

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton  
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ROMANS 4 v 16

"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by  
grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all  
the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to  
that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who  
is the father of us all"

The great leading theme of this chapter, as indeed of the whole epistle, is justification, a doctrine which is indeed most essential, not only to our eternal state, but to our happiness in this world. A doctrine little known perhaps; but as little known today as in almost any day since the Reformation, and yet, where it is known in the power of the Holy Ghost, it is the strength of the soul, the soul's delight, and peace, and steadiness, and comfort. Justification is either by works or absolutely gratuitous, by grace, that is. Paul puts it so in the beginning of the chapter. "For if Abraham were justified by works he hath whereof to glory, but not before God". He has something to say about, and for, himself; can say, I deserve to be declared just because I have met the law's requirements; I have answered to the claims of God upon me. But this boasting must be amongst men, not before God, for he has only done his duty. But, says Paul: "What saith the Scripture?" That is to decide the question whether Abraham was justified by works or by grace. "For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." So here the matter is decided, here it is declared, that justification is not by works but by grace and it is faith that receives this. So, dear friends, our standing before God is good or evil. If evil, it is because we are in our sins, and if we are in our sins and are never brought away from them, nor justified from them, then our case is woeful indeed, for we are under the curse, for "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are

written in the book of the law to do them." O, sinner, God make you think of this and feel it; that if you stand in your own works, be they as good as it is possible for you to do, remember that you are under the curse because your works are not perfect and God accepts nothing but what is perfect. He does not take account of a man's doing with sincerity the best he can, and then make up the rest. He will have a man absolutely perfect or He will count him absolutely lost. As he stands in himself, he is absolutely lost. If he is perfect, he stands in another, is justified by another. Do we ask ourselves the question as in God's sight, how we stand? Are we justified? Have we any apprehension of being justified? Justification in the righteousness of Christ becomes a living experience when it is brought into the heart by the Spirit. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith which we preach" that if thou shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (Romans 10 v 8/9) This is an experience that comes out of God's heart into the heart of a sinner; comes from heaven to earth, and is like the ladder which Jacob saw whose top was in heaven, whose bottom reaches the earth where sinners are. It is the great act of God passed on a sinner, conveyed to a sinner, whereby he is no longer, in God's account, a sinner, but a justified, a saved, person, standing in Christ, perfected by Christ, sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, cleansed from sin by the blood of Christ, so as that God Himself speaks to the person and says: "There is no spot in thee". I say again, that this doctrine becomes an experience, becomes the life of the soul, the light of the eye, the peace of the conscience, the stability of the mind. Look therefore at this, because there may be many things about us, and doubtless there are, and will be while we live, that are offensive, offensive to God, and, as we are light<sup>ened</sup> in our own souls, offensive to us. The most offensive of all, and what is the root of all, ~~is~~ unbelief. It is the most offensive of all sins to God because it doubts Him, questions His Word, and would make Him a liar. And, these things being in us, as apprehended and felt by us, cause weakness, and fear, and trouble, and that weakness, and that fear, and that trouble, can only be overcome and removed as justification is received into the heart and conscience by the Holy Ghost. If you are justified by your works you may boast, but not before God; cannot go to Him and thank Him for justification. You

may follow the Pharisee and thank God you are not as other men, but you can never unite with the Publican and bless God for justification. Brethren, this will be our standing, if we have it; the lack of it, our fall, our condemnation. Sin, that is to say, will eternally ruin us. The best experience therefore for us to be seeking after and asking the Lord to give to us, is the experience of being justified in the Person and righteousness of Jesus Christ, for "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness. And this will be a strength in affliction, a comfort in sorrow, and a sweet peace in the conscience against the accusations of the enemy, who accuses the brethren night and day before God. This is by grace, entirely gratuitous, free, "not of works lest any man should boast". If of works then away with grace; but if of grace, then banish works for ever, for they have no place here.

