

A LEARNED DISCOURSE OF
JUSTIFICATION

**A LEARNED DISCOURSE OF
JUSTIFICATION, WORKS, AND
HOW THE FOUNDATION OF
FAITH IS OVERTHROWN
IN MODERN ENGLISH**

BY RICHARD HOOKER

Edited by Bradford Littlejohn, Rhys Lavery,
and Ken Cook

Copyright © 2022 The Davenant Institute

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1-949716-10-4

ISBN-13: 978-1-949716-10-8

Front cover image is “Gold Cross in the Interior of a Church in the Lake District, Cumbria, UK.” Photo taken by David Forster.

Cover design by Rachel Rosales, Orange Peel Design

Typeset and proofread by Mikael Good

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	iv
<i>Bradford Littlejohn</i>	
Editorial Approach	xxv
I: The Real Disagreement Between Rome and Protestantism	1
II: Could Our Fathers Be Saved?	16
III: What Is the Foundation of Faith?	32
IV: Can the Elect Deny the Foundation of Faith?	39
V: Does Rome Directly Deny the Foundation of Faith?	51
VI: Conclusion	74

I:
**THE REAL DISAGREEMENT
BETWEEN ROME AND
PROTESTANTISM**

“The wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore justice goeth forth perverted.” (Habakkuk 1:4)

1. TO BETTER understand the Prophet’s meaning in this passage, we must *first* consider “the wicked,” of whom he says that they “compass about the righteous.” *Secondly*, we must consider “the righteous” that are compassed about by them. And *finally*, we must consider that which results: “therefore justice goeth forth perverted.” Concerning the first question, there are two kinds of wicked men. The blessed Apostle speaks concerning them in 1 Corinthians 5 in this fashion: “For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within?” (1 Cor. 5:12). There are wicked men, therefore, whom the Church may judge, and there are wicked men whom only God may judge. There are wicked men both inside and outside the walls of the Church. If we find within the Church particular people who appear to be wicked but cannot be brought to repentance, the rule of apostolic judgment is this:

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

“Separate yourselves from them.” If we find whole communities of such people, the rule is this: “Separate yourselves from among them, for what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14–17). But the wicked to whom the Prophet refers (in Hab. 1:4) were pagan Babylonians, who therefore were outside of the people of God. We have heard at length before how, for this reason, the Prophet urged God to judge them.

2. Now concerning the righteous, there is not now, nor ever was, any human being absolutely righteous in himself, free from any unrighteousness or sin. We dare not make even the Blessed Virgin herself an exception to this—we would prefer to follow St. Augustine’s advice and remain silent on this point for the sake of the honor we owe her as the mother of our Lord and Savior Christ.¹ But since the Roman schools have made this an issue, we must answer with Eusebius Emissenus, who speaks of her and to her to this effect:

By exclusive privilege your body provided
hospitality for the hope of all the ends of

¹ Hooker is here making reference to Augustine’s comment in *On Nature and Grace*. Here, Augustine records those that Pelagius claims lived without sin. Although Augustine denies this claim for the rest of the list, he avoids speaking about the state of Mary. Augustine writes, “Therefore, I make an exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in whose case, out of respect for the Lord, I wish to raise no question at all when the discussion concerns sins—for whence do we know what an abundance of grace for entirely overcoming sin was conferred on her who had the merit to conceive and bear him who undoubtedly was without sin?” Augustine, “On Nature and Grace,” in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge, Fathers of the Church 86 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 36.42, pp. 52–54 (PL 44:0267).

the earth, the honor of the world and the common joy of all men for nine months. He from whom all things had their beginning had his own beginning by means of you. From your body he received the blood which was to be shed for the life of the world. From you he took that which—even for you—he paid. *A peccati enim veteris nexu, per se non est immunis nec ipsa genitrix Redemptoris*: “The mother of the Redeemer herself, otherwise than by redemption, is not loosed from the bonds of original sin” (*Second Homily on the Nativity of the Lord*).²

