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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

MANIFOLD JUSTIFICATION.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 31ST MARCH, 1867, BY
MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Faith without works is dead.”—James ii. 26.

THE apostle James is in this chapter, as well as in some other parts of his epistle, reasoning out the completeness of the character of the Christian through the many departments in which, that the Christian may be complete, he is to be justified; and one of these departments is that of his own personal works. So that, when the matter is rightly understood, we shall see a complete harmony between the apostles Paul and James. And you will observe that the prophets in all ages, and also the apostles, and the Lord himself, aimed at this,—to see the people complete in their character. Hence the apostle saith, “That the man of God may be perfect, furnished unto all good works;” and in another scripture, “That ye may stand complete in all the will of God.” Those, therefore, who have not those works that the Lord has set before us in his word as characterizing those who are saved, are dead, and therefore must be “with devil damned.” “Devils believe, and tremble too;” but Satan cannot do works acceptable to God, because Satan cannot love him. I shall, therefore, this morning make it my sole business through nearly the whole of my sermon to point out *the completeness of the character of the Christian*; and in so doing, we shall have to notice one department after another of justification.

The first department I notice of justification is that spoken of by the apostle Paul, when he saith, “We are justified by faith without works;” and in another scripture, “Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The first good work of faith is to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true, when a sinner is led to know the Lord, and to cry for mercy, it may be some considerable time before he clearly understands the way in which he is justified before God, and the way in which he is accepted of God; but this does not hinder his seeking, and the way is opened up to him from time to time. Now, to be justified before God essentially is to be put right with God—to be made righteous in the sight of God. How is this done? First, by imputation; namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ was made under the law of God, and that he was made there substitutionally—that he was not there for himself, but that he came under that law for others, and that he became a debtor to do the whole law. He therefore lived that wonderful life of perfect love to God and to man; and that life which he lived had in it all the excellency of his eternal deity, as well as the perfection of purity in his manhood. That righteous life, or that righteousness, is called “everlast-

ing righteousness,"—"He shall bring in everlasting righteousness." Now, one step towards peace with God is to believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord our righteousness. "This is his name whereby he shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness." But this is only a part of our essential justification before God. We take into connection with this his atonement as well. We are justified by his blood; as saith the apostle in the 5th of Romans, "Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." This life of Christ, and this atonement, or this death which he died, in which, as we have been reading, the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all,—Jesus Christ did in his death compass and roll together in his own person all the penalties of sin, and was thus made sin, representatively, for us. He stood there before God to represent sin. He was not made sin as partaking of any of its properties, but he was made sin representatively. He stood there to represent sin; and he was also made a curse representatively, and there it was that the curse was endured; so that he did compass and suffer all that sin had entailed. Now this work of Christ, his life and his death both put together, make up a complete and eternal reconciliation to God. This was imputed, or set to the account of, the people even before the world was, for they were blessed with all spiritual blessings; and I am sure this substitutional work is the essential, spiritual blessing before the world was, according as they were chosen in him, to be, by this work, in due time, holy and without blame before God in love. When a sinner is brought, then, to where the publican was, with "God be merciful to me a sinner," faith in Jesus Christ is the end of the law and of sin, this is the way of reconciliation to God—"reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Now, there can be no works here, any farther than this is the work of faith; and we shall have to notice many spiritual works of faith as we go on this morning. There is no creature-work here. The work of faith is to receive Jesus Christ in what he hath done. And when Jesus Christ is thus received, such persons are the sons of God. "To them gave he power to become sons" and heirs "of God," without any works whatever; it is all of grace, according to the riches of his grace. If we are called to a knowledge of him, we are called by grace; and if we are made to enjoy his presence, it is by the riches of his grace. There is no room for works here; here the soul is eternally saved independent of works altogether, but simply by the work of Christ and this work of the Holy Spirit. Here we have salvation complete. Hence it is, if persons are so placed, if they are of such a character that they cannot by possibility perform any good works, or if persons are so placed that they cannot by possibility perform any of the works I shall have to lay before you presently, they nevertheless are as completely, as triumphantly, and as certainly saved by this work of Jesus Christ, without any work of the creature, as completely so as those that might have lived a long life of practical good works before God. Take the thief on the cross;—he received Jesus Christ; he is not so placed as to follow the good works of the Christian, but he is as completely saved by this perfect work of Christ (for nothing else is essential to eternal salvation) as the oldest Christian that ever was. Then, again, in the eleventh hour I am called upon, you are called upon, to go and visit a man or a woman just sinking into the arms of death. Just as they are dying, the Lord in mercy opens their eyes for the first time in their lives to see what and where they are; and they shudder at the Jordan, they dread eternity, they fear the Great Judge of all; their sins, and their condition by those sins, appear to them now in their true character. Ah, can I see any Christian or minister that can tell me whether there is any hope for me or not? You go, or I go. We at once tell them of what Christ has done, of that completeness that is in him, of the freeness and the greatness of the grace of God. And we will suppose that the Lord attends

