

A Review of Pink's Perspectives on the Doctrine of Justification

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Introductory back ground to the Doctrine of Justification

When Martin Luther stumbled across the Doctrine of Justification in the 1500s, what he did not probably realize at the time is his discovery would turn the world upside down (Jones 1985; Bainton 1950). In as much as it was a grand discovery, the thing that really warmed his heart was the liberty resulting from his lifelong oppressive guilt burden right from infancy until that day. He would therefore leap for joy and determine to share the glad tidings to the rest of Humanity. No doubt, 31st October, 1517 will forever be etched upon the memory of all Protestants as the day when bold and brave Luther made a public display of the Roman Catholic Church fallacies. Bainton (1950) particularly captures that momentous occasion standing before the most powerful force in Luther's day, the Popish Church, in graphic narrative that we find impossible to resist quoting as given at length (p 2):

On an April evening over 400 years ago a simple monk faced the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. His words, heard by only a roomful of people, have echoed through the centuries: My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I cannot recant anything—for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. Because he took his stand, Martin Luther shattered the structure of medieval Catholicism and initiated Protestantism.

Evidently, the discovery of the immensely liberating great doctrine of Justification emboldened this man and others after him to heights very few have ascended to in this mortal life! This is what inevitably happens when a guilty sinner meets the condemning law of God and are declared righteous as though they have never sinned! The heart is blown apart with everlasting joy! They cannot possibly conceal the euphoria attendant to divine Justification. A guilty sinner pardoned of all their sins once and for all? That's too good to be true! We hope a review of such a life and doctrine triggers similar, if not a stronger pulse towards what God has done in Christ!

However, this doctrine, although heralded and best known since the Reformation now sadly lies forgotten, relegated, minimized, disrespected, neglected or even

attacked, sometimes by people who are ideally supposed to be its avowed advocates. There is clear urgent need to correct this sad decay and once again, reinstate this pivotal doctrine to its former glorious heights in the hearts and minds of all Christians. As a contribution towards this spiritual dearth, AW Pink wrote a book, *The Doctrine of Justification* which not only defines the doctrine afresh, basically re-echoing and affirming the historic position but highlights other issues related to the said doctrine. Pink accomplishes this task in only 10 chapters, closing off with a summary, all within 50 pages. Considering the breadth, depth and width of the subject, what Pink achieves is extremely impressive. To scale this feat; his goal, Arthur breaks it down in the following chapters¹ listed below with some brief notes:

Justification: An Introduction:

According to Arthur Pink and other authorities, the doctrine of justification was once a well known and sweetly espoused truth by all Protestants and Evangelicals. It was a bulwark that effectively silenced the Church of Rome and equally gave impetus to the Reformation, led by Martin Luther. Sadly, this doctrine is scarcely preached or even known in contemporary Christian circles today, resulting in fearsome ignorance and loss of peace by Christ's Church. In ignoring and hurling out this doctrine, the church has, unawares, marched back to the Pre-Reformation days, though with an open Bible before their eyes and in their laps. Were the Reformers to awake today, they would most certainly be shocked, if not deeply disappointed with what they would find! In our mind and in agreement with Pink, this survey explores some salient features and points related to the doctrine. It also aims at inspiring interest in this sweet tonic that, once imbibed will make the difference between day and night, light and darkness. The best way to attack error, according to Pink, sometimes is to simply positively state the truth, and that is what he proposes to do in his brisk landmark work. His verbatim words eloquently tell the story as we here release them (p 2):

While there are times, no doubt, when it becomes the distasteful duty of God's servants to expose that which is calculated to deceive and injure His people, yet, as a general rule, the most effective way of getting rid of darkness is to let in the light. We desire, then, to pen these articles in the spirit of the godly John Owen, who, in the introduction to his ponderous treatise on this theme said, "More weight is to be put on the steady guidance of the mind and conscience of one believer, really exercised about the foundation of his peace and acceptance with God, than on the confutation of ten wrangling disputers..."

What better approach could we exploit today than this? Perhaps the postmodern mind may demand additional avenues but whatever route exploited, it better lead to the dissemination of this precious liberating truth as Owen rightly observed.

