

XXXI.

Our Status.

“And he believed in the Lord: and he counted it to him for righteousness.” —*Gen. xv.*
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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.

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.

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.

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, tho 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, altho 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, altho 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.

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 not receive it. Tho 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*.



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, altho 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 tho he is not. And as soon as he is sentenced, he is considered dishonorable, tho 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.

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.

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.

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 tho 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.

The king alone can determine his own status; if it pleases him to register to-morrow *incognito*, as a count or a baron, he will be relieved from the usual royal honors.

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," ([Gen. xv. 6](#) and [Rom. iv. 3](#)) is no longer understood; or it is made to refer to the *merit* of faith, which is Arminian doctrine.

The Holy Spirit often speaks of this *counting* of God: "I am *counted* with them that go down into the pit" ([Psalm lxxxviii. 4](#)); "The Lord shall *count* them when He writeth up the peoples" ([Psalm lxxxvii. 6](#)); "And it was *counted* unto Phineas for righteousness unto all



generations, forevermore.“ (Psalm cvi. 31) So it is said of Jesus, that “He was *counted* [numbered] with the transgressors” (Mark xv. 28); 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” (Rom. iv. 3); of him “that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly,” that “his faith is *counted* unto him for righteousness” (Rom. iv. 5); and of the children of the promise that “they are *counted* for the seed.” (Rom. ix. 8)

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 what a man is. The measure of worth is nothing else but the worth of our *personality*.

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.

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.

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.

And as they thus make the actual bearing of our guilt by the Mediator unthinkable, so they make inherited guilt impossible.

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.



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 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.

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.

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." ([John xv. 3](#)) 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.

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, altho 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 tho we discover in our hearts nothing but sweet and childlike innocence.

In this way alone it must be understood and interpreted that the Lord Jesus was *numbered* with the *transgressors*, altho He was holy; that He was made *sin*, altho He was the living Righteousness; and that He was declared a *curse* in our place, altho 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; 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. In the Resurrection alone He was restored to the status of the righteous, and thus He was raised for our justification.

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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.

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.

XXXII.

Justification from Eternity

“The righteousness which is of God by faith.” —*Phil. iii. 9.*

It has become evident that the question which most closely concerns us is, not whether we are more or less holy, but whether our *status* is that of the just or of the unjust; and that this is determined not by what we are at any given moment, but by God as our Sovereign and Judge.

In Adam's creation God put us, without any preceding merits on our part, in the state of original righteousness. After the fall, according to the same sovereign prerogative, He put us, as Adam's descendants, in the state of unrighteousness, imputing Adam's guilt to each personally. And in exactly the same manner He now justifies the ungodly, *i.e.*, He places him, without any previous merit on his part, in the state of righteousness according to His own holy and inviolable prerogative.

In the creation He did not first wait to see whether man would develop holiness in himself, so as to declare him righteous on the ground of this holiness; but He declared him originally righteous, even before there was a possibility on his part of evincing a desire for holiness. And after the fall He did not wait to see whether sin would manifest itself in us, so as to assign us to the state of the unrighteous on the ground of this sin; but before our birth, before there was a possibility of personal sin, He declared us guilty. And in the same manner God does not wait to see whether a sinner shows signs of conversion in order to restore him to honor as a righteous person, but He declares the ungodly just before he has had the least possibility of doing any good work.

Hence there is a sharp line between our *sanctification* and our *justification*. The former has to do with the quality of our being, depends upon our faith, and can not be effected outside of us. But

justification is effected outside of us, irrespective of what we are, dependent only upon the decision of God, our judge and Sovereign; in such a way that justification *precedes* sanctification, the latter proceeding from the former as a necessary result. God does not justify us because we are becoming more holy, but when He has justified us we grow in holiness: “Being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (*Rom. v. 9*)

There should never be the least doubt regarding this matter. Every effort to reverse this established order of Scripture must earnestly be resisted. This glorious confession, declared with so much power to the souls of men in the days of the Reformation, must continue the precious jewel, to be transmitted intact by us to our posterity as a sacred inheritance. So long as we ourselves have not yet entered the New Jerusalem, our comfort should never be founded upon our sanctification, but exclusively upon our justification. Tho our sanctification were ever so far advanced, so long as we are not justified we remain in our sin and are lost.

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