

Romans 4:5 (Charles Haddon Spurgeon) 161564

All of Grace, Chapter 3: God Justifieth the Ungodly

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THIS MESSAGE is for you. You will find the text in Rom. 4:5, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

I call your attention to those words, "Him that justifieth the ungodly." They seem to me to be very wonderful words.

Are you not surprised that there should be such an expression as that in the Bible, "That justifieth the ungodly"? I have heard that men that hate the doctrines of the cross bring it as a charge against God, that He saves wicked men and receives to Himself the vilest of the vile. See how this Scripture accepts the charge and plainly states it! By the mouth of His servant Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He takes to Himself the title of "Him that justifieth the ungodly." He makes those just who are unjust, forgives those who deserve no favor. Did you think that salvation was for the good and that God's grace was for the pure and holy who are free from sin? Perhaps you think that if you were excellent, then God would reward you; and maybe you have thought that because you are not worthy, therefore there could be no way of your enjoying His favor. You must be somewhat surprised to read a text like this: "Him that justifieth the ungodly." I do not wonder that you are surprised; for with all my familiarity with the great grace of God, I never cease to wonder at it. It does sound surprising, does it not, that it should be possible for a holy God to justify an unholy man? We, according to the natural legality of our hearts, are always talking about our own goodness and our own worthiness, and we stubbornly believe that there must be something in us in order to win the notice of God. Now, God, who sees through all deceptions, knows that there is no goodness whatever in us. He says that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). He knows that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), and, therefore, the Lord Jesus did not come into the world to look after goodness and righteousness with him, but to bestow them upon persons who have none of them. He comes, not because we are just, but to make us so; he justifieth the ungodly.

When a lawyer comes into court, if he is an honest man, he desires to plead the case of an innocent person and justify him before the court from the things which are falsely laid to his charge. It should be the lawyer's object to justify the innocent person, and he should not attempt to screen the guilty party. It is not man's right nor in his power to truly justify the guilty. This is a miracle reserved for the Lord alone. God, the infinitely just Sovereign, knows that there is not a just man upon earth who does good and does not sin. Therefore, in the infinite sovereignty of His divine nature and in the splendor of His ineffable love, He undertakes the task, not so much of justifying the just as of justifying the ungodly. God has devised ways and means of making the ungodly man to stand justly accepted before Him. He has set up a system by which with perfect justice He can treat the guilty as if he had been free from offense; yes, can treat him as if he were wholly free from sin. He justifieth the ungodly.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. It is a very surprising thing, a thing to be marveled at most of all by those who enjoy it. I know that it is to me, even to this day, the greatest wonder that I ever heard of that God should ever justify me. I feel myself to be a lump of unworthiness, a mass of corruption, and a heap of sin apart from His almighty love. I know and am fully assured that I am justified by faith which is in Christ Jesus, and I am treated as if I had been perfectly just and made an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. And yet, by nature I must take my place among the most sinful. I, who am altogether undeserving, am treated as if I had been deserving. I am loved with as much love as if I had always been godly, whereas before I was ungodly. Who can help being astonished at this? Gratitude for such favor stands dressed in robes of wonder.

Now, while this is very surprising, I want you to notice how available it makes the Gospel to you and to me. If God justifieth the ungodly, then He can justify you. Is not that the very kind of person that you are? If you are unconverted at this moment, it is a very proper description of you. You have lived without God; you have been the reverse of godly. In one word, you have been and are ungodly. Perhaps you have not even attended a place of worship on Sunday, but have lived in disregard of God's day and house and Word. This proves you to have been ungodly. Sadder still, it may be you have even tried to doubt God's existence and have gone the length of saying that you did so. You have lived on this fair earth which is full of the tokens of God's presence, and all the while you have shut your eyes to the clear evidences of His power and Godhead. You have lived as if there were no God. Indeed, you would have been very pleased if you could have positively demonstrated to yourself that there was no God whatever. Possibly you have lived a great many years in this way so that you are now pretty well settled in your ways, and yet God is not in any of them. If you were labeled ungodly, it would describe you as well as if the sea were to be labeled salt water. Would it not?

