All) Witnessed Forth in the Spirit of Truth, Against All Deceit* (1657).<sup>12</sup>

Burrough accused Bunyan of approaching popish legalism by denying "the Christ within."<sup>13</sup> He castigated Bunyan for denying that the light of conscience is a saving grace of Christ's Spirit given to all men. The Quakers asserted that Christ works His light and law in all people who are then saved by the choice of their own wills. By not resisting the inner light, men become holy and so are justified.<sup>14</sup> Bunyan rebuked Burrough for confusing "justification wrought by the man Christ without, and sanctification wrought by the Spirit of Christ, within." Their debate was marred by heated and uncharitable language. Bunyan called the Quakers "painted hypocrites" and Burrough called Bunyan's teaching "wonderful trash, and muddy stuff."<sup>15</sup>

Bunyan's controversy with Latitudinarian Anglicanism was a little less rancorous. *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Jesus Christ* (1672)<sup>16</sup> is a polemical work that Bunyan wrote particularly against Edward Fowler (1632–1714), vicar of Northill near Bedford at that time, though ten years earlier he had been a Presbyterian, ejected from the Church of England as a result of the Act of Uniformity (1662). In the mid-1660s, Fowler conformed and was reinstated in the Church of England. Later, he would be appointed Bishop of Gloucester. Fowler

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<sup>11</sup> Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 53–54, 75–77. Cf. I. M. Green, "Bunyan in Context: The Changing Face of Protestantism in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Bunyan in England and Abroad* (eds. M. Os and G. J. Schutte; Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1990), 1–27.

<sup>12</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 75–78; Oliver, "Grace Abounding," 73–77.

<sup>13</sup> Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver, "Grace Abounding," 77.

<sup>15</sup> Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 82–85.

<sup>16</sup> *A Defence of Justification*, (*Works*, 2:281–34).

wrote two books that deeply troubled Bunyan. In 1670, he published *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England* as a defense of the growing Latitudinarian school of theology which promoted religious rationalism at the expense of the doctrines of predestination and Christ's imputed righteousness. Moreover, in this book, Fowler denigrated Puritan experiential theology—as did most Latitudinarians—as mere “enthusiasm.” Several months later, Fowler published *The Design of Christianity*, which taught among other errors that genuine Christianity only aims to purify men's natures and reform their lives so that they could be restored to the Adamic pre-fall state. Attacking the doctrine of justification directly, Fowler wrote, “The free grace of God is infinitely more magnified, in renewing our natures, than it could be in the bare justification of our persons.”<sup>17</sup> Fowler said that the gospel teaches us “to perform good Actions,” as exemplified in Jesus whose life was “one Continued Lecture of the most Excellent Morals... He was a Person of the Greatest Freedom, Affability, and Courtesie.”<sup>18</sup> He said it was “stupid folly” to think that Christ's righteousness is our own.<sup>19</sup> In a word, Fowler preached a gospel of gentlemanly good manners rather than Christ's imputed righteousness.

In *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, Bunyan strongly condemned Fowler for abusing Scripture and the doctrines of his own church—particularly articles 10, 11, and 13 of The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England.<sup>20</sup> If our holiness must derive partly from us and from the purity of our nature, then Fowler was really offering little else than “the religion of the Socinians, Quakers, etc., and not the religion of Jesus Christ.”<sup>21</sup> Bunyan earnestly warned Fowler that his writing in such a vilifying manner of true religion, if not repented of, would bring the blood of the damned upon his own head.<sup>22</sup>

Fowler responded to Bunyan caustically. Instead of refuting Bunyan's arguments, he called Bunyan a problematic schismatic whose book was ill-conceived, and goes on to suggest that someone else must have written the bulk of it for him, since this lowly tinker used all kinds of vocabulary and phrases beyond his capacity of understanding. Fowler even provides a list of these terms and phrases. He carries on for seventy

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 83. Cf. Oliver, “Grace Abounding,” 74.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 282.

<sup>20</sup> *A Defence of Justification* (*Works*, 2:232).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:292.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:313–14.

pages replying to Bunyan, of whom he said at the beginning that he was not even worth replying to.<sup>23</sup> That is one way to do polemics!

Later, Bunyan wrote a shorter treatise, *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness*, which was found among his papers after his death in 1688 and was first published in 1692.<sup>24</sup> This book addresses the doctrines of justification and imputation more directly, in greater detail, and more pastorally than polemically, as we shall see. Throughout, Bunyan decries all self-righteousness and calls upon unbelievers to flee to Christ alone for justifying righteousness. He writes, “In the matter of thy justification thou must know nothing, see nothing, hear nothing, but thine own sins and Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>25</sup>

Many of Bunyan’s other writings—such as *The Pharisee and the Publican*, *Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*, *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness*, *Saved by Grace*, *A Vindication of Gospel Truths*, *The Work of Jesus Christ as Advocate*, *The Intercession of Christ*, and *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*—are sprinkled with references to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Not surprisingly, therefore, Bunyan considers justification essential for every believer, stating, “It is absolutely necessary that this be known of us; for if the understanding be muddy as to this, it is impossible that such should be sound in the faith.”<sup>26</sup>

### III. BUNYAN’S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Let us now turn to consider his doctrinal treatment of justification by faith alone. For Bunyan, that means answering six questions.