¹ Whose outline we have adopted in this paper

Justification: It's Meaning

In the ensuing chapter, Pink proceeds to unveil, highlight or give sense and meaning to the term "Justification" as relates to other equally cardinal scriptural truths. His approach is most instructive, clear and forceful. What exactly is meant by the word "Justification"? The word, in normal parlance, is defined variously but when used in the Biblical sense, it has at least one major meaning. The word "Justification" is derived from the word *Justify* whose etymological import or connotation is to declare someone free from condemnation. In that case then, we refer to an act of God's free Grace whereby He pardons guilty sinners of all their sins—past, present and future. Article 11 of the Baptist confession of Faith (1689) puts it even more succinctly when it states:

"Those who God effectually calls, He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting them as righteous, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone..."

Additionally, the racy Puritan, Thomas Watson would define as well as comment on the critical importance of this doctrine of Justification as follows (p 323):

Justification is an act of God's free grace, whereby he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight—only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us, and received by faith alone. Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable. It was a saying of Luther, "that after his death, the doctrine of justification would be corrupted."

The careful reader will discern that Watson has deeply influenced our thinking on the definition of the doctrine of Justification. That said, the central idea is that God declares them (i.e. sinners) righteous in His sight; in the courts of Heaven. It is both a forensic and judicial act of God when He acts as Judge rather than monarch. Dr John Owen had great thoughts to say about this doctrine, in sync with Martin Luther and John Calvin before him. Indeed, the Puritans treasured this grand doctrine because it grants the sinner both peace with God and entrance into Heaven. In our own day, Dr J.I. Packer for a long time tenaciously held to this great doctrine as a necessity to the extent that in his *ordo-salutis*, it appears that Justification precedes even regeneration! Justification, was and is, indeed the battle cry of the Reformation! It is a great panacea and comfort to the saint.

Justification: It's Problem

The definitions elaborated in the previous section does however generate some problems to some people, especially the unregenerate. To assert that God freely declares guilty sinners pardoned without any contribution on their part puzzles fallen mortals trusting in their filthy human works and actions. They cannot possibly imagine entering heaven having not contributed anything apart from simple belief in a crucified saviour. Charles Wesley, even after conversion, expressed similar wonder as to how a sinful people could be reconciled to God, even after having riotously spurned His holy law. His 1738 hymn *And Can It Be* best expresses this wonder. In the case of the unregenerate however, they tend to feel they should contribute in order to feel good about themselves and thus be worthy of salvation. They wish to feel in control of their destiny. This, according to Pink, cannot be. A second problem generated is the knowledge that no human being could ever meet the just demands of God. His standards are too lofty and cannot possibly be attained by sinful mortal humans. Try as they might, their works are as filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6). Worse still, the sinful nature (and state) in which they find themselves in makes it impossible to for them to find peace with God, let alone please Him (Boston 1964). But the doctrine is real and actually taught in scripture (Romans 3:21ff). It is the gateway to Heaven that gives the pardoned sinner a title to Heaven. Although a declarative act done once in the Courts of Heaven, it none the less renders pardoned sinners free from all fear and accusation. In itself, Justification does not make sinners holy but righteous (Pink 1998).

Justification: Its Basis

The basis of this doctrine is the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Watson 1958). The sinner is clothed in Christ's righteousness while Christ takes on their sinful garments, paying for and dying in the sinner's stead. There is an exchange, an imputation² so that when God looks at a sinner in the person of Christ, they are viewed as though they have never sinned before. This therefore negates the common notion today where people think they can be justified by works, let alone by good moral behaviour (Titus 3:5-8). In one sense, the sinner is justified from eternity because of the lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). In another sense, they are justified the moment they are regenerated. Both Regeneration and Justification are entirely acts of God but the one (regeneration) takes place in the subconscious of a sinner as the Spirit of God gives spiritual life while the other (Justification) is a declarative act of God done in the courts of Heaven (Winslow 1991; Hodge 2020). One transforms (i.e. regeneration) while the other changes one's legal standing before God. Justification then has to do with the imputed righteousness of God credited to the repenting sinner's account.