If Christ has paid a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:6), including even her, it follows that all without exception were captives. If one has died for all, then all were dead, dead in sin (2 Cor. 5:14, Eph. 2:1–10). If all were sinful, then none were absolutely righteous in themselves; but we are absolutely righteous in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). If the world would know what a perfectly righteous man looks like, then it must behold a Christian man, for Christ “was made unto us wisdom from

² This section comes from the Eusebius Gallicanus, a collection of seventy-six sermons by early church writers. The authorship of the sermons is unknown, although they have been attributed to a variety of authors. Here, Hooker is referring to the second sermon, entitled *Homilia II de natale Domini* (also known as *De nativitate Domini*, i.e., The Nativity of the Lord). For the section cited here, see *Homilia II*, in *Eusebius ‘Gallicanus’: Collectio homiliarum*, ed. Fr. Glorie, Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina 101 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1970), 4, p. 26. Hooker mentions that the author is Eusebius, and although this may be a possibility, there is no way to know for certain who the author of this text is. The Eusebius Hooker refers to was the Bishop of Emesa and was well-known for learning and eloquence. He was the student of his namesake, Eusebius of Caesarea (260/265–339/340), the great church historian and biographer of Constantine the Great (c. 272–337).

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

God, and righteous and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). He is our wisdom because he has revealed his Father’s will; he is our justice because he has offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; he is our sanctification because he has given us his Spirit; he is our redemption because he has appointed a day to vindicate his children out of the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty. How Christ is made our wisdom and redemption may be discussed when occasion arises. But how Christ is made the righteousness of mankind, we will discuss in what follows.

3. There is a glorifying righteousness for men in the world to come; and there is a justifying and a sanctifying righteousness here and now. The righteousness with which we shall be clothed in the world to come is both perfect and inherent. That righteousness by which we are now justified is perfect, but not inherent. That righteousness by which we are sanctified is inherent, but not perfect. These distinctions will make it easier to understand that great question which stands between the Church of England and the Church of Rome regarding the righteousness that justifies before God.

4. First, although the Roman Church imagines that the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was, for his honor, and by his special protection, completely preserved from all sin, they nonetheless teach—as we do—that all have sinned. They teach that infants who have never actually sinned have defiled natures, destitute of justice, and turned away from God. They teach, as we do, that God alone justifies the soul of man without any other cooperative cause of justice—that is, in making man righteous, none work effectively alongside God in this matter, but rather, that God works alone. They teach, as we do, that no one has ever attained justification but by the merits of Jesus Christ. They

teach, as we do, that although Christ as God is the efficient cause of our justification and that Christ as man is the meritorious cause of our justification, something nonetheless is required of us as well. God is the cause of our natural life; we live in him (Acts 17:28). However, he does not give life to our bodies without giving life to the soul within the body as well. Christ's merits have made us just before God. But, just as medicine does not heal by being made available but by being applied, so there can be no justification for mankind apart from the application of the merit of Christ. Thus far we join hands with the Church of Rome.

5. Where, then, do we disagree? We disagree about the very nature of the medicine by which Christ cures our disease; we disagree about the way in which he applies it; and we disagree about the number and the power of the means which God requires in us in order to effectually apply this medicine to comfort our souls.

When we ask them what the righteousness is that justifies a Christian man, they answer that it is a divine spiritual quality. Further, they teach that when this quality is received within the soul, it first makes one to be born of God (cf. Jn. 1:13), and then endows the soul with power to bring forth those works which are proper to those who are born of God (this happens, they say, in just the same way that the soul of a man, being joined to his body, first makes him a rational creature, and then enables him to perform the functions which are proper to rational creatures). They teach that this quality renders the soul gracious and pleasing in the sight of God (thus its name, "grace"), and that by this grace, through the merit of Christ we are delivered from sin and likewise from its consequences: eternal death and condemnation.

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

They understand this grace to be applied to the soul by infusion. They make this comparison: just as the body is warmed by the heat which is within it, so the soul becomes righteous by an inherent grace, a grace that can increase—as the body might become more and more warm, so the soul may become more and more justified, as grace increases. Furthermore, they argue that this increase of grace is merited by good works, just as good works are made meritorious by it. Thus, in their doctrine, the first reception of grace into the soul is the “first justification,” and the increase of this grace is the “second justification.”