#### 1. *What is the function of the moral law?*

From the time of the Reformation, not to mention the days of the apostles, a central question in the debate on justification has been: Can a sinner be justified by doing the works of the law? The answer to this question depends on how we view the gospel of grace. In Bunyan’s day, as in our own, many have proposed views that do not direct people to Christ and His accomplished work but to themselves and their own

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<sup>23</sup> John Brown, *John Bunyan (1628–1688): His Life, Times, and Work* (London: Hulbert Publishing, 1928), 218–19.

<sup>24</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness*, (*Works*, 1:301–334). It may have been written in 1676 but hidden due to increasing government persecution (Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 339, 341–42).

<sup>25</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness*, (*Works*, 1:327).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:303.

works. George Offor says Bunyan offers “powerful arguments [to] counteract these errors.”<sup>27</sup>

The need for justification arises from the nature of the law. Bunyan saw the law in the context of the two covenants between God and man: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works laid upon Adam in the Garden of Eden the requirement for perfect obedience to God’s moral law, later expressed in the Ten Commandments.<sup>28</sup> To be right with God, a person must be perfectly righteous, meaning he or she is fully obedient to the law of God. Bunyan cites Moses in his *Exposition on Genesis*, saying, “It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.”<sup>29</sup> Our obedience is our righteousness, and this righteousness involves *negative* as well as *positive* holiness. Negative holiness means a person must cease from sin, or the transgression of the law;<sup>30</sup> positive holiness means a person must also perform the duties commanded in the law, or the practice of holiness: “For it is not what a man is not, but what a man does, that declares him a righteous man.”<sup>31</sup> The requirement of the law is perfect righteousness.<sup>32</sup>

The law demands obedience, but also threatens to punish disobedience. Bunyan asserts, “The law is itself so perfectly holy and good as not to admit of the least failure.”<sup>33</sup> Anything less than perfect obedience to this law brings upon the sinner the curse and condemnation of the law (Gal 3:10). In his *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*, Bunyan says this law “doth not onely condemn words and actions...but it hath authority to condemn the most secret thoughts of the heart, being evil; so that if thou do not speak any word that is evil...yet if there should chance to passe but one vain thought...the Law taketh hold of it, accuseth, and also will condemn thee for it.”<sup>34</sup> Wherever this law shines, it exposes wrongdoing, even in the smallest measure, and pronounces a death sentence on the wrongdoer, for, as Bunyan says, “Sin and death is forever its language.”<sup>35</sup> In the vivid imagery of *Pilgrim’s Progress*,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1:300.

<sup>28</sup> Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 22–23.

<sup>29</sup> *Exposition of Genesis*, (*Works*, 2:425–26), citing Deut 6:25.

<sup>30</sup> *Pharisee and the Publican* (*Works*, 2:222–23); 2 Tim 2:22; 1 Cor 10:14.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2:223; cf. 1 Tim 6:11.

<sup>32</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:302).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1:316.

<sup>34</sup> *Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* (*MW*, 2:33).

<sup>35</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:317).

Moses cannot show mercy to a pilgrim, but can only punch his lights out.<sup>36</sup>

In the light of the law, can anyone declare himself exempt from its curse and condemnation? Bunyan says, “If thou findest thy self guilty, as I am sure thou canst not otherwise choose but do, unless thou shut thy eyes against thy every dayes practice; then I say conclude thyself guilty of the breach of the first Covenant.”<sup>37</sup> The law daily exacerbates a person’s guilt. “Strike a steel against a flint, and the fire flies about you; strike the law against a carnal heart, and sin appears, sin multiplies, sin rageth, sin is strengthened!”<sup>38</sup> Davies writes, “To believe that one can attain righteousness by works is supreme folly for Bunyan, as the ability to fulfill the law was forfeited for everyone by Adam (mankind’s representative, or “publick person”) in his act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden.”<sup>39</sup> Pieter de Vries observes, “The doctrine of the justification of a sinner has its significance in the light of man’s total depravity...As long as we are strangers to the depravity of our hearts, we shall not esteem Christ.”<sup>40</sup>

Since everyone has broken the law and lacks both negative and positive holiness, “therefore now for ever, by the law, no man can stand just before God.”<sup>41</sup> Even works which might, at face value, seem ethically good are defiled because they are tainted by sin.<sup>42</sup> Those who seek to come to God on the basis of their own righteousness are like the Pharisee who stood on a street corner thanking God that he was not a publican. Bunyan comments, “Indeed, thou mayest cover thy dirt, and paint thy sepulcher...But Pharisee, God can see through the white of this wall, even to the dirt that is within...nor can any of thy most holy duties, nor all, when put together, blind the eye of the all-seeing majesty from

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<sup>36</sup> *Pilgrim’s Progress* (*Works*, 3:118–19).

<sup>37</sup> *Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* (*MW*, 2:35). Bunyan, agreeing partly with the Federal Theology of his day, agrees that man was created in a covenant of works, which operated under the strict nature of law: “do this and live.” Therefore, to break that covenant is to break the law (*Exposition of Genesis* (*Works*, 2:426–27).