Possibly you are a person of another sort. You have regularly attended to all the outward forms of religion, and yet you have had no heart in them at all, but have been really ungodly. Though meeting with the people of God, you have never met with God for yourself; you have been in the choir, and yet have not praised the Lord with your heart. You have lived without any love to God in your heart, or regard to His commands in your life. Well, you are just the kind of person to whom this Gospel is sent, this Gospel which says that God justifieth the ungodly. It is very wonderful, but it is happily available for you. It just suits you. Does it not? How I wish that you would accept it! If you are a sensible person, you will see the remarkable grace of God in providing for someone such as you are, and you will say to yourself, "Justify the ungodly! Why, then, should not I be justified, and justified at once?"

Now, observe further, that it must be so. The salvation of God is for those who do not deserve it and have no preparation for it. It is reasonable that the statement should be put in the Bible, for no others need justifying but those who have no justification of their own. If any of you are perfectly righteous, you want no justifying. You feel that you are doing your duty well, and almost putting heaven under an

obligation to you. What do you want with a Savior or with mercy? What do you want with justification? You will be tired of this book by this time, for it will have no interest to you.

If any of you are giving yourselves such proud airs, listen to me for a little while. You will be lost as sure as you are alive. You righteous men, whose righteousness is all of your own working, are either deceivers or deceived, for the Scripture cannot lie and it says plainly, "There is none righteous, no, not one." In any case, I have no Gospel to preach to the self-righteous, no, not a word. Jesus Christ Himself came not to call the righteous, and I am not going to do what He did not do. If I called you, you would not come; therefore, I will not call you. No, I ask you rather to look at that righteousness of yours till you see what a delusion it is. It is not half so substantial as a cobweb. Be finished with it! Flee from it! Believe that the only persons that can need justification are those who are not just in themselves. They need something to be done for them to make them just before the judgment seat of God. Depend upon it, the Lord only does that which is needful.

Infinite wisdom never attempts that which is unnecessary. Jesus never undertakes that which is superfluous. To make him just who is just is no work for God; that were a labor for a fool. But to make him just who is unjust, that is work for infinite love and mercy. To justify the ungodly is a miracle worthy of God, and it is.

Now, look. If there be anywhere in the world a physician who has discovered sure and precious remedies, to whom is that physician sent? To those who are perfectly healthy? I think not. Put him down in a district where there are no sick persons, and he feels that he is not in his place. There is nothing for him to do. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick" (Mark 2:17). Is it not equally clear that the great remedies of grace and redemption are for the sick in soul? They cannot be for the whole, for they cannot be of use to such. If you feel that you are spiritually sick, the Physician has come into the world for you. If you are altogether undone by reason of your sin, you are the very person aimed at in the plan of salvation. I say that the Lord of love had just such as you are in His eye when He arranged the system of grace. Suppose a man of generous spirit were to resolve to forgive all those who were indebted to him; it is clear that this can only apply to those really in his debt. One person owes him a thousand pounds, and another owes him fifty pounds; each one has but to have his bill receipted, and the liability is wiped out. But the most generous person cannot forgive the debts of those who do not owe him anything. It is out of the power of Omnipotence to forgive where there is no sin. Pardon, therefore, cannot be for you who have no sin. Pardon must be for the guilty. Forgiveness must be for the sinful. It would be absurd to talk of forgiving those who do not need forgiveness or pardoning those who have never offended.

Do you think that you must be lost because you are a sinner? This is the reason why you can be saved. Because you realize that you are a sinner, I would encourage you to believe that grace is ordained for such as you. One hymn writer even dared to say: A sinner is a sacred thing: The Holy Ghost hath made him so.

It is true that Jesus seeks and saves that which is lost. He died and made a real atonement for real sinners. When men are not playing with words or calling themselves "miserable sinners" in false humility, I feel overjoyed to meet with them. I would be glad to talk all night to bona fide sinners. The inn of mercy never closes its doors upon such, neither on weekdays nor on Sunday. Our Lord Jesus did not die for imaginary sins, but His heart's blood was spilled to wash out deep crimson stains which nothing else can remove.