What an amazing thing! Who are the justified people? The Apostle, writing to the Corinthians, tells them of the kind of people who have no part in the kingdom of God; thieves, murderers, idolators, and all sorts of sinners. He says, these have no part in the kingdom of God. Well, there is nobody in this chapel who can hope on that ground ever to enter into the kingdom of God. But, says Paul, by the Spirit, continuing there: "And such were some of you" - what a wonderful thing to belong to these people - "Such were some of you, but ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Therefore justification is by God Himself, through Jesus Christ. He justifies the ungodly that believe in Jesus. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And this is the only standing in the sight of God that is good; the only ground of hope for eternity; the only peace of conscience that a sinner can ever properly feel. Plenty of peace that is not this, but this is the only peace that a sinner will find standing against all the wiles of the devil and the accusations of the accuser of the brethren, and the accusations of his own conscience, for when you are accused in your conscience, what can you say? If conscience says to you, after you have been trying to seek the Lord, you were not sincere in some of your petitions, your will was not straight with God's will, you wanted your own will in a particular thing; what will you say? If you, after prayer, hear conscience saying your love was partial, it

was not wholly set on God, you had something secret in your own breast which your love was set on; what would you say? If conscience says, when you were on your knees, you began to wander and gad about, and then you began to chatter and only to say words; you were not worshipping; then what will you say? If conscience says when you thought you were looking to God, you only followed Lot's wife, and looked back; what will you say? Conscience will accuse you and you will have nothing to say in contradiction. Then if you have no justification to fall back upon, no atoning blood to look to, and have no Spirit of God in you to bear witness of Christ's righteousness, nothing but condemnation can follow, for he that is guilty in one point is guilty of all. If you have broken the law you have broken it. So there is no peace for the conscience, no rest for the mind, but this, being justified freely by His grace. And then, that, brought home by the Spirit, will enable you to say to conscience: I own every charge and more than you have brought to me; I know the whole that you say and infinitely more and worse, but I fall on Christ's righteousness and look to that, and that alone, for my acquittal from all law charges, and all conscience charges, and everything that the accuser of the brethren can bring. I look to that to deliver me from all. This, brought home by the Spirit, will answer to that in the Corinthians which I have just quoted: "But ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God". The work of the Spirit does not add to Christ's righteousness, but it is a revelation of that righteousness, and the grace of the Spirit does sanctify the affections and deliver the soul from the bondage of corruption. This is the doctrine of the Apostle in this chapter, throughout this epistle. There is one righteousness only, one covering only. The King's daughter shall be brought to Him in raiment of needlework; her clothing is of wrought gold. A lot of broken, filthy threads we have, and if we try to put them into this robe, we shall fail, and our labour will be in vain. But if, without a thread; if, renouncing everything of that sort and kind, we are brought by the Holy Ghost to look to this wrought gold righteousness, to this precious, beautiful, wondrous, everlasting robe, seamless, and spotless, then we shall have whereof to glory in the sight of God. As Isaiah speaks: "Surely shall one say" - O happy one he is - "in the Lord have I righteousness and strength" Is he not happy? Is he not most blessed in his state? who can so speak, and so boast, saying:

"In the Lord make I my boast; my soul boasteth in the Lord." And, as Paul says: "Finally my brethren rejoice in the Lord and again I say rejoice".