<sup>38</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:317).

<sup>39</sup> Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation* (trans. C. van Haften; New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1994), 149.

<sup>41</sup> *Exposition of Genesis* (*Works*, 2:426).

<sup>42</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:315).

beholding all the uncleanness of thy soul.”<sup>43</sup> God thus rightfully rejects “man’s righteousness, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.”<sup>44</sup>

The law requires that a person be justified by perfect obedience, yet no one is capable of such perfection. The law thus demands the condemnation of all. As Bunyan says: “No, saith the Law, thou hast sinned, therefore I must curse thee; for it is my nature to curse, even, and nothing else but curse every one that doth in any point transgress against me, Gal. 3.10.”<sup>45</sup> In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, Bunyan expresses how many people feel when the law penetrates their conscience: “I had no sooner thus conceived in my mind, but suddenly this conclusion was fastened on my spirit...that I had been a great and grievous sinner, and that it was now too late for me to look after heaven.”<sup>46</sup> How then can a sinner find acceptance by a righteous and holy God? He cannot do it by his own merit, for his sins leave him void of any righteousness, and God thus rejects his obedience altogether.

## 2. How can a person be made right with God?

In this quagmire of sin, hopelessness, and helplessness, we find hope, Bunyan says, by looking to the righteousness of another. Bunyan directs his readers to the incarnate Mediator of the covenant of grace, who alone can justify. This is the gospel promise already offered to our first parents by God in the *protoevangelium* of Gen 3:15. Bunyan impersonates God as saying, “Now because I have grace and mercy, I will therefore design thy recovery.”<sup>47</sup> Sinners stand before the indictment of the law in need of supernatural help; they can by no means recover themselves from their fallen state. So God promises this recovery through the work of Jesus Christ, His beloved Son. Bunyan again uses impersonation: God promises that His Son will save sinners by “fulfilling my law, and by answering the penalties thereof. He shall bring in a righteousness which shall be ‘everlasting,’ by which I will justify you

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<sup>43</sup> *Pharisee and Publican (Works, 2:229).*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* This will remind us of Christian’s journey in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* when he came upon By-path Meadow. Having ventured unto tough terrain he sought a different path to lead them to the Celestial Gate. They took the easier road and as they did it began thundering and lightning, reminding us of Sinai and not Zion. It was here that they stumbled upon Vain-confidence and later Doubting Castle and Giant Despair (see *Pilgrim’s Progress [Works, 3:138ff.]*).

<sup>45</sup> *Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded (MW, 2:36).*

<sup>46</sup> *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners (Works, 1:8).*

<sup>47</sup> *Exposition of Genesis (Works, 2:437).*

from sin, and the curse of God due thereto.”<sup>48</sup> Because the law has been transgressed, its demands have strengthened. For the Son to satisfy God’s justice, He must both pay the penalty for sin and fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. His obedience must be both active and passive, positive and negative: “for the accomplishing of righteousness, there was both doing and suffering; doing, to fulfill all the commands of the law; suffering, to answer to its penalty for sin.”<sup>49</sup>

Within the economy of salvation, this promised Savior is considered “a *public* person, or one that presents the body of mankind in himself.”<sup>50</sup> Christ did not do what He did for Himself; rather, He was a representative—not for all mankind, but for His promised seed. Bunyan writes, “Christ stood as a common person, presenting in himself the whole lump of the promised seed, or the children of the promise; wherefore, he comes under the law for them, takes upon him to do what the law required of them, takes upon him to do it for them.”<sup>51</sup> As representative of His chosen seed, Christ’s work is always *for them*. While affirming this doctrine, Bunyan also asserts the mystery of it, saying, “That one particular man should represent all the elect in himself, and that the most righteous should die as a sinner, yea, as a sinner by the hand of a just and holy God, is a mystery of the greatest depth!”<sup>52</sup>

### *3. Why are Christ’s active and passive obedience both essential for justification?*

As a public person, Christ’s vicarious obedience applies to both His life and His death. The Savior fulfilled the law both actively and passively, by works He performed and the things that He suffered, which are tasks delegated to Him from eternity. In Christ’s passive obedience, the penalty of sin is paid: as Bunyan says, “Thou hast sinned; the law now calls for passive...obedience.”<sup>53</sup> Suffering is necessary for justification because “the threatening of death and the curse of the law lay in the way between heaven’s gates and the souls of the children, for their sins; wherefore he that will save them must answer Divine justice,

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:438.

<sup>49</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness (Works, 1:323).*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:303.

