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# The Doctrine in the Experience and Thought of St. Paul

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**I**N studying the doctrine of justification by faith, we are studying a picture much more than a theory. That is the first important lesson which we must learn about the doctrine. I learnt it first myself when I read the brilliant description by Deissman of the scenes which St. Paul borrows from contemporary life to illustrate his central experience and teaching of the forgiveness of Christ. His use of his metaphors is more theoretic and less graphic than are the parables of Christ. For that reason we are apt to theorise about them as dogmas rather than treat them as metaphors or parables. But essentially the doctrine of justification is of the same nature as a parable, in that it is one illustration amongst many all pointing to the same underlying experience of new life in Christ.

Before we go on to the detailed study of the particular picture of justification we will pause and ask what are the central dominant themes, which recur in one form or another in all these pictures as St. Paul uses them. It will, I think, help us to understand the meaning of justification both in St. Paul and in later doctrine if we recognise clearly as we start that it is one among a number of pictures, all illustrating various sides of a single underlying experience.

## I

We can distinguish five strands or themes in the Pauline doctrine of Atonement. There is first what Professor Brunner calls the No of God, or the Wrath of God against the guilt of man. Within this theme we can trace certain subordinate elements. St. Paul had made every effort which a devout Pharisee could make to attain righteousness by following the Jewish moral and ritual code. He could write at a later day from his own experience, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. iii. 21). But the law had proved powerless, and at heart he knew that his outward veneer of Pharisaic respectability hid an inward knowledge of guilt. The words of St. Stephen struck home to this secret knowledge of shame: "They have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law, . . . and have not kept it" (Acts vii. 52, 53). Sabatier comments on this verse, "Here was a radical condemnation of Judaism, which the Pharisees had not heard since the days of Jesus".

With a profoundly important psychological insight, which St. Paul shares with the Fourth Gospel, he sees that the effects of the knowledge of the good is not to make us good, but only to make us aware of our evil. Jesus declares in the Fourth Gospel, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin

remaineth" (John ix. 41). St. Paul discovers this truth and writes, "Where no law is, there is no transgression. . . . The law entered, that the offence might abound" (Rom. iv. 15 and v. 20). Here incidentally we see the fallacy of all merely exemplarist doctrines of the Atonement. If all we had in Christ was the perfect example of love, it would merely raise to the highest point the ideal before our eyes, and thereby enforce in deepest measure our knowledge of our failure to attain that ideal. Worse still, with a further psychological insight St. Paul sees that the law may even entice to the very evil it condemns. "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence" (Rom. vii. 7, 8). This is a very important principle in all pastoral work and education; our advice may and often does result simply in suggesting to people the attractiveness of the very sins against which we are warning them. We reach the conclusion, which Luther somewhere declares to be the central point of Holy Scripture: "There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 10 and 23).

The second theme we can distinguish is that of the vicarious cost of sin. This was the solution of the problem of evil discovered by the Second Isaiah under the stress of the Babylonian exile. He pictures his people in captivity as the Suffering Servant, and writes: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah liii. 5, 6). Quite evidently our Lord pondered on the picture of the Suffering Servant, and saw His own Messianic mission in these terms. In point of actual fact the words are fulfilled in the Cross. The sin lies with those who stand around the Cross, Pilate, the High Priest, Judas, the disciples who deny and flee and betray; the cost of the sin is borne in bodily pain and deeper pain of heart by the Christ upon the Cross. This scene is then re-enacted in the martyrdom of Stephen, when "they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts vii. 58). And the lesson went home, that the cost of the sin of which he is conscious is borne ultimately by the Christ on the Cross. This fact of the vicarious cost must have been pointed out and explained to St. Paul by other disciples in the early Christian church, since he writes of it: "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. xv. 3). St. Paul writes himself in I Thessalonians, "who died for us" (I Thess. v. 10), and again in Galatians "who gave himself for our sins" (Gal. i. 4). This theme of the vicarious cost reaches its highest expression in a saying which gives most vividly the central mystery of the Atonement: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. v. 21).