Now the subordinate theme in this chapter is in the text - "Therefore it is of faith". I say, subordinate, not to depreciate the grace of faith, but only to, as enabled, put it in its proper place, for faith, acting in the Spirit's power on God as He reveals Himself in Christ, brings justification, as in the fifth chapter the Apostle opens it thus: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". This faith fastens in God. Mind that. See if you have faith. One evidence to yourself will be that it will fasten in God, that is, look to Him. Christ will be its life, its ground, its centre, its end. Christ, and Christ alone, will be the object of faith in respect of justification. Therefore, by the Lord's help, let us look at this great grace, faith. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace", not of works, but wholly of grace; what they used to call gratuitous justification; justification, purely and simply, by the grace of God; "to the end" - for this purpose - "that the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law" - that is, to the Jews - "but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham" who received the promise and the covenant before he was circumcised and before then, even while in uncircumcision, he had the promise of being made the father of many nations, God telling him that in Isaac should all nations of the earth be blessed." So here, through faith, by grace, the promise of eternal life is sure to all the seed of Abraham, not only to his natural children, but to all who follow his faith; his faith by which he was called the friend of God. Faith, a grace that ever stands on the side of God, that, if I may so put it, is the guardian of God's interests in the conscience; that gives God credit for every word He speaks; that looks to His power for the accomplishment of good promises, to His faithfulness; so that the sinner, in all his fallings and failings and imperfections, may be borne with and ultimately brought home to heaven. If the seeing eye be given to us by the eternal Spirit, then we shall get a view of God in Christ. Why is it that we are not more attracted to God? I will tell you; it is because we see so little in Him. And I can appeal to the experience of every child of God here and everywhere where I might reach by my voice

and say, now tell me when do you feel drawn, invincibly drawn, to God? And when, on the contrary, do you feel there is no drawing, rather an attraction to yourself and to the world, your own world? I am sure you will say when you feel attracted to God it is when you get some view of Him, when you see something in Him, when He is beautiful to you, altogether lovely; when you delight in Him and sit down under His shadow, and His fruit is sweet to your taste. Then you say. I do not want to move from here. You say

Here is all a God can give  
Here would I constantly abide  
And every moment live

Then you say, here I cast my care, here I find my hope, here is my nourishment, my delight, my peace. My prospects are bright when here, when I am getting near to Him. Here I find strength to bear, patience to wait, hope to look forward; expectation has its life and its strength here, nowhere else. And when do you feel no attraction? Just when, on the contrary, you have no view of God. It is like that in the Proverbs: Where no wood is the fire goes out, so where there is no vision the people perish. They perish in their earnestness in seeking; they perish in their fervency of spirit; they perish in the liveliness of their hope; they perish in the warmth of their affection; they perish in the brightness of their expectation. So faith is that grace which is as an eye set on God and, in this particular doctrine of justification, set on the righteousness of Christ. Is it not in the heart of some of you to seek, above all else, this righteousness? Whence come our gracious feelings? Do they not flow from this? Can there be wrought in us anything that is good by the Spirit, apart from justification? I do not mean that you will always apprehend being justified, but this, as a ground of all, produces this blessed experience that a child of God longs for. We want a broken heart; will anything produce it more effectually than the sense of being justified from all our sins? We want to feel love to God; will anything more provoke and stimulate it than feeling that God is the justifier of us through Jesus Christ, by faith? We want a bright hope; will anything produce it in us better and more effectually than feeling that now there is no condemnation to us, but that we are enabled to walk after the Spirit and mind the things of

the Spirit and not the things of the flesh? And so one might run through all the graces that are wrought in us and the sweet experiences we hope we have from time to time, and show how that they all have one source - God Himself as He is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. How important then is faith to apprehend this. Let me again speak of faith as the eye of the soul, and if it is in us, do we not see this great truth, that God can never bless us except He justify us? That, unless we are acquitted and brought from under the law, we remain under a curse, the curse of it. But that, on the contrary, if we are acquitted and brought from under the law, then we are under grace, and grace is concerned in us. Grace is concerned to bring us honourably through, concerned to strengthen us, concerned to supply us. Grace in God as a river is the source of all supply of all grace, of all experience. See then if you have this faith, this eye.