<sup>51</sup> *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness (Works, 1:406)*; for more on Bunyan’s view of particular redemption, see *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ (Works, 1:242–43).*

<sup>52</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness (Works, 1:303).*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works, 1:317*).

or God must lie, in saving them without inflicting the punishment threatened.”<sup>54</sup>

The law, which is a reflection of God’s perfect justice, demands that all transgressions must be punished. Christ submitted to the punishment decreed by the law, dying for sin, in order to purge its guilt through the shedding of His blood. Citing Hebrews 1:3, Bunyan says Christ has “purged our sins...by his precious blood; for that alone can purge our sins.”<sup>55</sup> Christ’s death was designed to meet the demands of God’s justice. “Christ, when he died, died not to satisfy Satan, but his Father; not to appease the Devil, but to answer the Demands of the Justice of God...He redeemed us, therefore, from the Curse of the Law, by his Blood.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, if Christ is to justify sinners, He “must...have suffered; the manner of the work laid a necessity upon him to take our flesh upon him, he must die, he must die for us, he must die for our sins.”<sup>57</sup>

Likewise, Christ’s active obedience is necessary, for paying the penalty is only half of the equation. Had Christ only suffered punishment, obedience to the commands of the law would still be necessary, for the whole law, every jot and tittle of it, must be fulfilled to establish righteousness. So Bunyan writes, “That at the very time when Jesus Christ did hang on the cross on Mount Calvary, was buried, rose again from the dead, and ascended above the clouds from his disciples, at that very time was all the law fulfilled for righteousness. He is the end of the law, mark; he is the end of the law for righteousness.”<sup>58</sup> As a righteous man, Christ obeyed the law perfectly, fulfilling *all* the demands of the law, both in His passive obedience of paying for sin through His suffering and death, and in His active obedience by doing the things commanded, loving God above all and loving His neighbor as Himself.

#### 4. *How are we justified by faith?*

In speaking of the first covenant God made with man in the Garden of Eden, Bunyan says that if man kept the law both positively and negatively, his obedience would be his righteousness. This is precisely

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<sup>54</sup> *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness* (Works, 1:405).

<sup>55</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (Works, 1:323).

<sup>56</sup> *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ* (MW, 11:127). The second issue of the first edition of this work was retitled *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate* (cf. Works, 1:151ff.).

<sup>57</sup> *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness* (Works, 1:405).

<sup>58</sup> *A Vindication of Gospel Truths* (Works, 2:189).

what Christ has done, for in Him there was no transgression, and in all that He did He lived a holy life. Therefore, we can say that Christ *is* righteous: He has done what man, weakened by flesh, could not do.

As a public man, Christ represented the promised seed; all that He did was done for them, on their behalf. His people are made righteous, not by their own righteousness, but by *His*. Bunyan writes, “For if he hath undertaken to bring in a justifying righteousness, and that by works and merits of his own, then that righteousness must of necessity be inherent in him alone, and ours only by imputation.”<sup>59</sup> Just as Adam’s sin was imputed to his physical posterity, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to His spiritual posterity, or those who believe in Him. Of this Bunyan says: “It is improper to say, Adam’s eating of the forbidden fruit was personally and inherently an act of mine. It was personally his, and imputatively mine; personally his, because he did it; imputatively mine, because I was then in him.”<sup>60</sup> It follows that “the righteousness of the other [Christ] is reckoned the righteousness of those that are his.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, “saving comes to us by what Christ did for us.”<sup>62</sup>

Bunyan, therefore, is an avid promoter of the forensic character of justification. He believed that Christ’s righteousness is personally imputed to each and all of the elect as sinners. By that imputation of righteousness which they are justified individually and corporately before God. The believing sinner, led by the Spirit and Word of God, gives up the vain attempt to produce his own righteousness, and takes refuge in Christ’s righteousness.

Like John Owen (1616–1683) and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679), Bunyan distinguished justification from the forgiveness of sin. As de Vries writes,

In his opinion the forgiveness of sin is the fruit of someone’s being covered with the righteousness of Christ. Quite consciously Bunyan refrained from equating justification and forgiveness, making a logical distinction between them in order to point out that Christ’s imputed righteousness is the sole legal ground for the forgiveness of sins. In doing this he sought to exclude any possibility for a Socinian interpretation of

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<sup>59</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:324).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Christ a Complete Saviour* (*Works*, 1:207).

justification [as they defined justification exclusively in terms of forgiveness].<sup>63</sup>

Bunyan taught that the imputed righteousness of Christ is received by us through *faith*, which is defined as “receiving, embracing, accepting, or trusting.”<sup>64</sup> Above all, faith appropriates Christ’s righteousness which is readily available in and from Christ Himself. Faith does not justify us by its own virtue, but by virtue of its object, Christ and His righteousness; hence, it always bears a relational character. Faith justifies us only because through it we rest on Christ’s work. This is the only way for Christ and His righteousness to become a personal, experiential reality for us. Bunyan thus says, “To be saved is to be brought to, and helped to lay hold on, Jesus Christ by faith.”<sup>65</sup> To trust in anything other than Christ, whether the merit of the law or the merit of faith, is to undermine the glorious doctrine of justification. Bunyan asks, “What, then, must it [faith] rely upon or trust in? Not in itself; that is, without Scripture; not in its works, they are inferior to itself...therefore it must trust in Christ.”<sup>66</sup> Because of what Christ suffered for us, He alone became the “meritorious cause of our justification...Thou art, therefore, as I have said, to make Christ Jesus the object of thy faith for justification.”<sup>67</sup>

Bunyan emphasizes the relationship between faith and Christ, saying, “Faith, then, as separate from Christ, doth nothing; nothing, neither with God nor man; because what it wants is relative; but let it go to the Lord Jesus—let it behold him as dying, and it fetches

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<sup>63</sup> De Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, 148.

