

# Justification

by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

This article is extracted from Kuyper's classic book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (1888; American edition 1900) volume 2, chapters 30-31. The electronic edition of this article was scanned and edited by Shane Rosenthal. It is in the public domain and may be freely copied and distributed. Original pagination has been kept for purposes of reference. Some sections have been edited due to the dated nature of their content. Presented here are the first two of Kuyper's four chapters on the doctrine of justification.

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, *THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*, 1900, Page 354

*Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"--Rom. iii. 24

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that true conversion consists of these two parts: the dying, of the old man, and the rising again of the new. This last should be noticed. The Catechism says not that the new life originates in conversion, but that it arises in conversion. That which arises must exist before. Else how could it arise? This agrees with our statement that regeneration precedes conversion, and that by the effectual calling the newborn child of God is brought to conversion. p. 354, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

We now proceed to consider a matter which, though belonging to the same subject and running parallel with it, yet moves along an entirely different line, viz., justification. p. 354, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

In the Sacred Scripture, justification occupies the most conspicuous place, and is presented as of greatest importance for the sinner: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24). "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. i); "Who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. iv. 25); "Who of God is made unto us from God, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). p. 354, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

And not only is this so strongly emphasized by Scripture, but it was also the very kernel of the Reformation, which puts this doctrine p. 354, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, *THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT*, 1900, Page 355

of "justification by faith" boldly and clearly in opposition to the "meritorious works of Rome." "justification by faith" was in those days the shibboleth of the heroes of faith, Martin Luther in the van. p. 355, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

...Through the grace of God, our people did not go so far astray; and where the Ethicals, largely from principle, surrendered this point of doctrine, the Reformed did and do oppose them, admonishing them with all energy, and as often as possible, not to merge justification in sanctification. p. 355, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

Regarding the question, how justification differs, on the one hand, from "regeneration," and, on the other, from "calling and conversion," we answer that justification emphasizes the idea of right. p. 355, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

Right regulates the relations between two persons. Where there is but one there is no right, simply because there are no relations to regulate. Hence by right we understand either the right of man in relation to man, or the claim of God upon man. It is in this last sense that we use the word right. p. 355, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

The Lord is our Lawgiver, our judge, our King. Hence He is absolutely Sovereign: as Lawgiver determining what is right; as judge judging our being and doing; as King dispensing rewards and punishments. This sheds light upon the difference between justification and regeneration. The new birth and the call and conversion have to do with our being, as sinners or as regenerate men; but justification with the relation which we sustain to God, either as sinners or as those born again. p. 355, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

~~Apart from the question of right, the sinner may be considered p. 355, par. 6, [JUSTIFIC]~~

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 356

as a sick person, who is infected and inoculated with disease. After being born again he improves, the infection disappears, the corruption ceases, and he prospers again. But this concerns his person alone, how he is, and what his prospects are; it does not touch the question of right. p. 356, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

The question of right arises when I see in the sinner a creature not his own, but belonging to another. Herein is all the difference. If man is to me the principal factor, so that I have nothing else in view but his improvement and deliverance from misery, then the Almighty God is in this whole matter a mere Physician, called in and affording assistance, who receives His fee, and is discharged with many thanks. The question of right does not enter here at all. So long as the sinner is made more holy, all is well. Of course, if he is made perfect, all the better. Clearly understanding, however, that man belongs not to himself, but to another, the matter assumes an entirely different aspect. For then he can not be or do as he pleases, but another has determined what he must be and what he must do. And if

he does or is otherwise, he is guilty as a transgressor: guilty because he rebelled, guilty because he transgressed. p. 356, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

Hence when I believe in the divine sovereignty, the sinner appears to me in an entirely different aspect. As infected and mortally ill, he is to be pitied and kindly treated; but considered as belonging to God, standing under God, and as having robbed God, that same sinner becomes a guilty transgressor. p. 356, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

This is true to some extent of animals. When I lasso a wild horse on the American prairies for training, it never enters my mind to punish him for his wildness. But the runaway in the city streets must be punished. He is vicious; he threw his rider; he refused to be led and chose his own way. Hence he needs to be punished. And man much more so. When I meet him in his wild career of sin, I know that he is a rebel, that he broke the reins, threw his rider, and now dashes on in mad revolt. Hence such sinner must, be not only healed, but *punished*. He does not need *medical* treatment alone, but before all things he needs *juridical* treatment. p. 356, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