Now one may say, but I lack a great thing; I lack repentance. Now repentance comes from two sources in the people of God and indeed from one of the two you may find it. In many natural people repentance of a kind may come from sore natural conviction that things are not well, that you have done some evil thing or things and from an apprehension that you have broken God's law and therefore merit punishment, and that may make you repent, turn round in your feelings, and even to turn round in your conduct and make you seek justification by leaving off sin and doing righteously. And this repentance may be filled with terror, may be accompanied with hardness of heart, and may really issue in despair and cursing God. "They shall pass through it hardly bestead and hungry", and they shall look up and curse their king and their God. How many natural people have this? How many are driven from open wickedness into religion? How many are driven into Pharisaism by this, God only knows. May we not have this repentance. The other source of repentance is the goodness of God and "not knowing", says Paul in this epistle, "that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2 v 4). That is, men do not always know the source of that sweet repentance that makes a sinner hate his sins, not because there is a hell in which he is to be punished, but because God suffered; sin broke Christ's guiltless heart. Grace produces repentance; grace makes sinners sorry that they are sinners. "I said I will be sorry

for my sin". Now if you have true faith you will repent and God gives His people space to repent, and with the space, that is the time, He gives them to repent, He gives them the grace of repentance. O, how sweet it is to repent of sin, with a hope in God's mercy. Sweet are the tears we shed, in our spirits, if there are no tears trickling down our cheeks, when we are sorry before a good God that we are sinners. I would bless Him that He has given me repentance, and I am disposed to say that I never repented half as much in my early days as I do in these, my latter days. I live a good deal in the past nowadays, and see such causes of repentance for everything, and faith comes forth and grace comes and I can go to God often and say, I am sorry, I am truly sorry for this. And the stronger the hope is in the Lord, the stronger and the sweeter is repentance.

Nor is it such a dismal thing  
As 'tis by some men named;  
A sinner may repent and sing,  
Rejoice and be ashamed.

Faith apprehends justification, faith believes God. God says that He does not impute sin to the sinner, and the sinner, by faith, believes that. Says the Apostle here, "... David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin". Men may, but if God does not, things are well then. Your own conscience may accuse you and impute thousands of things to you, and that very justly, but if God says, I do not, how blessed you are. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin". Not because He sees nothing to impute, but because, though seeing thousands of things which He might impute, He puts them away; casts them behind His back into the depths of the sea and gives the sinner to look to Him and believe in Him. Concerning that which was naturally impossible Abraham believed God and when you have your faith strengthened so as to receive a full Christ for an empty sinner, a robe of righteousness for a sinner clothed with filthy garments, and the blood of Christ to wash away every stain, you will believe God, and your faith will bring this righteousness in, and you will find what Paul says to be true in the chapter I read. The word is nigh



thee". Thou art not to go over the sea to bring it; you are not to ascend on high to fetch it down nor descend into the deep to bring it up. The Scripture saith: "The word is nigh thee" The word of righteousness, the gospel which we preach, is nigh thee, in thy heart; that is the word of faith which we preach. O, what a blessing is true faith; faith in the bleeding Lamb. Therefore, 'tis of faith, and your faith, seeing this, will look at nothing else for justification; look for nothing of blessing except through this righteousness; look for no acceptance but in this righteousness; for no good experience but through this righteousness; for no sweet favours of God but by this righteousness. "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace"; that there shall be no mixture of grace and works, but wholly of grace, wholly of an imputed righteousness, the non imputation of sin, the non imputation of guilt and transgression and iniquity, but the putting away of all, and the bringing in of Jesus Christ into the soul as the only righteousness of the sinner. We speak of experience; what, in spirit, is it? What is it to have experience, but to have something of God in your soul? We speak of gracious feelings and what child of God does not want them? Each one would be filled with them if he might, day by day; but how do they come? By justification. A broken heart, a contrite spirit, a loving heart, a believing heart, a humble heart, one clothed with humility; all these blessings, these sweet graces, this rich experience, you will find comes, and comes alone, by the non imputation to you of your sins and the speaking of this from God's heart into your heart. That, coming direct from Him to you so that you shall say for yourself and not another: "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". Job got this one day in the midst of his darkness and trouble, so that he broke out in a different language from that which he had been speaking before, for he, just before, had said, if God spoke to him he would not believe it. Now, says he, "I know that my Redeemer liveth". I know it; I have seen Him, and I shall stand one day in His sight, "and though, after my skin worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". Balaam had some vision of this, but not for himself, nor very nigh. "I shall see Him but not nigh". That wont satisfy a child of God. I want Job's faith, Job's appropriation of things. "Whom I shall see for myself .....and not another". It is all faith. Faith makes her boast in the Lord, and in the Lord alone, saying: "Surely in the Lord have I

righteousness and strength".