<sup>64</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:328). Bunyan taught that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness immediately precedes faith, which then apprehends Christ’s righteousness consciously. He argued that God must justify before He can bless the sinner with the grace of faith, for an unjustified sinner is under His curse, not His blessing. Faith was a sign of justification, not its cause (*The Pharisee and the Publican* [*Works*, 2:250–51]; cf. de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, 151–54; Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 30–31). However, Bunyan’s view is not the same as the later British Baptist John Gill (1697–1771), for Bunyan taught a justification logically prior but temporally simultaneous with faith, not an eternal justification innate in God. Bunyan did teach that the elect were saved in one sense before the creation of the world, but in another sense saved when drawn to Jesus Christ to trust in Him (*Saved by Grace* (*Works*, 1:338–39).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:339.

<sup>66</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (*Works*, 1:326).

<sup>67</sup> *Saved by Grace* (*Works*, 1:339).

righteousness, and life, and peace, out of the virtue of his blood.”<sup>68</sup> Faith is nothing more than trusting Jesus Christ and His righteousness to be *our* righteousness. Here we come full circle, for Bunyan defines justification as that act whereby man stands free and clear before God in the approbation of His law. This cannot be accomplished by any inherent righteousness in man, who by nature is a law breaker, but only by faith in Jesus Christ and His meritorious work.

Behind Christ’s meritorious work stands the irrevocable love of God to His elect. That love moves the Father to give Christ as heaven’s Savior for sinners. Thus, for Bunyan, the love of God is the first and ultimate cause of justification, the merits of Christ are the second, and then, Spirit-worked faith, which is only the instrumental cause—not the meritorious cause—of justification. Without the Spirit’s work, there is no possibility of our believing.<sup>69</sup> This faith, which is the gift of God, is not parceled out indiscriminately, but given to the elect alone. Faith has to be worked in our heart by the Spirit, or as Bunyan also puts it, we have to be “implanted into the faith of Christ.”<sup>70</sup> Only when understood this way can the Calvinist avoid falling into the Arminian and Socinian error of making faith itself the savior, instead of Christ.

##### *5. How does justifying faith relate to obedience to the law?*

Clearly Bunyan held that justifying faith does not look to one’s own good works in the least. However, Bunyan taught that justifying faith produces good works. Faith is “a principle of life by which a Christian lives,...a principle of motion by which [the soul] walks towards heaven in the way of holiness...It is also a principle of strength, by which the soul opposeth its lust, the devil and this world, and overcomes them.” Spirit-worked faith is an active grace; it fuels the believer’s engine all his lifetime. Greaves comments that Bunyan’s view of faith is “an all-embracing principle or source of the Christian life from its inception to its consummation.”<sup>71</sup>

Faith in Christ alone justifies a sinner before God. But since faith is invisible, good works justify us before men. Visible obedience to the law plays a crucial role in demonstrating our new spiritual state to our fellow men. Bunyan wrote,

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<sup>68</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness (Works, 1:310).*

<sup>69</sup> Greaves, *John Bunyan*, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, *John Bunyan*, 71–73.

When I think of justification before God from the dreadful curse of the law; then I must speak of nothing but grace, Christ, the promise, and faith. But when I speak of our justification before men, then I must join to these good works. For grace, Christ, and faith, are things invisible...He that would shew to his neighbors that he hath truly received this mercy of God, must do it by good works; for all things else to them is but talk.<sup>72</sup>

Faith initiates the believer into the enjoyment of the covenant of grace without abolishing the law from the believer's life. Bunyan believed that the moral law has a place in both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He noted that the Lord gave the law to Moses twice, once with thunder and fire in Exodus 19–20, and again with a revelation of grace in Exodus 34. He wrote,

I think the first doth more principally intend its force as a covenant of works, not at all respecting the Lord Jesus Christ; but this second time not, at least in the manner of its being given, respecting such a covenant, but rather as a rule, or directory [set of directives], to those who already are found in the cleft of the rock, Christ: for the saint himself, though he be without law to God, yet even he is not without law to him as considered under grace, not without law to God, but under the law to Christ. 1 Co. ix. 21.<sup>73</sup>

Bunyan was so convinced that “good works must flow from faith” that he wrote, “The best way both to provoke ourselves and others to good works, it is to be often affirming to others the doctrine of justification by grace, and to believe it ourselves.”<sup>74</sup>

6. *In the order of salvation, which has priority, justification or sanctification?*

Bunyan emphasized the necessity of imputed righteousness, personal righteousness, and practical righteousness in the true Christian. Anjov Ahenakaa observed that Bunyan “confirms the Reformed position of taking justification and sanctification together, not one at the expense of the other as the Antinomians and Arminians were rightly accused of

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<sup>72</sup> *A Holy Life the Beauty of Christianity* (Works, 2:507).

<sup>73</sup> *The Law and a Christian* (Works, 2:388).