As grace may be increased by the merit of good works, so it may be diminished by the demerit of venial sins, and lost entirely by mortal sin. Since it is necessary in the first case to repair, and in the second to recover, the loss which has been experienced, infused grace needs many fresh injections, and they describe many ways by which grace may be re-applied. For instance, it is applied to infants without either faith or works through baptism, so as to take away original sin as well as the punishment due such sin. For adult unbelievers and wicked men, it is applied in their first justification through baptism apart from works but not without faith, and takes away both actual sins and original sin, together with all punishments, temporal or eternal, which they had deserved. To those who have obtained this first justification, or first reception of grace, it is further applied by good works. This results in the increase of the first grace, and is the second justification. If they work more and more, grace increases more and more, and they are more and more justified.

To those who have lost some portion of grace by venial sins, it can be re-applied by holy water, *Ave Marias*, the

sign of the cross, papal salutations, and the like; these means serve to restore grace that has decayed. To any who have lost grace altogether through mortal sin, it can be re-applied by the so-called sacrament of penance, which has the power to confer grace anew, although not to fully restore the grace that has been lost. For penance can only cleanse the stain or guilt of sin actually committed, and change an eternal punishment into a temporal punishment to be borne in this life, if there is enough time at least. If not, the punishment must be endured in the hereafter, though it can be lightened by masses, works of charity, pilgrimages, fasts, and the like, or else pardoned in part or in full by church authorities.

This is, in short, the mystery of the “Man of Sin” (2 Thes. 2:3–4), the maze which the Church of Rome sets her followers to tread when they ask her the way of justification. I cannot take time now to take this building down and sift it piece by piece. Instead, I will simply aim to lay out the structure of apostolic teaching in a few words, so that, as befell Dagon in the presence of the Ark (1 Sam. 5), so it may befall the Roman “Babylon” in the presence of what God has established.

6. “Yea verily,” says the Apostle, “I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:8–9). Whether they speak of the first or second justification, they make the essence of it an inherent divine quality, that is, a righteousness which is in us. But if it is in us, then it is ours as our souls are ours, even if we have our souls from God

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

and can possess them no longer than pleases him. For if God withdraws the breath from our nostrils, we return to dust at once. But the righteousness in which we must be found, if we are to be justified, is not our own. Therefore, we cannot be justified by any inherent quality. Rather, *Christ has merited righteousness for as many as are found in him*. God finds us in him, if we are faithful, for by faith we are incorporated into Christ.

Thus, although we ourselves are altogether sinful and unrighteous, even the man who is himself impious, full of iniquity and sin, if he is found in Christ through faith and hates his sin in repentance, God beholds him with a gracious eye! God puts away his sin by not imputing it to him; God takes away the punishment he justly deserves by pardoning it; God accepts him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous, as if he had fulfilled all that is commanded in the law, and—can it be?—as *more* perfectly righteous than if he himself had fulfilled the whole law!

I must take care in my words, but the Apostle Paul himself says, “Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, we are, in the sight of God the Father, as the very Son of God himself! Let this be counted folly or frenzy, or fury, or whatever you please. It is our wisdom and our comfort; we desire no other knowledge in the world but this: that man has sinned and God has suffered; that God has made himself the sin of men, and that men are made the righteousness of God.

You see therefore that the Church of Rome, in teaching justification by inherent grace, perverts the truth of Christ, and that from the hands of the very Apostles we have received a different teaching than Rome’s.

Now when it comes to the righteousness of sanctification, we do not deny that it is inherent, and we acknowledge that unless we work at a holy life, we do not have it. However, we distinguish the righteousness of sanctification as something different in nature from the righteousness of justification. We are righteous in one way by the faith of Abraham (Gen. 15:1–6); in regard to the other way, unless we do the works of Abraham, we are not righteous (Gen. 22:1–14). Of justification, St. Paul says, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). Of sanctification, St. John says, *Qui facit justitiam, justus est*—“He that doeth righteousness is righteous” (1 Jn. 3:7). Of justification, St. Paul proves by the example of Abraham that we have it by faith without works (Rom. 4:1–25). Of sanctification, St. James teaches by the example of Abraham “that we have it by works, and not only by faith” (James 2:14–26). St. Paul clearly distinguishes these two parts of Christian righteousness from one another. In Romans 6 he writes, “But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life” (Rom. 6:22). “Made free from sin and become servants to God”—this is the righteousness of justification. “Fruit unto sanctification”—this is the righteousness of sanctification. By the first we gain the right of inheritance; by the second we are brought into the actual possession of eternal bliss. And so the end of both of these is everlasting life.