We now reach the third of the themes in the Atonement, which Professor Brunner calls the Yes of God, and which Karl Barth calls in one place *Das Trotzdem*, the Nevertheless of the Love of God to the Sin of Man. Although we are unworthy of God's love, He forgives

and continues to love. He loves us in our sin, not because of what we are but despite what we are. From the crucified Christ we hear the cry, which to me seems the central turning point in history: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23. 34). Here again this word from the cross is re-enacted before the eyes of Saul, when Stephen died with the similar cry, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts vii. 60). There is a very interesting comment on this verse in a sermon of St. Augustine (Sermon 382, 11). "If Stephen had not prayed, the Church would never have had Saul." St. Paul in later life develops the sense of the forgiveness of God with exactly the same shade of meaning that he had heard in Stephen's cry. He borrows from the Psalms a verse in illustration: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. iv. 7-8 quoting Psalms xxxii. 1-2). He had already written in II Corinthians, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Cor. v. 19). We shall notice presently how these verses occur in close connection with the preaching on justification.

Before we leave this theme of forgiveness, we may notice one or two subsidiary points. St. Paul always regards it as a definite past act, proclaimed once for all in Christ. This comes out in his constant use of the aorist tense in passages on the Atonement. The forgiveness like the guilt is universal. "God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. xi. 32). Atonement requires with the logical necessity of a syllogism the doctrine of the Incarnation. Sin is defiance of God's laws, and only God has the right to forgive. The Pharisees were quite right, when they said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark ii. 7). In Christ St. Paul knew that he had in fact found forgiveness; therefore necessarily there follows the first simple statement of the Incarnation, "God was in Christ".

This brings us to our fourth theme, the acceptance of faith that God has in fact spoken His forgiveness, and the resulting penitence before Him. We notice that faith followed by penitence is the order, both in fact and in logic and in spiritual experience. In Professor Brunner's exposition of the Atonement, the Yes of God in forgiveness implies an underlying No against the sin that needs forgiveness. To accept the forgiveness is at the same time to acknowledge the sin that needs forgiveness. So long as we resist forgiveness, we repress acknowledgment of the sin which requires penitence. St. Paul has been "kicking against the pricks" of conscience (Acts ix. 5) for some time before he accepts the Christ in the vision on the Damascus road. Once there is this acceptance, then open penitence follows.

At first sight this seems the wrong order. We are so used in the Anglican Office and Liturgy to repeat first the Confession and then the Absolution, that we feel that penitence comes first. Actually it is interesting to observe how in Moslem and other non-Christian lands, where there has not yet been acceptance of the forgiveness of God in Christ, deceit is prevalent and it is difficult for them to own up to wrongdoing. In Christian experience the fact of Absolution makes penitence

and confession possible. This order is clearly expressed in one saying of St. Paul, "not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. ii. 4). After his conversion he can say, what he could never have said before it, ". . . sinners, of whom I am the chief" (Tim. i. 15). This acknowledgment of sin is of profound psychological importance. There comes the healing of a split personality, when we learn to say "I" with regard to the acts and memories of which we are ashamed, instead of driving them from our consciousness and saying "not really me". It is the first step in psychological healing when we cease to "resist evil" (Matthew v. 39), and accept our nature as it really is.

Finally, we come to the fifth and last of our themes, which we may call the resulting ethic. Here also there is a change of direction. In pre-Christian experience we strive to be good in order that we may earn the favour of God. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. x. 3). In post-Christian experience the favour of God comes first unearned; it then lays upon us a new constraint to respond to His mercy by our own works of love. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Cor. v. 14). It is interesting and important to notice this sanction of Grace, in a day when in much wider circles in the welfare state we are asking what ultimate sanction will produce a high level of service and work when we have removed the sanctions of poverty and fear.

The prior love of God raises the possibility that if we receive His favour whatever we do, we can continue in evil and sin does not matter. We have not understood the doctrine of the Atonement, unless we have come to the place where all forms of moralism are swept away, and we can at least ask, "Shall we continue in sin?" (Rom. vi. 1). But if we have really faced the love of God, we shall answer, "God forbid" (Rom. vi. 2). In fact, the love and forgiveness of Christ lays upon us a constraint to respond with gratitude and to show a like love and forgiveness toward our fellow-men. "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. iii. 13). "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake (or better, God in Christ) hath forgiven you. . . . Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. iv. 32 and v. 2.) For the disciple as for the Master this life of forgiveness will involve vicarious suffering. "Ye are partakers of the sufferings" (II Cor i. 7). "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil. i. 29). This theme reaches its highest point in the saying, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. i. 24).