<sup>74</sup> *Christian Behavior* (Works, 2:570).

doing—Antinomians emphasizing free justification at the expense of sanctification, and the Arminians emphasizing sanctification at the expense of justification.”<sup>75</sup> Bunyan wrote,

Thus, therefore, we have described the righteous man. First. He is one whom God makes righteous, by reckoning or imputation. Second. He is one that God makes righteous by possessing of him with [or putting him in possession of] a principle of righteousness. Third. He is one that is practically righteous...I dare not give a narrower description of a righteous man than this, because whoever pretends to justification, if he be not sanctified, pretends to what he is not; and whoever pretends to sanctification, if he shows not the fruits thereof by a holy life, he deceiveth his own heart, and professeth but in vain.<sup>76</sup>

But Bunyan insisted that the righteousness of imputation must be kept distinct from the righteousness of personal transformation and that imputation must come first: “Righteousness by imputation must be first, that justification may not be of debt, but of mercy and grace.”<sup>77</sup> This is further necessary so “the sinner may stand just in God’s sight from the curse, and that God might deal with him both in a way of justice as well as mercy, and yet do the sinner no harm.”<sup>78</sup> Only after a person is counted righteous in Christ can he begin to live in holiness. Bunyan says, “Wherefore our holy actions are the fruits of righteousness, that is by Jesus Christ, not by our human nature, or the purity of it in us; yea, they are the fruits of the Spirit of God.”<sup>79</sup> For Bunyan, righteousness by imputation always and necessarily precedes holy works.

Consequently, sanctification may never precede justification (as in Roman Catholicism) and justification and sanctification may never be commingled (as in Baxterian neonomianism). No one may build his case for salvation on his own sanctification in even the smallest degree. In fact, building salvation on self-righteousness or on anything else in us is

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<sup>75</sup> Anjov Ahenakaa, “Justification and the Christian Life in John Bunyan: A Vindication of Bunyan from the Charge of Antinomianism” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 126.

<sup>76</sup> *The Desire of the Righteous Granted* (*Works*, 1:750–51).

<sup>77</sup> *Pharisee and Publican* (*Works*, 2:254).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, in *Works* (2:255).

<sup>79</sup> *A Defence of Justification* (*Works*, 2:285).

our greatest hindrance in exercising faith in Christ's imputed righteousness.<sup>80</sup>

### **Excursus: Contemporary Justification Issues**

It is obvious from what has been laid out above that Bunyan's view of justification is at odds with views about justification being published abroad today. One increasingly influential view is known as the New Perspective on Paul (NPP). Essentially it argues that the Reformers misunderstood Paul on two levels and that this misunderstanding has dominated later discussions of Paul's view of justification down to the late twentieth century, which would include Bunyan. First, the NPP maintains that when Paul discussed justification, he was not talking about how a sinner can find peace with a holy God. That perspective, NPP advocates maintain, is rooted in the guilty conscience of a Martin Luther or, one could say in the present case, the guilt-laden conscience of a John Bunyan. Besides, the argument continues, such a position is typical of a Western mindset beset with legal notions of sin and justice and beginning to be afflicted by the individualism that is so much a part of occidental *mentalité*. Rather, NPP asserts, when Paul talks about justification, he is not so much thinking about how one is saved from the wrath and judgment of God, but of the evidence that one is already saved. To be justified by faith means that the marks of true conversion are evident, namely, faith in the Lord Jesus and the good works of the Christian life. Justification is not about entry into the Christian life but about what that life looks like. Thus, Paul's polemic against "the works of the law" is not against the attempt to win God's favor by good works—which was very much the mindset of medieval Roman Catholic piety. Rather, "the NPP tells us, "the works of the law" are the marks of Judaism that indicate membership in God's covenant people: circumcision, the keeping of the foods laws, etc."<sup>81</sup>

In the NPP, then, Paul is attacking the idea that to belong to the corporate people of God one must keep the distinctive aspects of Judaism. It is faith in Christ that typifies the truly saved. Most advocates

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<sup>80</sup> De Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, 149.

<sup>81</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 119–22; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), lxiii–lxxii, 192; Mark M. Mattison, "A Summary of the New Perspective on Paul," <http://www.thepaulpage.com/a-summary-of-the-new-perspective-on-paul/> (accessed April 27, 2011).

of the NPP also go further and make a second assertion, namely, that Paul says nothing about imputed righteousness. The NPP is rooted in the idea that first-century Judaism was just as grace-oriented as early Christianity, that the final judgment is based on one's works and that the Greek word for faith means faithfulness, the equivalent of obedience.