7. Let us come back to the Prophet Habakkuk. He refers to the Jews as “righteous men,” not only because, being justified by faith, they were free from sin, but also because they bore fruit in holy living. He provides us with an example of charitable judgment, leaving it to God to discern what

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

men are, and speaking of them according to what they profess themselves to be—even though men are not holy based on what other men think of them but based on what God knows to be the case. But every Christian man must understand that, in a spirit of Christian equity, he is bound to think and speak of his brothers as men who have a measure of holiness and a right to the titles with which God—by his special favor and mercy—condescends to honor his chosen servants. That is why we see the Apostles of our Savior Christ refer to the people of God by the title of “saints”; likewise, the Prophet refers to the faithful of his day as “righteous.” But let us all endeavor to be in fact what we desire to be called. “Godly names do not justify godless men,” says Salvianus.³ We deserve rebuke when we are honored with names and titles which do not match our lives and manners.

If, indeed, we have lives characterized by the fruit of holiness, we must note that the more we abound in holy living, the more we need to desire to be strengthened and supported in our endeavor. Even our virtues may become snares to us. The enemy that waits on all occasions to work our ruin (1 Pet. 5:8) has always found it harder to overthrow a humble sinner than a proud saint. No one’s situation is as perilous as that of the man whom Satan has persuaded to trust his own righteousness to present him pure and blameless in the sight of God (compare Jude 24–25). Even if we could say that “we feel no guilt in our own consciences”

³ Salvianus, also known as Salvian, was a fifth-century theologian who served for a period as presbyter in Marseilles. The work being cited is *De gubernatione Dei* (On the Government of God) 19.90 (PL 53:0092A). The Latin phrase, *reatus impii est pium nomen*, is cited by Hooker before he offers his English translation/paraphrase.

(which no one could honestly say, for we know ourselves to be far from such innocence), could we plead “Not guilty!” in the presence of our Judge, who sees further into our hearts than we ourselves are able to see? Even if our hands had never done violence to our brothers, a violent thought proves us murderers before him. If we had never opened our mouths to utter any scandalous, offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our secret thoughts still echoes in God’s ears. If we did not commit the evils which we do daily and hourly—the evil deeds, words, or thoughts—consider how many defects are intermingled with even the good things we do!

When it comes to our actions, God has special regard for the mind and intentions of the one who acts. If we then eliminate all those deeds in which we aimed at our own glory, sought to please men, or satisfy our own pleasures, we will find the number of those things which we do without ulterior motives, purely for the love of God, is very small indeed. Let us consider the holiest and best thing we do: prayer. We are never more focused on God than when we pray, yet how often when we pray, we find our thoughts and desires distracted! How little reverence we show to the grand majesty of that God to whom we speak! How little remorse for our own failures! How little we taste the sweet influence of his tender mercies! Are we not, often, so unwilling to begin prayer and so glad to end it that it is as if God had laid a great burden upon us in saying, “Call upon me”!

What I say may seem somewhat extreme, so let everyone consider only what his own heart tells him. I only ask this: suppose God would grant us—not as in the case of Abraham at Sodom, fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, or even just

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

ten good persons so that the city should not be destroyed (Gen. 18:22–33)—but a different offer. Suppose it was one like this: “Search all the generations of men since the Fall of our father Adam, and find one man who has done any single pure action without any stain or blemish, and for that one man’s singular act, neither man nor angel shall feel the torments which are prepared for both.” Do you think that this ransom—fit to deliver men and angels—could actually be found among the sons of men? Even the *best* things we do have something in them that requires pardon! How then can anything we do be meritorious and worthy of reward?