"To the end the promise might be sure". Promise of eternal life. If it were of works, how could it be sure? because by Ezekiel the Lord says: If a righteous man shall sin then his righteousness shall not be counted to him; it stands for nothing. That is just according to the teaching of the Spirit in James. "He that is guilty in one point is guilty of all". He that fails in one single thing; let him just turn from loving God with his whole heart to selfishness and the loss of love; he is guilty of the whole law. So the promise could not be sure on the ground of works. It could not be sure to you, to me, on that ground. But, if justified by the grace of God, freely, then the promise is sure and sure to faith; sure in God, who cannot lie. Sure to faith that receives this God. So, as Abraham, he did not count a natural impossibility to stand in the way, for he was strong in faith and staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. "That it might be sure to all the seed", Jew and Gentile alike here, for the privilege of the Jew did not exist when God justified Abraham. He received that which characterised the Jew ever afterward as a seal of the promise which he had received. He had not the promise that he had that seal; it would not have been a seal then; but, having the promise, he got the seal, and so the promise is to all the seed, Jew and Gentile, for Abraham was promised to be the father of many nations. (Genesis 17) "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed", and thy name shall be no more Abram, but Abraham, for I will make thee a father of many nations. Well, what a wonder if God has pulled us in, poor Gentiles, and I think I may say here, it was not without very great and merciful significance that the Lord brought Gentiles into the ancestors of Christ after the flesh. Ruth the Moabitess was the mother of Obed who begat Jesse. And you will find that when God will bring a Gentile in - and O, what Gentiles He has brought in; what Gentiles He has had in this blessed nation, formerly blessed, and what nations are yet to come in - the promise is sure to all the seed, and some of them in this chapel. What praises we owe to God, what praises we owe to the Trinity, to electing love, to redeeming blood, to justifying grace by the Spirit. O what praises we owe. We have something to glory in my friends, before God. Not works, but justification. Not good deeds, good tempers nor frames, but justification by grace; that is what we have to boast of. May we

glory in God and have this suitable ground to stand on, this Rock to build on, to build a building on, that no wind or waves beating against it shall move it, being justified freely by His grace. He wont change; He cannot. We can change and do change many times in the day. Now humble, now proud; now tender, now hard; now earnestly seeking, then falling away into sleep. O, the changes that some of us pass through. One minute casting all care on God with sincerity, as we think, and the next finding our hearts just burdened with care, corroding care. What changes. But here is a God who says: I knew thee; I knew that thou wouldest deal treacherously; I knew that thou wouldest profane My holy Name; I knew that thou wouldest do these things. Yet the promise is sure, and it is so sure as that it shall bring repentance to you and fill you with all joy and peace in believing that your sins are put away; in believing that I am your God and Saviour; in believing that I will guide you with Mine eye; in believing that I will never leave you nor forsake you. "That the promise might be sure".

My friends, Christ paid the greatest price possible for the worst possible sinners and when these two things meet in a sinner then glory goes to God and peace fills the conscience. Then true religion is possessed. Then a prospect of good, prospect for eternity, is found and felt. Then the soul delights itself in God. May I say to you in conclusion, dear friends who fear the Lord, seek this grand doctrine as an experience in your own souls, namely justification by the free grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Then all the sweet experiences that you desire shall flow, sweetly grow in your heart as from a good root, and you will bless God. The Lord grant it may be so.

AMEN.