But close examination of Paul's writings (for example, Eph 2 and Titus 3) reveal a theologian quite conscious that the onset of our salvation is always entirely a matter of grace, which runs against the human tendency to seek self-justification by works before a holy God. The Epistle to the Hebrews sets forth the weight of sin and clearly argues that nothing human beings can do by way of good works or obedient faithfulness can make us holy enough to stand before the majestic purity of the living God. Only Jesus' death and faith in that death, lead to salvation. Bunyan has rightly understood Paul and Hebrews at this point. First-century Judaism was no more grace-oriented than much of seventeenth-century Anglicanism that Bunyan contended with or the early twenty-first century secular confidence in the essential goodness of men and women that we must contend with today. Moreover, the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness is obviously central to Bunyan's understanding to justification and was the key to his conversion, in which he saw that the flawless righteousness he needed to stand before a holy God was to be found only in the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father. Recent studies like Brian Vickers' *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation*, a close study of the Pauline writings that bear on this issue, show that Bunyan, not to mention the Reformers, rightly understood Paul.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For helpful short articles on the New Perspective, see J. Ligon Duncan, "The Attractions of the New Perspective(s) on Paul," [http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0,,PTID307086\\_CHID560462\\_CIID1660662,00.html](http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086_CHID560462_CIID1660662,00.html) (accessed April 27, 2011); Paul F. M. Zahl, "Mistakes of the New Perspective on Paul," *Themelios* 27, no. 1 (2001): 5–11. For books on the topic, see Cornelis P. Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ: An Assessment of the Reformation and New Perspective on Paul* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006); Guy Prentice Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2004). For investigations related to the New Perspective by New Testament scholars, see D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001, 2004).

#### IV. BUNYAN'S PASTORAL APPLICATIONS

We would be remiss if we ended the discussion of Bunyan on justification here, for Bunyan's trademark is his pastoral concern. This experimental emphasis is evident in most of his writings, in which he applies the truth of a doctrine to a believer's life. Bunyan was well acquainted with the weaknesses and temptations of the human heart, so his explanation of the doctrine of justification takes on a consoling and comforting tone.

In all that can be said regarding justification by faith, Bunyan notes many things that have "great power with the heart to bend it to seek life before God by the law."<sup>83</sup> In sinning, Adam and his heirs take on a new relationship to the law, which no longer promises them life but rather "shakes Mount Sinai, and writeth death upon all faces, and makes the church itself cry out, A mediator! else we die."<sup>84</sup> We need to stop turning to the law as if it might justify us before God, for in turning to it, "the law...doth veil the heart from Christ, and holds the man so down to doing and working for the kingdom of heaven, that he quite forgets the forgiveness of sins by mercy through Christ."<sup>85</sup>

We must rather look to Christ as the end of the law. As Bunyan says, "He has done in his own person, and justified me thereby, and for my part, I will not labor now to fulfill the law for justification, least I should undervalue the merits of the Man Christ Jesus, and what he hath done without me."<sup>86</sup> Justifying righteousness is found only in the person of Christ apart from the law,<sup>87</sup> and we must thus warn ourselves not to seek righteousness in anything we do. For those who cling to Christ by faith, His righteousness *becomes* their righteousness. Bunyan quips, "Wherefore, in this sense, we are said to *do* what only was done by him."<sup>88</sup> Therefore, a justified man owes no more penalty or obedience to the law for his justification—indeed, he is in a better state than Adam since his state of acquittal before God is irrevocable in Christ! Fittingly then, Bunyan always points us back to Christ, the ground of our

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<sup>83</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (Works, 1:320). Bunyan reasoned extensively that believers are no longer under the law as a covenant of works, but are under grace (see *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* [MW, 2:83ff.]).

<sup>84</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (Works, 1: 317).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:321.

<sup>86</sup> *A Vindication of Gospel Truths* (Works, 2:194).

<sup>87</sup> *A Defence of Justification* (Works, 2:286–87).

<sup>88</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (Works, 1:304).

justification. He writes, “Look, then, upon Christ as the man, the mediator, the undertaker, and accomplisher of that righteousness in himself, wherein thou must stand just before God; and that he is the covenant or conditions of the people to Godward, always having in himself the righteousness that the law is well pleased with, and always presenting himself before God as our only righteousness.”<sup>89</sup>

In Bunyan’s allegory of the pilgrim, Christian encounters two men who tumble over the wall into the narrow way instead of entering by the gate. One was named Formalist, the other Hypocrisy. Christian questions them and they tell him they are confident that they can perform “laws and ordinances” as well as he and say the only thing he has that they do not is his coat, which no doubt his neighbors gave him out of pity to cover his nakedness. In fact, Christian received that coat when he stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Bunyan has Christian reply to these vain men:

By laws and ordinances you will not be saved, since you came not in by the door. And as for this coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go; and that, as you say, to cover my nakedness with. And I take it as a token of his kindness to me; for I had nothing but rags before. And, besides, thus I comfort myself as I go: Surely, think I, when I come to the gate of the city, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his coat on my back—a coat he gave me freely in the day that he stripped me of my rags.<sup>90</sup>

Another benefit of justification by faith is that it serves as the ground for Christ’s advocacy before the Father. Whatever charge may be leveled against us, Christ takes upon Himself. Bunyan says, “He taketh the whole Charge upon himself, acknowledging the Crimes to be his own. ‘O God,’ says he, ‘thou knowest my foolishness, and my Sins; my Guiltiness is not hid from thee, Psal. 69.5.’”<sup>91</sup> Christ then becomes our advocate before the throne of justice, for “[a]ll, then, that we, in this matter, have to do, is, to stand at the Bar by Faith among the Angels, and see how the business goes.”<sup>92</sup> At the bar of God, Christ pleads the goodness of God, and “God is never weary of being delighted with Jesus Christ; his blood is always precious with God; his merits being those in

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:327.