Apart from his disease a sinner has done evil; there is no virtue in him; he has violated the right; he deserves punishment. Suppose, for a moment, that sin had not touched his person, had not corrupted him, had left him intact as a man, then there would have p. 356, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 357

been no need of regeneration, of healing, of a rising again, of sanctification; nevertheless he would have been subject to the vengeance of justice. p. 357, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

Hence man's case in relation to his God must be considered *juridically*. Be not afraid of that word, brother. Rather insist that it be pronounced with as strong an emphasis as possible. It must be emphasized, and all the more strongly, because for so many years it has been scorned, and the churches have been made to believe that this "*juridical*" aspect of the case was of no importance; that it was a representation really unworthy of God; that the principal thing was to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. p. 357, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

Beautiful teaching, gradually pushed into the world from the closet of philosophy: teaching that declares that morality included the right and stood far above the right; that "right" was chiefly a notion of the life of less civilized ages and of crude persons, but of no importance to our ideal age and to the ideal development of humanity and of individuals; yea, that in some respects it is even objectionable,

and should never be allowed to enter into that holy and high and tender relation that exists between God and man. p. 357, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

The fruit of this pestilential philosophy is, that now in Europe *the sense of right* is gradually dying of slow consumption. Among the Asiatic nations this sense of right has greater vitality than among us. Might is again greater than right. Right is again the right of the strongest. And the luxurious circles, who in their atony of spirit at first protested against the "*juridical*" in *theology*, discover now with terror that certain classes in society are losing more and more respect for the "*juridical*" in the *question of property*. Even in regard to the possession of land and house, and treasure and fields, this new conception of life considers the "*juridical*" a less noble idea. Bitter satire I You who, in your wantonness, started the mockery of the "*juridical*" in connection with God, find your punishment now in the fact that the lower classes start the mockery of this "*juridical*" in connection with your money and your goods. Yea, more than this. When recently in Paris a woman was tried for having shot and killed a man in court, not only did the jury acquit her, but she was made the heroine of an ovation. Here also other motives were deemed more precious, and the "*juridical*" aspect had nothing to do with it. p. 357, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

~~And, therefore, in the name of God and of the right which He~~ p. 357, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 358

has ordained, we urgently request that every minister of the Word, and every man in his place, help and labor, with clear consciousness and energy, to stop this dissolution of the right, with all the means at their disposal; and especially solemnly and effectually to restore to its own conspicuous place the juridical feature of the sinner's relation to his God. When this is done, we shall feel again the stimulus that will cause the soul's relaxed muscles to contract, rousing us from our semi-unconsciousness. Every man, and especially every member of the Church, must again realize his juridical relation to God now and forever; that he is not merely man or woman, but a creature belonging to God, absolutely controlled by God; and guilty and punishable when not acting according to the will of God. p. 358, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

This being clearly understood, it is evident that regeneration and calling and conversion, yea, even complete reformation and sanctification, can not be sufficient; for, although these are very glorious, and deliver you from sin's stain and pollution, and help you not to violate the law so frequently, yet they do not touch your juridical relation to God. p. 358, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

When a mutinous battalion gets into serious straits, and the general, hearing of it, delivers them at the cost of ten killed and twenty wounded, who had not mutinied, and brings them back and feeds them, do you think that that will be all? Do you not see that such battalion is still liable to punishment with decimation? And when man mutinied against his God, and got himself into trouble and nearly perished with misery, and the Lord God sent him help to save him, and called him back, and he returned, can that be the end of it? Do you not clearly see that he is still liable to severe punishment? In case of a burglar who robs and kills, but in making his escape breaks his leg, and is sent to the hospital where he is treated, and then goes out a cripple unable to repeat his crime, do you think that the judge would give him his liberty, saying: "He is healed now and will never do it again"? No; he will be tried, convicted, and incarcerated. Even so here. Because by our sins and transgressions we have wounded ourselves, and made ourselves wretched, and are in need of medical help, is our guilt forgotten for this reason? p. 358, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