## II

With this background we may now ask how these five themes are illustrated by the picture of justification, and how in turn they help us to interpret that doctrine. We shall find that three of them, the sense of guilt, the sense of forgiveness and the response of faith, are specially clear and dominant in this metaphor, which is the reason why

it became a favourite in St. Paul's teaching. One theme, the resulting ethic, is retained and acquires a special shade of meaning. One theme, vicarious suffering, is lacking altogether in this metaphor. For that reason St. Paul mixes his metaphors in order to retain the reality of the vicarious suffering. The recognition of this mixing of metaphors will help us to understand the place given to the merits of Christ in the doctrine of justification.

Before we proceed to the closer analysis of the Pauline doctrine of justification, it may be helpful to bring together the relevant passages. We will give them in the Authorised Translation, merely noticing that in all cases justification corresponds to some part or derivative of the same Greek word. First let us notice and set aside two places, which may be interesting for the meaning of the word, but which do not explicitly refer to the doctrine we are studying. In the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul quotes from Psalm li. : "That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest be overcome when thou art judged" (Rom. iii. 4). The parallelism suggests a scene of judgment; the meaning appears to be, "shown or proved to be right". In I Timothy, if it is Pauline, there is the saying, probably in a quotation from an early Christian hymn: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit" (I Tim. iii. 16).

We will now collect the biblical sayings which are relevant for the doctrine of justification. We will put at the head a saying, not of St. Paul, but of our Lord, in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke xviii. 14). Then we have a saying from a speech of St. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (xiii. 38, 39). The sayings in the Epistles are as follows, quoted in the order in which they may probably have been written. In studying them, particular notice should be taken of the mixing and interplay of metaphors: Galatians ii. 16; iii. 8, 11; v. 4; I Corinthians iv. 3, 4; vi. 10, 11; Romans ii. 13; iii. 20-30; iv. 2-8; iv. 25-v. 1; v. 8, 9, 16-18; viii. 30-34; Philippians iii. 9; Titus iii. 3-7 (if Pauline).

We are now in a position to trace the five themes with particular reference to the picture or metaphor or parable of justification. The first theme of the No of God and the guilt of man is particularly clear. The prisoner stands guilty before the judge. His utmost efforts to keep the law have failed to justify him in the sight of God. One passage might seem to give a faint hope. "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. ii. 13). But the purpose of this sentence in the context is to say that the Jews are not superior to the Gentiles because they have heard the law; only the keeping of the law would justify them, and in fact, as every other passage shows, they have not kept it. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. ii. 16). "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23).

The treatment of our second theme, the vicarious cost of sin, is very interesting. In the underlying reality in the Cross of Christ, which was re-enacted as a result of Saul's own efforts and before his eyes in the martyrdom of Stephen, the vicarious cost is manifest. In the particular metaphor of justification there is no place for **this** theme. It costs the judge nothing to be merciful, and to say "I

acquit" instead of "I condemn". Therefore the vicarious cost is brought in to the picture either by a plain statement of fact or by a mixing of metaphors. Quite irrelevantly, in strict terms of justification, but quite essentially in terms of the underlying reality, we find the words brought in: "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. iii. 24-25); "who was delivered for our offences" (Rom. iv. 25); "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood" (Rom. v. 8-9); "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Rom. viii. 32). Here therefore we find the answer to "the place of merit (particularly of the merits of Christ) in justification". It has no strict and therefore no clear place in the doctrine as such; it has an essential place in the underlying reality. Both Christ Himself as He forgives from the Cross, and the disciples as they go forth to preach Christ, must suffer for the sins of others, and by bearing that suffering in love they win an entry to the hearts of others.

The third theme of forgiveness is particularly clear in the metaphor of the judge, who might and in strictness should condemn, but who in fact pronounces a verdict of acquittal. Here also in the passages we have quoted there is a mixing of metaphors. The passages are primarily concerned with justification, but the thought plays to and fro with the other terms, forgiveness and remission of sins. Similar in thought, though not actually using the term justification, is the striking new metaphor which St. Paul uses in the Epistle to the Colossians: "having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. ii. 13-14). This mixing of metaphors is in itself a sign and a warning that we should not press any one metaphor like justification too strictly in isolation, but should interpret them all as varied attempts to convey the single underlying experience of forgiveness.