² Not impartation

Justification: Its Nature

In its nature, Justification has to do with God forgiving or pardoning a guilty, helpless sinful lot in the world. Having been pardoned, sinners have peace with God, having appropriated this divine pardon by faith, which in itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 5:1; Romans 8:1). As earlier alluded to, Justification has to do with a declaration as well as an “alien” righteousness that comes from God granted to sinners in or on account of Christ. Some, however object to this doctrine, claiming that Justification is not tenable so simply by faith. Others claim that teaching the doctrine in those terms may encourage licentiousness or sin in people. In Christ, sinners can approach the throne of Grace and live. Those so justified will definitely live a holy life because the seed of God remains in them. In other words, a justified sinner cannot and should not leave in sin, much like Paul argued in Romans 6.

Justification: Its Source

Where does this Justification exactly emanate from? Who Justifies the other and why? Obviously, from what has been stated thus far, it is evident that God is the source of this justification through the vicarious atonement in Christ Jesus. Sinners are pardoned because Christ has obeyed the just demands of God in their stead through Jesus’ passive and active obedience before God (Morey 2011). Christ met all the requirements of the law and thus was qualified to be our righteousness. Had God not provided the saviour and lamb, humans would all be damned but thanks be to God for His indescribable gift, even Jesus Christ!

Justification: Its Objects

The objects of this divine Justification are the elect who turn to God in faith and repentance (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4). Though not inherently righteous in themselves, the elect are predestined to eternal life, called and Justified leading to an eternal glorious inheritance. Those not so justified are reprobates³ and not benefit in the glorious achievements of Christ on the cross.

Justification: Its Instrument

The instrument by which the elect appropriate or get this Justification is faith, which in itself is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is the instrument not the condition of Justification. It is important to note the distinction because many people mix the two or simply misunderstand.

³ This is double Predestination as held by Supralapsarian rather than Infralapsarian Calvinists.

Justification: Its Evidence

The evidences of Justification are many. One of them is peace with God and a sense of sins forgiven (e.g. Romans 8:1). Another evidence is good works because true faith does not go alone (James 2:14-26; Philippians 3:12ff). Though the sinner is justified by faith alone, this faith is never alone, always evidenced by fruit (Acts 20:20). Pardoned sinners love to do good works out of a thankful heart rather than as a means to salvation. It is strange to have a justified person living an unholy or even fruitless life. The power of grace will not permit because Christ's love compels subjects so to live, a life pleasing to God (II Corinthians 5:9, 11, 14-15).

Justification: Its Results

Justification has glorious results that include peace with God and with oneself. Another result is the forgiveness of all known sin and a sense of acceptance into the family of God. God no longer holds pardoned sinners culpable, in the sense that they end up in Hell. Although He may chastise them (Hebrews 12:5,6), God loves them to the end and will definitely bring to completion what He begins in them (Philippians 1:6). What a blessed privilege Christians have in Christ!

A Synopsis of the blessed results of Justification

Having dealt with the doctrine in its various aspects, Pink hurries along to a conclusion by stating the "fruits and benefits" of the Justification that comes from God. He lists the following blessed results:

- The sins of the believer are pardoned and dealt with once and finally. God never brings them up again as far as the East is from the West.
- Everlasting glory from God is bestowed upon the pardoned.
- Peace with God is achieved-reconciliation.
- God now perceives and looks upon the sinner with a favourable eye and finally,
- The Christian is fully and totally justified in that one unrepeated-able act. Once Justified, they cannot be more justified than before. More-over, it may be stated that those justified cannot be condemned again or brought to account for their sins because the Judge of all the earth has acquitted them and at the same time clothed them in the righteousness of Christ.

- Pardoned sinners, as a fruit of Justification is adoption into the family of God. They have royal blood flowing within their veins, having been engrafted into the family of God to become a royal Priesthood. These are high privileges indeed!

This doctrine is a sweet tonic to the saint and no wonder Luther felt any one who did not hold forensic Justification could not possibly be a Christian! He was definitely right, a thousand times so.

May we have a resurrection of interest in this pearl among evangelical doctrines once again!

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