the testimony with some degree of power, that their eyes are opened, they see, they begin to have a hope; and we have had instances of their being thus called at the eleventh hour, and made, before they left the world, as happy as they were before miserable. Pardoning, saving, triumphant mercy has rolled into the soul, and the man that just now seemed to be half in hell is now almost in heaven. Here, then, we have the great truth that there is complete salvation, reconciliation to God, justification, and eternal glorification, without any work of the creature, save that of faith in Christ; and that is not a creature work, it is a Christian work; it is the work of the Holy Spirit, the gift of God. See, then, how suited this salvation is—without works. Now, that faith which thus receives Christ is not dead. The faith by which the thief received Christ was not dead, but living faith; the faith by which the dying man thus receives Christ is not dead, but living faith. Then we take another class—infants. In the 31st of Jeremiah there is a promise to infants, that they should come again from the land of the enemy. If you cannot psychologically or metaphysically, you can theologically almost understand how an infant can thus be saved. Here is an infant dying; and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the notice of the great Creator, much less can an immortal soul transit from time to eternity without his observation. You may at once see, then, that the Holy Spirit takes possession of the soul of this infant; implants, though the infant is unconscious of it, in that soul that described by the apostle Peter,—“Born again of an incorruptible seed, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Indeed, the adult is as passive in regeneration as the infant. You that know the Lord, you knew nothing of the moment, and even now you know not the moment when the Holy Spirit implanted vitally the truth of God in your soul. You knew it by its effects, but you knew not the moment; you were passive in it. And so the infant; the Holy Spirit thus takes possession of the infant, and by uniting the infant’s soul to the eternal perfection of Christ’s righteousness and atonement, that infant enters triumphantly into heaven as ever did any prophet or apostle, because it enters entirely by the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ. May the Lord give us to understand more and more of the suitability of his mercy, and the manner of that mercy; of the suitability and infinite importance of his salvation, and the manner of that salvation! Why, if you could find out a case to which this salvation could not adapt itself, that would circumscribe the Saviour’s mission. He says, “Preach the gospel to every creature;” and we go with it, asking this question, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Thus, then, the saints of God, or believers, let the circumstances be what they may—whether the thief on the cross, the man at the eleventh hour, the infant, or the established Christian—they all stand alike complete in Christ, and saved by grace from first to last.

But having said so much for the sake of making matters as clear as possible, we will now go on to five or six other departments belonging to this great subject. We will suppose that you are thus reconciled to God, that through grace you have received Jesus Christ; for you read of Barnabas helping them much that had believed through grace, because where there is a believing through grace, there is a conviction of sin, and your need of Christ as the way of reconciliation to God. I will now go on to tell such a person what he is to do. I do not know that I can tell what you are to do in that precise order in which you are to do it, and therefore by your better understanding of your own experience you must make up my deficiency. Now, supposing you are thus reconciled to God and receive Jesus Christ, the next thing you will have to do will be to stand out for and to justify God’s truth. In Matthew xi. 19, the Saviour gives us some instruction upon this. The people in that day considered that the Saviour’s doctrines led to sin—yea, that they were sinful, that they were dangerous; that he himself was a bad character. Well, John the