Why, then, are such undermining ideas brought among the people? Why is it that under the appearance of love a sentimental Christianity is introduced about the "dear Jesus," and "that we are p. 358, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 359

so sick," and "the Physician is passing by," and that "it is, oh I so glorious to be in fellowship with that holy Mediator"? p. 359, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

Are our people really ignorant of the fact that this whole representation stands diametrically opposed to Sacred Scripture--opposed to all that ever animated the Church of Christ and made it strong? Do they not feel that such a feeble and spongy Christianity is a clay too soft for the making of heroes in the Kingdom of God? And do they not see that the number of men who are drawn to the "dear Jesus" is much smaller now than that of the men who formerly were drawn to the Mediator of the right, who with His precious blood hath fully satisfied for all our sins? p. 359, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

And when it is answered, "That is just what we teach; reconciliation in His blood, redemption through His death! It is all paid for us! Only come and hear our preaching and sing our hymns!" then we beseech the brethren who thus speak to be serious for a moment. For, behold, our objection is not that you deny the reconciliation through His blood, but that, by being silent on the question of God's right, and of our state of condemnation, and by being satisfied when the people "only come to Jesus," you allow the consciousness of guilt to wear out, you make genuine repentance impossible, you substitute a certain discontent with oneself for brokenness of heart; and thus you weaken the faculty to feel, to understand, and to

realize what the meaning is of reconciliation through the blood of the cross. p. 359, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

It is quite possible to bring about reconciliation without touching the question of the right at all. By some misunderstanding two friends have become estranged, separated from, and hostile to each other. But they may be reconciled. Not necessarily by making one to see that he violated the rights of the other; this was perhaps never intended. And even if there was some right violated, it would not be expedient to speak of the past, but to cover it with the mantle of love and to look only to the future. And such reconciliation, if successful, is very delightful, and may have cost both the reconciled and the reconciler much of conflict and sacrifice, yea, prayers and tears. And yet, with all this, such reconciliation does not touch the question of right. p. 359, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

~~In this way it appears to us these brethren preach reconciliation. It is true that they~~ preach it with much warmth and animation even; but--and this is our complaint--they consider and present it as an enmity caused by whispering, misunderstanding, and p. 359, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 360

wrong inclination, rather than by violation of the right. And, in consequence, their preaching of reconciliation through the blood of the cross no longer causes the deep chord of the right to vibrate in men's souls; but it resembles the reconciliation of two friends, who at an evil hour became estranged from each other. p. 360, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 361

## Our Status (Volume 2, Chapter 31)

*"And he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness. --Gen. xv. 6.*

The right touches a man's status. So long as the law has not Proven him guilty, has not convicted and sentenced him, his legal status is that of a free and law-abiding citizen. But as soon as his guilt is proven in court and the jury has convicted him, he passes from that into the status of the bound and law-breaking citizen. p. 361, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

The same applies to our relation to God. Our status before God is that either of the just or of the unjust. In the former, we are not condemned or we are released from condemnation. He that is still under condemnation occupies the status of the unjust. p. 361, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]



Hence, and this is noteworthy, a man's status depends not upon what he is, but upon the decision of the proper authorities regarding him; not upon what he is *actually*, but upon what he is *counted* to be. p. 361, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

A clerk in an office is innocently suspected of embezzlement, and accused before a court of law. He pleads not guilty; but the suspicions against him carry conviction, and the judge condemns him. Now, though he did not embezzle, is actually innocent, he is counted guilty. And since a man does not determine his own status, but his sovereign or judge determines it for him, the status of this clerk, although innocent, is, from the moment of his conviction, that of a law-breaker. And the contrary may occur just as well. In the absence of convicting evidence the judge may acquit a dishonest clerk, who, although guilty and a law-breaker, still retains his status of a law-abiding and honest citizen. In this case he is dishonorable, but he is counted honorable. Hence a man's status depends not upon what he actually is, but what he is counted to be. p. 361, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

~~The reason is, that man's status has no reference to his inward being, but only to~~  
the manner in which he is to be treated. It would be useless to determine this himself, for his fellow citizens would p. 361, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 362

not receive it, though he asserted a hundred times, "I am an honorable citizen," they would pay no attention to it. But if the judge declares him honorable, and then they should dare to call him dishonorable, there would be a power to maintain his status against those who attack him. Hence a man's own declaration can not obtain him a legal status. He may fancy or assume a status of righteousness, but it has no stability, it is no status. p. 362, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