It is true that God graciously promises to give all the gifts of a blessed life to as many as sincerely keep his Law (e.g., Dt. 11:13–15), although they are not able to keep it strictly (Josh. 24:19–21). Therefore we acknowledge the necessary duty of doing good works, but we utterly renounce any notion of meritoriousness for these good actions. We see how far we are from the perfect righteousness of the Law. The little fruit we have in holiness is, God knows, corrupt and unsound. We can put no confidence in it at all, nor make any demands based on it, and we dare not call God to a reckoning as if we had him in our debt. Our continual plea to him is, and must be, “Please bear with our infirmities. Pardon our offenses.”

8. But the people of whom the Prophet Habakkuk speaks—were they all, or even a majority of them, careful to walk uprightly? Did they thirst after righteousness (Mt. 5:6)? Did they wish, did they long with the righteous Prophet, “Oh that my ways were established to observe thy statutes” (Ps. 119:5)? Did they lament with the righteous Apostle, “Wretched men that we are! The good which we wish and purpose and strive to do, we cannot do” (Rom.

7:18–19, 24)? No. The words of other Prophets about this people show the opposite. How grievously Isaiah mourns over them: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly!” (Is. 1:4). Nonetheless, God’s profound compassion for us is such that he does not deny us, not even when we are laden with iniquity, permission to call upon him as a Father, to seek his aid and entreat his help that whatever plagues we have deserved, we may still be spared, and that we might not be hemmed in by pagans and unbelievers.

The Jerusalem of Habakkuk’s day was a sinful, polluted city, but it was still righteous compared to Babylon. And shall the righteous be overwhelmed, shall they be utterly compassed about by the wicked? The Prophet not only complains, “Lord, how has it come to pass that you treat us so severely (we who are called by your name) and overlook the heathen nations which despise you?” No, he is driven into extreme grief and goes so far as to conclude that what has occurred is wicked; it is wickedness for the righteous to be treated in this fashion: “Justice goeth forth perverted” (Hab. 1:4).

9. This conclusion has many lessons which would be valuable for you to hear, and for me to speak, if necessity did not require me to focus on another task. When Paul and Barnabas were asked to preach the same things a second time, they considered it their duty to satisfy these godly desires of men sincerely inclined toward the truth (Acts 13:13–43). Likewise, hopefully it will not seem burdensome to me or unprofitable for you if I follow their example, since a similar occasion has been offered to me. Remember when we last considered St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, and especially these words, that God “hath at the end of these

LEARNED DISCOURSE OF JUSTIFICATION

days spoken unto us in his Son” (Heb. 1:2). In that sermon, I discussed the nature of the visible Church of Christ and defined it as a community of men who are sanctified through the profession of that truth which God has taught the world by his Son. I also declared that the purpose of Christian doctrine is to comfort those whose hearts are overwhelmed by the burden of sin, and proved that the doctrine professed in the Church of Rome deprives men of comfort both during their lives and at their deaths. The conclusion to which we came at the end was this:

Since the Church of Rome is so corrupted in matters of faith and refuses to reform herself, we are to utterly separate ourselves from her. The example of our forefathers cannot suffice to keep us in communion and fellowship with that church in the hope that we might be saved in this communion, just because our forefathers were. I have no doubt that God was merciful to save thousands of them, even though they lived in popish superstitions, because they sinned ignorantly. As for us, however, the truth is now laid before our eyes.

I plead with you to take notice of my words, “I have no doubt that *God was merciful to save thousands of our fathers who lived in popish superstitions, because they sinned ignorantly.*” Examine these words with your most exacting judgment. If they be found as gold, let them stand, suitable for the precious foundation on which they were laid (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–4:5). But if they are found to be hay or stubble, my own hand shall set fire to it!

Two questions have arisen with regard to this former sermon of mine. The first is: “Whether our fathers—infecting as they were with popish errors and superstitions—might be saved at all?” The second is: “Whether their ignorance might serve as a reason for us to think that they might be saved?” We will therefore examine first, what *possibility*, and then second, what *probability* there is that God might be merciful to so many of our forefathers.