Baptist came rather cynically, I was going to say rather rigidly; what do you say to him? Why, they said, "He hath a devil." What made them say that? Because of the doctrines he preached. "The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Now, they meant by this that his doctrines were bad, therefore himself could not be good. Before I notice his answer, let me stay for one moment. Leaving out profane or common church history, and taking the Bible for your guide, has it not been so in all ages—that God's truth has been reckoned dangerous? The consequence is, that men have always been adopting something else. Hence the ancient idols: hence the more modern human traditions and inventions. And even to this day those that love the truth are called high doctrine, Antinomians, and I do not know what besides. Well, if they call the Master of the house Beelzebub, the servants must not expect to be better treated. But let us take the answer. The answer is beautiful. He says, "But wisdom is justified of her children." Now, I take the word "wisdom" there to mean the gospel, because the gospel is declarative of the wisdom of God as displayed in salvation. When Luke takes this up in his 7th chapter, he saith, "Wisdom is justified of *all* her children." The reason I take wisdom there to mean the gospel is that scripture in 1 Cor. ii., where the apostle saith, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." Now they certainly did speak the gospel, which is there called the wisdom of God, in a mystery—"even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory." I therefore take the wisdom there to mean that wisdom that was set up from everlasting, that gospel wherein the Lord's wisdom is manifest. And he has shown his wisdom in such an endearing form: nowhere as in the great contrivance of Christ's complexity, Christ's substitution, our reconciliation to himself, and our eternal glorification by what the dear Saviour hath done. "Wisdom is justified of all her children." Oh, how well prepared we are to bear testimony that the doctrine of immutable love is pure as God himself; that the doctrine of absolute and eternal election is pure as God himself; that divine predestination is a predestination from all evil unto all that is good; that the eternity of Christ's righteousness is a doctrine pure as the heavens; that the eternity of that perfection we have in Christ is a holy doctrine. So of the promises, so of the precepts, so of the whole from first to last. Therefore, "wisdom is justified of her children." I know that everlasting love loved my soul out of all sin; I know that eternal election chose my soul out of all sin; I know that Divine predestination predestinated my soul out of all the evil; I know that the righteousness of Jesus Christ delivers from all evil, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; I know that the work of the Holy Spirit is to give life to the soul, form it to God, consecrate it to God; and that therefore "wisdom"—this glorious gospel—"is justified of all her children." But if there are those that know not their need of such a gospel, they are enraged by it, offended with it, and run away from it. Is that the gospel's fault? Would you blame the Saviour because the multitude you read of in the 6th of John went back, and walked no more with him. Now, my hearer, where are you? If you are reconciled to God rightly you will be prepared to justify his gospel, you will stand out for his truth, and you will see that there was no unkind, no unchristian, no improper feeling in the mind of the holy apostle when he said, "If an angel from heaven bring any other gospel, let him be accursed." And if your faith be a living faith, this is one of its works. For remember this, you that have a hope in the Lord, you are set for the defence of the gospel; that may be an unpleasant department, but you are. There are some ministers in our day, they preach the gospel in a certain way, but they do not defend it; let all error alone, and let Satan just have his own way. Whereas, those who are taught of God

must defend the truth. Why, the prophets had to defend the truth unto death; Christ had to defend the truth unto death; the martyrs defended the truth unto death. And, besides, if you know the value of this gospel, of the wisdom of God shown in this gospel, you will stand by it. You will say, Better let everything go than let that go. Thus you will be one of wisdom's children, and will justify wisdom in all it has done—you will justify the gospel.

The next work of faith that I name is that you will also have to justify God. Hence, in the 51st Psalm, which you must read carefully, or else you will be led into one of the worst doctrines you can be lead into—in that psalm you have these words, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Am I to understand that David did wrong in order to make God right? Am I to understand that David sinned in order to justify God? I should be very sorry to be so lost as to receive such a notion as that. There are two things that have done great injury to that 51st Psalm. The one is the superscription at the head of it, which has no business there. Some knowing, conceited Pharisee put that superscription; and fixed the psalm as relating to a painful circumstance in David's life; whereas we have no evidence that David himself wrote the psalm. That is one thing that has injured that psalm. Ah, he (the Pharisee) says, this is a psalm under fearful circumstances. I happen myself very much to question whether David wrote that psalm at all. The next thing that has injured it is one word in the verse I have quoted,—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight.” The word *this* ought not to be there. Our translators have given it in italics, and the verse ought to read thus:—“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight.” Now, if I understand the verse, it means this:—Lord, I make this confession; thou hast condemned the whole human race; thou has declared of us all that there is none righteous, no, not one; none that doeth good, no, not one. I see and feel that I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me; I therefore do confess that thy judgment is right and just. He confessed the evil as an honest man, and thereby justified God in the judgment he had passed. And when you are brought to justify God in the judgment he passes upon you, you will then go on to justify him in the way in which he saves you—namely, by his grace. Thus we are to justify the ways of God to man. But I may notice that there is a verse in this 51st Psalm that some may say is a little difficult. Yes; the superscription over that psalm makes it difficult. “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.” They say,—There, that is no doubt David referring to the murder he committed. I very much question it. Well, but can every one say that? Yes, sir; there is not a man or a woman now within the sound of my voice but is by nature guilty of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are murderers of the Saviour, every one of you; as sinners, considered apart from God's grace, it can be charged home upon your consciences that you have slain the Lord of life and glory. If you have not done it personally, you have done it tacitly; you have by your carnal enmity consented to the deed, as every carnal mind does; and thus the best man as well as the worst may pray, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness.” Mark further, he that is angry is a murderer. And therefore it is a prayer to be delivered from the guilt of our enmity, and a prayer to be delivered from the enmity itself; that I may cease to be a murderer of Christ; that I may cease to be an enemy to Christ and become his friend. “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness;” having reconciled me to thyself, I will justify thy sentence against

me as a sinner, and I will justify thee in the way thou hast sovereignly and eternally saved my soul.