He that is a dirty sinner is the kind of man that Jesus Christ came to make clean. A Gospel preacher on one occasion preached a sermon from, "Now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees" (Luke 3:9), and he delivered such a sermon that one of his hearers said to him, "One would have thought that you had been preaching to criminals. Your sermon ought to have been delivered in the county jail." "Oh, no," said the good man, "if I were preaching in the county jail, I should not preach from that text, there I should preach 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Tim. 1:15). This is true." The Law is for the self-righteous, to humble their pride; the Gospel is for the lost, to remove their despair.

If you are not lost, what do you want with a Savior? Should the shepherd go after those who never went astray? Why should the woman sweep her house for the pieces of money that were never out of her purse? No, the medicine is for the diseased; the quickening is for the dead; the pardon is for the guilty; liberation is for those who are bound; the opening of eyes is for those who are blind. How can the Savior and His death upon the cross and the Gospel of pardon be accounted for unless they be upon the supposition that men are guilty and worthy of condemnation? The sinner is the Gospel's reason for existence. If you are undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving, you are the sort of man for whom the Gospel is ordained and arranged and proclaimed. God justifies the ungodly.

I want to make this very plain. I hope that I have done so already. But, still, plain as it is, it is only the Lord who can make a man see it. At first it does seem most amazing to an awakened man that salvation should really be for him when he is lost and guilty. He thinks that it must be for him when he is penitent, forgetting that his penitence is a part of his salvation. "Oh," he says, "but I must be this and that," all of which is true, for he shall be this and that as the result of salvation. But salvation comes to him before he has any of the results of salvation. It comes to him, in fact, while he deserves only this bare, beggarly, base, abominable description: ungodly. That is all he is when God's Gospel comes to justify him.

May I, therefore, urge upon any who have no good thing about them—who fear that they have not even a good feeling or anything whatever that can recommend them to God—to firmly believe that our gracious God is able and willing to take them without anything to recommend them, and to forgive them spontaneously, not because they are good, but because He is good. Does He not make His sun to shine on the evil as well as on the good? Does He not give fruitful seasons and send the rain and the sunshine in their time upon the most ungodly nations? Yes, even Sodom had its sun, and Gomorrah had its dew. The great grace of God surpasses my conception and your conception, and I would have you think worthily of it. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are God's thoughts above our thoughts. He can abundantly pardon. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; forgiveness is for the guilty.

Do not attempt to touch yourself up and make yourself something other than you really are, but come as you are to Him who justifies the ungodly. A great artist some time ago had painted a picture of a part of the city in which he lived, and he wanted, for historic purposes, to include in his picture certain characters well known in the town. A street sweeper who was unkempt, ragged, and filthy, was known to everybody, and there was a suitable place for him in the picture. The artist said to this ragged and rugged individual, "I will pay you well if you will come down to my studio and let me paint you." He came around in the morning, but he was soon sent away, for he had washed his

face, combed his hair, and donned a respectable suit of clothes. He was needed as a beggar and was not invited in any other capacity. Even so, the Gospel will receive you into its halls if you come as a sinner, not otherwise. Wait not for reformation, but come at once for salvation. God justifieth the ungodly, and that takes you up where you now are; it meets you in your worst estate.

Come in your disorder. I mean, come to your heavenly Father in all your sin and sinfulness. Come to Jesus just as you are: leprous, filthy, naked, neither fit to live nor fit to die. Come, you that are the very sweepings of creation; come, though you hardly dare to hope for anything but death. Come, though despair is brooding over you, pressing upon your bosom like a horrible nightmare. Come and ask the Lord to justify another ungodly one. Why should He not? Come, for this great mercy of God is meant for such as you. I put it in the language of the text, and I cannot put it more strongly: the Lord God Himself takes to Himself this gracious title, "Him that justifieth the ungodly." He makes just, and causes to be treated as just, those who by nature are ungodly. Is not that a wonderful word for you? Do not delay till you have considered this matter well.

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