This explains why, in our own good land, a man's legal status as a citizen is determined not by himself, but solely by the king, either as sovereign or as judge. The king is judge, for all judgment is pronounced in his name; and, although the judiciary can not be denied a certain authority independent of the executive, yet in every sentence it is the king's judicature which pronounces judgment. Hence a man's status depends solely upon the king's decision. Now the king has decided, once for all, that every citizen never convicted of crime is counted honorable. Not because all are honorable, but that they shall be counted as such. Hence so long as a man was never sentenced, he passes for honorable, even though he is not. And as soon as he is sentenced, he is considered dishonorable, though he is perfectly honorable. And thus his status is determined by his king, and in it he is accounted not according to what he is, but what his king counts him to be. Even without the

judiciary, it is the king who determines a man's state in society, not according to what he is, but what the king counts him to be. p. 362, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

A person's sex is determined not by his condition, but by what the registrar of vital statistics in his register has declared him to be. If by some mistake a girl were registered as a boy, and therefore counted as a boy, then at the proper time she would be summoned to serve in the militia, unless the mistake were corrected, and she be counted to be what she is. It may be a pretended, and not the real, child of the rich nobleman in whose name it is registered. And yet it makes no difference whose child it really is, for the state will support it in all its rights of inheritance, because it passes for the child of that nobleman, and is counted to be his legitimate child. p. 362, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

Hence it is the rule in society that a man's status is determined not by his actual condition, nor by his own declaration, but by the sovereign under whom he stands. And this sovereign has the power, by his decision, to assign to a man the status to which, according to his condition, he belongs, or to put him in a status where he does not belong, but to which he is accounted to belong. p. 362, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 363

This is the case even in matters where mistakes are out of the question. At the time of the king's death and of the pregnancy of his widow, a prince or princess is counted to exist, even before he or she is born. And, accordingly, while the child is still a nursing babe, it is counted to be the owner of large possessions, even though these possessions may be entirely lost, before the child can hear of them. And so there are a number of cases where standing, and condition, without anybody's fault or mistake, are entirely different; simply because it is possible that a man be in a state into which he has not yet grown. p. 363, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

The king alone can determine his own status; if it pleases him to register tomorrow incognito, as a count or a baron, he will be relieved from the usual royal honors. p. 363, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

We have elaborated this point more largely, because the Ethicals and the Mystics have got our poor people so bitterly out of the habit of reckoning with this counting, of God. The word of Scripture, "Abraham believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness," is no longer understood; or it is made to refer to the merit of faith, which is Arminian doctrine. p. 363, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

The Holy Spirit often speaks of this counting of God: "I am counted with them that go down into the pit"; "The Lord shall count them when He writeth up the



peoples"; "And it was counted unto Phineas for righteousness unto all generations, forevermore." So it is said of Jesus, that "He was counted [numbered] with the transgressors"; of Judas that "he was counted with the eleven"; of the uncircumcision which keeps the law, that "it shall be counted unto him for circumcision"; of Abraham that "his faith was counted unto him for righteousness"; of him "that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly," that "his faith is counted unto him for righteousness"; and of the children of the promise that "they are counted for the seed." p. 363, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

~~It is this very counting that appears to the children of this present age so~~ incomprehensible and problematic. They will not hear of it. And, as Rome at one time severed the tendon of the Gospel, by merging justification in sanctification, mixing and identifying the two, so do people now refuse to listen to anything but an Ethical justification, which is actually only a species of sanctification. Hence God's counting, counts for nothing. It is not heeded. It has no worth nor significance attached to it. The only question is p. 363, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 364

what a man is. The measure of worth is nothing else but the worth of our *personality*. p. 364, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

And this we oppose most emphatically. It is a denial of justification *in toto*; and such denial is essentially mutiny and rebellion against God, a withdrawing of oneself from the authority of one's legal sovereign. p. 364, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

All those who consider themselves saved because they have holy emotions, or because they think themselves less sinful, and profess to make progress in sanctification, all these, however dissimilar they may be in all other things, have this in common, that they insist on being, counted according to their own declaration, and not according to what God counts them to be. Instead of leaving, as dependent creatures, the honor of determining their status to their sovereign King, whose they are, they sit as judges to determine it themselves, by their own progress in good works. p. 364, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