But next there comes the justification of Jesus Christ. I suppose it was one of the sweetest feelings the Saviour had, and nothing perhaps more supporting than this, that he always felt justified in everything he thought, in everything he said, and in everything he did. Hence saith the apostle, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit. I do always those things that please him." So you will be pleased with all the Saviour did. Then, fifthly, there is the justification of your hope. What justifies you in looking for eternal life by Jesus Christ? What justifies you in believing you shall never die, that is, spiritually so; believing you cannot be lost? You need the justification of your hope. If I hope for something, I must have a reason that will justify my hoping for that something, or else my hope is mere fancy. What is that which justifies our hope? The answer is, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; "He rose again for our justification;" that is, we should not be justified in looking for eternal life by him, in looking for the eternal inheritance by him, if he had not risen from the dead. If Christ be not risen, there is no resurrection; if Christ be not risen, why then your faith is vain, and you are yet in your sins; if Christ be not risen, why then they that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished; if Christ be not risen, why then we are of all men the most miserable, if we have hope only in this life: as though the apostle should say,—To suffer what we do, and undergo what we do, all just for this mortal life, why, we should be the greatest fools and the most miserable of men. But now is Christ risen, therefore your faith is not in vain; now is Christ risen, therefore ye are not in your sins; now is Christ risen, therefore we are not false witnesses, and our preaching is not in vain; now is Christ risen, and therefore they that are fallen asleep in him have not perished; now is Christ risen, and so we are not of all men the most miserable, but of all men the most happy, and would not change our position for any monarch upon earth or angel in heaven. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord; happy is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his help."

The next work of faith to show that it is a living faith is that it is to act by principle; to walk by principle, and not by persons. If you take a person for your guide, let him be who he may, he may go wrong, and if that person go wrong, you go wrong; and when that person dies, depend upon it your religion will die. Therefore the apostle saith, "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to persons," but take principle. Now suppose the Israelites had, to a man, let the ruler, the judge, the king, be he who he may, taken this principle for their guide,—namely, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself,"—why, if the Israelites to a man had adopted that principle they would always have gone right; and if they had had the very devil on their throne as king, they would not have followed that king. But alas! alas! they lost sight of this principle, and followed the ruler. If they had a good ruler, they went somewhat straight; if they had a bad ruler they went wrong. Therefore, here is the danger of taking persons for our guide. Let principles be our guide; the truth of God be our guide; the great principle of faith in Christ in his perfection, and in God in his immutability, and then we are sure to go right. Principles are unalterable; persons change and die. Then this principle also will cause you to lose sight of the providential, natural acquirements and other distinctions among Christians. Hence the business of the minister is not to divide the world into Whigs and Tories, Radicals or Democrats; the business of the minister is not to divide the world into male and female, or into learned and unlearned, or into rich