Keeping within the terms of the metaphor of justification, we may quote one or two comments in illustration. Thackery writes, "A verdict of not guilty is pronounced in his (the prisoner's) favour, even though he has hitherto been actually ungodly". Rashdall writes similarly, "The whole trend of St. Paul's thought requires that God shall be supposed of His own free grace to pronounce men righteous who are not yet in point of fact actually righteous". As against this Fernand Prat, S.J., rejects with a general condemnation what he calls "the Protestant interpretation 'to be declared just'". He writes: "Protestants maintain that to justify, in spite of its causative form, means to declare just but not to make just". And he adds: "It is evident that the judgement of God is necessarily conformable to truth, and that no one can be declared just by the infallible Judge, if he be not actually so". These comments of Father Prat seem to miss the point, precisely because they do press a metaphor and so fail to see it as a picture of the forgiveness of God. In point of fact, since in St. Paul's view "all have sinned", the prisoner must be declared righteous while not yet in fact actually righteous. And this apparent contradiction in the strict sense of justification is not a deceit in the

verdict of God : it is an expression of the essential paradox of forgiveness, that God loves the sinner in his sin without waiting for him first to become righteous. " God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us " (Rom. v. 8).

However, perhaps we may reconcile what Prat feels to be that antithesis of the Catholic and Protestant points of view by recognizing that to justify means both to declare just, and to make just, inasmuch as the justification leads on to the further theme, which we have called the resulting ethic. There is a balanced statement in a recent commentary by Easton on the Pastoral Epistles. " ' Righteousness ' is God's free gift to men whose moral character falls short of righteous achievement ; the gift being bestowed not because of ' works ' but because of ' faith '. And this gift is granted at the very beginning of the Christian course (justification) and precedes the moral progress which the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit will effect (sanctification)." Easton continues : " In justification ' righteousness ' is ' imputed ', not ' infused '. We should perhaps rather say that through justification ' righteousness ' is first imputed and then infused. The term justification, in common with the whole Pauline doctrine of Atonement, covers both the moment of forgiveness and the subsequent ethic and growth in grace".

### III

For our fourth theme we may picture the prisoner hearing the verdict of acquittal and slowly becoming aware that he can leave the court a free man. He will be moved to penitence as he compares his own past life with the mercy of the judge. He will realise that he need not return to the prisoner's cell for ultimate punishment, but can go out into the world and start life anew. The turning point before he can enter this new world is the acceptance in trust of the fact that God in Christ has pronounced the verdict of acquittal or forgiveness.

It is important to notice that this act of faith is not a substitute for works by which we may earn the divine favour ; it is the response whereby we recognise and accept the fact that we have received the favour unearned. One passage might seem to suggest that faith is a substitute " work " whereby we earn the divine favour. " To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness " (Rom. iv. 5). Fernand Prat argues that it is " the act of faith which produces justification ", and says that " it is in vain for certain Protestant theologians to try to prove that faith is not a work ". But this is inconsistent with his own more discerning statement that " faith is the amen of the intelligence and the will to divine revelation ". Faith does not produce the revelation of the forgiveness of God, but accepts it. When we examine the context of the Romans passage more closely, we see that the justification by faith is contrasted with the earning of the divine favour : " Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt " (Rom. iv. 4). The contrast would fall to the ground if faith were a substitute by which we earn the grace, which in that case would become a debt due for our faith. This point comes out all the more strongly when we notice how often in the Atonement passages St. Paul stresses that the forgiveness or the remission or the



justification is "freely" given. We shall conclude therefore that the Anglican Articles are right when they say that we are accounted righteous before God, not *propter fidem* but *per fidem* (Article XI).