And not only this, but they also detract from the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and from the reality of the guilt for which He satisfied. He who maintains that God must count a man according to what he is, and not according to what God wills to count him, can never understand how the Lord Jesus could bear our sins, and be a "curse" and "sin" for us. He must interpret this sin-bearing in the sense of a physical or Ethical fellowship, and seek for reconciliation not in the cross of Jesus, but in His manger, as many actually do in these days. p. 364, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

And as they thus make the actual bearing of our guilt by the Mediator unthinkable, so they make inherited guilt impossible. p. 364, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

Assuredly, they say, there is inherited stain, taken in a Manichean sense, but no original guilt. For how could the guilt of a dead man be counted unto us? It is evident, therefore, that by this thoughtless and bold denial of the right of God, not only is justification disjointed, but the whole structure of salvation is robbed of its foundation. p. 364, par. 6, [JUSTIFIC]

And why is this? Is it because the human consciousness can not conceive the idea of being counted according to what we are not? Our illustrations from the social life show that men readily understand and daily accept such a relation in common affairs. The deep cause of this unbelief lies in the fact that man will not rest in God's judgment concerning him, but that he seeks for rest in his own estimate of himself; that this estimate is considered a safer shield than God's judgment concerning him; and that, instead p. 364, par. 7, [JUSTIFIC]

---

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 365

of living with the reformers by faith, he tries to live by the things found in himself. And from this men must return. This leads us back to Rome; this is to forsake justification by faith; this is to sever the artery of grace. Much more than in the political realm must the sacred principle be applied to the Kingdom of heaven, that to our Sovereign King and judge alone belongs the prerogative, by His decision, absolutely to determine our state of righteousness or of unrighteousness. p. 365, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

The sovereignty which reposes in an earthly king is only borrowed, derived, and laid upon him; but the sovereignty of the Lord our God is the source and fountainhead of all authority and of all binding force. p. 365, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

If it belongs to the very essence of sovereignty, that by the ruler's decision alone the status of his subjects is determined, then it must be clear, and it can not be otherwise than that this very authority belongs originally, absolutely, and supremely to our God. Whom He judges guilty is guilty, and must be treated as guilty; and whom He declares just is just, and must be treated as just. Before He entered Gethsemane, Jesus our King declared to His disciples: "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." And this is His declaration even now, and it shall forever remain so. Our state, our place, our lot for eternity depends not upon what we are, nor upon what others see in us, nor upon what we imagine or presume ourselves to be, but only upon what God thinks of us, what He

counts us to be, what He, the Almighty and just judge, declares us to be. p. 365, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]

When He declares us just, when He thinks us just, when He counts us just, then we are by this very thing His children who shall not lie, and ours is the inheritance of the just, although we lie in the midst of sin. And in like manner, when He pronounces us guilty in Adam, when in Adam He counts us subject to condemnation, then we are guilty, fallen, and condemned, even though we discover in our hearts nothing but sweet and childlike innocence. p. 365, par. 4, [JUSTIFIC]

In this way alone it must be understood and interpreted that the Lord Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, although He was holy; that He was made sin, although He was the living Righteousness; and that He was declared a curse in our place, although He was Immanuel. In the days of His flesh He was numbered with transgressors and sinners, He was put in their state, and He was treated accordingly. p. 365, par. 5, [JUSTIFIC]

ABRAHAM KUYPER, THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, 1900, Page 366

as such the burden of God's wrath came upon Him, and as such. His Father forsook Him, and gave Him over to bitterest death. lit, the Resurrection alone He was restored to the status of the righteous, and thus He was raised for our justification. p. 366, par. 1, [JUSTIFIC]

Oh, this matter goes so deep! When to the Lord God is again ascribed His sovereign prerogative to determine a man's status. then every mystery of Scripture assumes its rightful place; but when it is not, then the entire way of salvation must be falsified. p. 366, par. 2, [JUSTIFIC]

Finally, if one should say: "An earthly sovereign may be mistaken, but God can not be; hence God must assign to every man a status which accords with his work"; then we answer: "This would be so, if the omnipotent grace of God were not irresistible." But since it is, you are not esteemed by God according to what you are, but you are what God esteems you to be. p. 366, par. 3, [JUSTIFIC]