and poor,—the business of the minister is to divide the world into saints and sinners; that is his business, and he must keep to that. And so, when you meet with a person, it is not for you to ask whether he is rich or poor, learned or unlearned; your question must be, Does he know the truth? does he love the truth? does he stand out for the truth? Let him be as poor as he may, let him be what he may in nature, in circumstances, or in other respects, the great principle of receiving persons should be their standing manifest to us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for all the members are alike to him. Therefore will he say at the last day to those whose faith had in it this principle of Christian sympathy to his people, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." This is a very solemn scripture for those of you that have it in your power, and yet never do practise any sympathy in this respect. It is an awful thing. But I ought not to speak reproachfully, and I will not even reprovably, for I desire to bless the Lord for that great sympathy that you have manifested now for so many years towards the poor. I do not believe there is another cause upon the face of the earth with the same number of people that, upon the whole, do more for the poor than you have done, besides those burdens and draws that are upon you. Well, do not repine, do not fret under it. Why, you know that in giving to a poor man in the name of Christ you give to Christ. What is done unto his brethren is done unto him. Thus, then, saith James, "If ye say, Be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body,"—if you have it in your power to do so—"what doth it profit? Even so, faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone." You can hardly imagine the thrill that will run through the soul of every practical Christian at the last day, on hearing the words, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." There is no merit in anything we do; no, not the slightest; but such is the Lord's order of things that he attaches great importance to our little services, and even a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple shall in no wise lose its reward. Thus, then, if thy faith hath no brotherly, practical sympathy with the poor and with the cause of God, having it in thy power by the kind providence of God, then thy faith is dead. Ah, saith one, yes, I have it in my power, but I have worked hard for it. And pray, who gave you the health? pray who gave you an ingenuity superior to some of your fellows? pray who has given you success? How is it that your humble servant has preached the gospel now forty years, and here he is, favoured and blessed? Who has given me the grace, who has kept me somewhat diligent, and who has kept me firm? Who has attended the word, who has blessed the people, who has brought the people? Though I cannot say, in relation to my brethren, that I have been more abundant in my humble labours, I can say that whatever has been done, I will say, "Not I, but the grace of God that is with me." Now I am not, in speaking of practical sympathy with the poor, advocating laziness. I am fully aware there are some people that do need a downright stirring up; I know laziness is a disease with some, and even a crime. Now Paul's remedy is the best medicine, and you can get it for nothing. There is a great deal said about curing diseases in advertisements, and I will just give an advertisement this morning of a remedy for idleness. And the remedy is this,—that "if any will not"—it does not say, cannot—"work, neither shall he eat." And if that does not cure a man he will have to be turned out incurable. It is sure to cure him one way or another; it will either make him work, or else he must die. You must either work or die; which will you do? He may go about it rather unwillingly at first, but when once he is roused up, his eyes opened, his energies awakened, why, he will say, Hard work is better than I thought it was; and he will soon discover that hard work is the

best fun in the world. But while I speak thus, we must remember that there will always be some people poor, from bodily affliction, or some unavoidable cause or another. There are a great many that are what we term unfortunate. Everything they put their hands to they are pretty sure to make a bungle of. I recollect one of our hearers once; he never went out of his house without falling down. At last he bought a cart, then he fell out of that, then he fell out of it again. And he fell out of his cart one day, and so injured himself that he died; but mercy gave even this affliction a grace, and reconciled the good man to his lot. When I was there at the grave, I thought within myself, It is ten to one if he has had all his falls yet; it is not very likely that he will go into the grave like other people; he will no doubt keep up his old way. I had hardly thought the words, when away went the coffin end over end right into the grave. Why, I thought, what a peculiar thing! he has followed up his plan to the last. Now, misfortune will attend some, do whatever they may; and we are not to make these misfortunes a reason why we should not practically sympathize with deserving objects. So, then, our faith will carry us into good works.

Justification by works means this:—You profess to belong to Jesus Christ. Yes. Well, then, I say you are not justified in making that profession unless your works accord with your profession. You are not justified in making that profession of Christ except you walk as he walked; you are not justified in making that profession unless your faith receive Christ; stand out for the truth, justify God, justify Christ, sympathize with the poor of his people and with his cause. If these are not your works, then you make a profession, but your works belie it. But if your works do not belie that profession, then your profession is real; it is living faith, living acts, and living doings. “Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” That is the best way. Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son; and by works was his faith made perfect. Now, Abraham, you believe in God’s sworn promise. Yes. And in the work of the great Melchisedec, as imputed to you for righteousness? Yes. And you stand thus as the friend of God? Yes. Suppose he should call upon you to part with your son? Then by his grace I would do it. And so he did; he was prepared to do it, and would have done it actually, as you know, if the Lord had not stepped in at the moment. Now, Abraham, I know that thou art my friend; now I have tried thee; now I know that thou fearest me. Thy son shall not die; here is a substitute for him. “Was not Abraham justified by works?” He professed to love his covenant God before everything, and when put to the test his faith proved real; the Lord renewed his promise to him:—“In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

“Likewise, also, was not Rahab the harlot justified by works?” She professed to believe in the God of the Hebrews; she professed to believe in the certainty of his purpose and promise. Now, then, if she professed that, did her works belie her profession? No; she was justified by her works in making that profession. She received the spies in the name of the Lord. When she saw their danger (for her very heart was with them; she loved them as men of God, and she loved the God of the messengers) she hid them; and then strategically, elusively, dexterously, and effectually warded off the demands of the murderous king of Jericho. What was the use of her hiding the spies if she had betrayed them? She therefore, by that wisdom of the serpent united with the dove which the Holy Ghost blessed her with, stood by them. Had she feared man she would have fallen in with the messengers of the king of Jericho, and gained all the honour she could from him by betraying these dangerous men. But no; at the risk of her life, in the fear of God, she warded off the demands of the murderous king of Jericho.