Yet faith there must be if the justification is to become a spiritual reality, "most wholesome" and "very full of comfort", as our Articles call it. This trust in an unseen reality is just what our modern world finds it extremely difficult to give. We are so impressed with our technical achievements through scientific experiment that there is a constant pressure on us to suppose that the world of material fact is the only reality. One whole school of thought, Logical Positivism, argues that only those things are real with which we can experiment with sight and hand, and on that basis argues away all metaphysical reality, and therefore also all theology, as meaningless. But God cannot be known in that way. As the Jewish people learnt early in their history, and as Christ repeats in His temptation, you may not tempt God, that is, you may not experiment with Him and put Him to the proof. To try to do so would be to claim that *we* should be master in the transaction, not He. We may only know God by taking His Word on trust. We shall only rediscover in our souls the most wholesome and comforting realities of God's forgiveness or justification when we accept them in trust or faith. Actually of course there are whole ranges of reality in the fields of art and culture, and in the I and Thou of personal relationships, as well as in religion and psychology, which we shall banish from the little world of our experience so long as schools of thought like Logical Positivism hold sway. We shall only rediscover these realities when we accept the fact that it is God and not our experimenting minds who occupies the throne of judgement.

Finally, we come to the fifth theme, the resulting ethic. The acceptance of the acquittal does in fact make a difference in our behaviour. We are liberated from the striving after the divine favour, which must always have had within it a measure of self-effort and self-concern. There is laid upon us the new sanction of gratitude for the divine mercy. With this gratitude in our hearts we are free, and we are compelled to give ourselves in selfless service to the world around us. With this liberation into love we can now do freely the acts of love, which we failed to do under an unwilling obedience to the law. In this sense justification does "make righteous", and not merely "declare righteous". We notice the resulting change very clearly, and incidentally also again the mixing of metaphors, in the Corinthians passage: "and such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. vi. 11). Here it is clear that the 'washing' and 'justifying' have resulted in a change of character.

At the same time we may notice a very interesting special tinge of meaning in the ethic of justification. In general terms we remember that our Lord taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. vi. 12). In the same general terms St. Paul taught his followers: "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. iv. 32). In terms of the special metaphor of judgement

our Lord taught, " Judge not, that ye be not judged " (Matt. vii. 1). St. Paul had taken this implication of the doctrine of justification deeply to heart. He rejects subservience to the judgment of men. " With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment : yea, I judge not mine own self. . . . But he that judgeth me is the Lord " (I Cor. iv. 3-4). We remember also the magnificent turning point at the opening of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. In the first chapter he has summed up every conceivable vice of the pagan world. In the second he turns to the religious world with the declaration, " Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest : for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ; for thou that judgest doest the same things " (Rom. ii. 1).

In this new ethic, " Judge not", there is something which challenges and rebukes our moralism the more we reflect on it. How can we avoid judging others? Is it not part of our very calling in Christian leadership, to use our critical faculties to discern between good and evil, so that we may encourage the good and rebuke the evil? Did not our Lord Himself rebuke in most challenging terms the sins of the Pharisees? Does not St. Paul in the very fact of telling others not to judge, himself judge them for doing so? In a sense all this is true. We cannot supersede judging others, any more than we can supersede the moral law which we use as a basis and standard for our judging. St. Paul was right, and Marcion misinterpreted him ; the Gospel does come to fulfil, not to supersede the law. We must still retain the law, with its moral standards ; we must uphold these standards ; we cannot therefore help seeing where they are not fulfilled.

But shall we therefore judge? That we did not say. Once more, it is God, not we, who sits in the final throne of judgment. Shall we at least, as his ministers, condemn and punish? Would not all moral standards be let down if we failed to do so? At times we cannot help thinking so. And yet, St. Paul writes of " a more excellent way ", the Christian way of charity, the way of forgiveness (I Cor. xii. 31). God has a more excellent way for enabling people to fulfil the law than by judging and condemning them. We hear again the warning word, which the Pharisees heard from Christ. " He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone " (John viii. 7). " And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last : and Jesus was left alone " (John viii. 9). God retains to Himself alone the prerogative of judgement, and commits it to His Son. And Jesus as Judge, where we should expect the word of condemnation, says, " Neither do I condemn thee " (John viii. 11). Yet with that word He is not abolishing moral standards, but releasing a love that will fulfil them. He is liberating us, but not for a life of antinomian self-will ; He is liberating us, in order that with hearts set free from self we may now through love fulfil the law, in a way we must ever fail to do so long as it is a matter of conscientious striving. Thus we hear at the end the word which completes our study of the doctrine of justification, combining the moment of acquittal and the resulting growth in grace : " Neither do I condemn thee : go, and sin no more " (John viii. 11).