<sup>90</sup> *Pilgrim’s Progress (Works, 3:104)*.

<sup>91</sup> *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ (MW, 11:124)*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 11:125.

which justice hath everlasting rest.”<sup>93</sup> God is pacified by the accomplished work of Christ so that no believer, whatever his sins, can be found guilty before the throne of God.

In the same way, Christ argues against Satan, our accuser. Illustrating this point from Zech 3, where Joshua the high priest stands before the Angel of the Lord and is confronted by Satan as his adversary. Bunyan writes, “Come, then, says the Lord Jesus, the Contention is not now against my People, but myself, and about the Sufficiency of the Amends that I have made for the Transgressions of my People; but he is near that justifieth me, that approveth and accepteth of my Doings...Who is mine Adversary? let him come near me.”<sup>94</sup> This challenge shuts the mouth of Satan, and he no longer can lay anything to the charge of the justified people of God. This should move us to praise God. Bunyan says, “Let us therefore by him offer praise for the gift of his Son, and for that we stand quit through him in his sight, and that in despite of all inward weakness, and that in despite of all outward enemies.”<sup>95</sup>

Finally, justification by faith enables us to live in gospel obedience. While obedience is not the ground of our justification, it is a proper fruit of justification. Only after we receive the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ can we begin to live in a way that pleases the Heavenly Father. Once, we were nothing but law-breakers, but, through Christ and the continuing operation of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled more and more to live in holiness. Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone.<sup>96</sup>

In all of these applications, Bunyan is concerned that Christians never seek to move beyond Christ. They must not say, “I see not that in Christ now, that I have seen in him in former days. Besides, I find the Spirit leadeth me forth to study other things.”<sup>97</sup> Bunyan’s response is that the fault for this apathy toward Christ does not lie in Christ but in those who are no longer delighted with Him. He concludes, “God is never weary of being delighted with Jesus Christ, his blood is always precious with God; his merits being those in which justice hath everlasting rest,

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<sup>93</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness (Works, 1:329).*

<sup>94</sup> *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ (MW, 11:128).*

<sup>95</sup> *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness (Works, 1:427).*

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Richard L. Greaves, “Amid the Holy War: Bunyan and the Ethic of Suffering,” in *John Bunyan and His England, 1628–1688* (eds. Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens, and Stuart Sim; London: The Hambleton Press, 1990), 63–75.

<sup>97</sup> Bunyan wrote this against the Quaker claim to immediate inspiration and Anglican appeals to reason, over against Scripture.

why shouldest thou wander or go about to change thy way?”<sup>98</sup> How we need to replay that same note today, stressing with professing Christians everywhere that there is nothing to be had beyond the doctrine of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone. To look anywhere beyond Christ is to look beyond where God looks.

## V. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of justification is critically important in Bunyan’s writing. In his own confession, he places justification before calling and election.<sup>99</sup> Bunyan was a staunch defender of the forensic nature of justification. Salvation in Christ, by His righteousness alone, without the works of the law, is foundational in all his preaching.

Bunyan believed that the doctrine of justification by faith alone offers believers much practical comfort. His words offer guidance to us as we find ourselves engaged in a life-and-death struggle to maintain the truth of the gospel. The doctrines of the profound sinfulness of sin, the need for personal union with Christ, and the glorious truth of justification are being undermined today within and without the church. To rid ourselves of the truths that were so foundational in Bunyan’s writings is to rid ourselves of biblical Christianity. Bunyan says, “No man that buildeth forsakes the good foundation; that is the ground of his encouragement to work, for upon that is laid the stress of all; and without it nothing that is framed can be supported, but must inevitably fall to the ground.”<sup>100</sup>

Christians must never abandon the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness. They must build their confession, confidence, and life upon the glorious truth that Christ has become their righteousness. Bunyan writes, “Never think to live always on Christ for justification is a low and beggarly thing, and as it were a staying at the foundation; for let me tell you, depart from a sense of the meritorious means of your justification with God, and you quickly grow light, and frothy, and vain.”<sup>101</sup> May we never “grow light, frothy and vain,” but take warning and encouragement from those who by faith have inherited the promises and daily live in obedience to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>98</sup> *A Defence of Justification (Works, 2:327).*

<sup>99</sup> *A Confession of My Faith (Works, 2:597–99).*

<sup>100</sup> *Justification by an Imputed Righteousness (Works, 1:328).*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

To the unbeliever, the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ's righteousness alone contains both a note of warning and a note of invitation. Bunyan writes:

Ah how many thousands that can now glory that they were never troubled for sin against God, I say, how many be there that God will trouble worse than he troubled cursed Achan, because their peace, though false, and of the devil, was rather chosen by them than peace by Jesus Christ, than "peace with God by the blood of his cross." Awake, careless sinners, awake! And rise from the dead and Christ shall give you light. Content not yourselves with either sin or righteousness, if you be destitute of Jesus Christ, but cry, O cry to God for light to see your condition by; cry for light in the Word of God, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed. Cry therefore for light to see this righteousness by; it is a righteousness of Christ's finishing, of God's accepting and that which alone can save the soul from the stroke of eternal justice.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:333.

