

# CHAPTER FOUR

## ADAM'S SIN MAKES CHRIST'S PERFECT OBEDIENCE THE ONLY BASIS OF SALVATION

In the present chapter, the following aspects of Edwards' theology of Adam's sin necessitating Christ's perfect obedience for the salvation of sinners will be examined. First, as Adam stood in the garden as the representative and surety for all mankind in his trial of obedience to God's rule of righteousness, he rendered his entire posterity guilty of sin and subject to the penalty of God's wrath for disobedience. Moreover, the inflexible and exacting nature of God's law renders all people guilty of sin in every act, while making no provision for deliverance from sin and guilt. Second, all sinners possess infinite guilt and cannot obtain eternal life by obedience to God's rule of righteousness. Every sin creates infinite guilt, while the best works of saints and sinners are infinitely sinful in light of the honor due to an infinitely holy and benevolent God. Third, Adam's sin neither altered nor abrogated God's rule of righteousness, as it is inalterable and eternal. Fourth, justification in accordance with God's rule of righteousness requires perfect positive obedience as well as pardon of sin, as mere freedom from punishment does not achieve the believer's title to glory and

exaltation in heaven. Fifth, God as a righteous judge cannot judge without a rule and cannot justify without perfect righteousness. Sixth, if God's strict rule of righteousness has been replaced with a milder law that requires imperfect obedience only, then imperfect obedience meets the terms of the law and no atonement is needed, rendering Christ's death needless. Seventh, God's rule of righteousness precludes justification by any virtue or righteousness inherent in faith itself. Rather, faith unites to Christ who alone possesses the perfect righteousness required by God's rule of righteousness. And lastly, justification by the virtue or righteousness of mankind insults the glory of the Trinity, making the glory of the heavenly arrangement among the persons of the Trinity for the redemption of sinners superfluous and foolish.

### **Adam's Sin Makes All Mankind Guilty Sinners Under God's Wrath According to the Strict Nature of God's Rule of Righteousness**

Fundamental to Edwards' understanding of the necessity of Christ's perfect obedience to God's rule of righteousness to redeem sinners is that "all men are guilty of Adam's first sin."<sup>1</sup> Adam stood for himself and his posterity in his trial of obedience, as the covenant God made with Adam was made with all mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> "True Repentance Required," *Works* 10:512. For Edwards, the denial of both original sin and the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity was an attack on the foundation of the gospel. For what is likely the most compelling work ever written in defense of the doctrine of original sin, see Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook, vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 107-437. Edwards argues from the evidence of "facts and events," as well as from an extensive array of Scriptural support, in addition to answering common objections to the doctrine. With the exception of a few instances of uncritical acceptance of Perry Miller's explanation of the nature of Covenant Theology (pp. 4-7), Holbrook's excellent introduction to *Original Sin* provides helpful context and background to the controversy and how Edwards viewed the denial of original sin as destructive to Christianity, *Works* 3:4-85. See also *Works* 3:432-458 for an excellent and concise account of Edwards' motive for writing the treatise.

Therefore, when Adam sinned, “all mankind sinned and fell in Adam.”

This is evident by Adam's being the legal head of mankind, which is the first thing insinuated. For if God, when he spake to Adam in the singular number, giving him a precept, spake to him as representing his posterity, so it will follow that he spake to him as representing his posterity in the threatening. And this is further evident by this, that death did not only reign from Adam to Moses, but also reigned over them that had not violated Adam's law themselves by their actual personal transgression, as Adam had done.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, “Adam was our common father and representative who stood in our room: we were all in his loins.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, when

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<sup>2</sup> “Romans 5:13-14,” *Works* 24:999. In supporting the doctrine of original sin from Romans 5:12-14, Edwards writes, “and this is further evident by this, that death did not only reign from Adam to Moses, but also reigned over them that had not violated Adam's law themselves by their actual personal transgression, as Adam had done.” In other words, as death is the penalty for sin, the meaning of “because all sinned” in v. 12 must be by their participation in Adam's sin, as evidenced by the fact that those who did not sin by their “actual transgression” still die. Additionally, in the sermon “True Repentance Required,” he argues from the fact that all have suffered the effect of Adam's sin: “The covenant which he broke was made with us all, and for us all in him; it cannot be supposed that the covenant that God made with Adam, He made only for his single person. That is ridiculous, for at that rate there must be a particular covenant made with every particular person, in all nations and ages. We might know that we are guilty of Adam's sin because we see that the effects of it are transmitted down to all his posterity; which if it were not so, there would be no more reason for than that all the world should feel the effect of every particular man's sin in these days.” *Works* 10:512.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards' understanding of Adam as both the natural and covenantal head of the human race is consistent with the traditional federal or covenantal view. Turretin writes: “The bond between Adam and his posterity is twofold: (1) natural, as he is the father, and we are his children; (2) political and forensic, as he was the prince and representative head of the whole human race. Therefore the foundation of imputation is not only the natural connection which exists between us and Adam (since, in that case, all his sins might be imputed to us), but mainly the moral and federal (in virtue of which God entered into covenant with him as

Adam disobeyed God's rule of righteousness as surety for mankind, the necessary condition of man's entrance into eternal life went unfulfilled, and remained to be fulfilled if any of mankind were to obtain eternal life. Further, as all sinned in Adam and are thereby guilty of disobeying God's rule of righteousness, no one of Adam's posterity could fulfill it, as perfect obedience was and remains the requirement.

### *The Law Is Exceedingly Strict*

The exceedingly strict nature of the law is seen in that every violation or falling short of its requirements, "however light," is sin, and that all violations of the law are punishable by death.

The Law of God not only requires holiness in our disposition and actions, but it requires it to the utmost capacity of our natures. It don't answer the Law for us to love God unless we love him with all our hearts and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our minds.... The Law is so strict that it allows not of any unholiness in any case whatsoever. The Law don't only bind at ordinary times and in ordinary cases but in all cases. Whatever our circumstances are, whatever our temptations are, yet the Law allows of no unholiness....The Law is so strict that it binds men in every action they do. Men are never at liberty from the obligation of the Law in any act that

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our head). Hence Adam stood in that sin not as a private person, but as a public and representative person- representing all his posterity in that action and whose demerit equally pertains to all." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1994), 1:9:11. Also, see Murray for an excellent discussion and clarification of the misunderstanding that Edwards taught "mediate" imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity (that Adam's sin is imputed to Adam's posterity by virtue of their hereditary corruption and is the result of corruption) in contrast to "immediate" imputation where the imputation of Adam's sin precedes corruption and is the cause of inherited corruption, the latter being Edwards view. John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1959), 42-70.

they perform in their whole lives, in every voluntary action they perform.<sup>4</sup>

The penalty for disobedience to any command of the law is death, without exception, as “it binds over to the suffering of eternal death for every transgression.”<sup>5</sup>

We are told, Rom. 6:23, that “the wages of sin is death,” and Ezek. 18:20, [that] “the soul that sinneth, it shall die,” by which is undoubtedly meant eternal destruction. The Scripture has sufficiently explained itself in that matter. When it is said, ‘tis its wages, the meaning of it is that it is the recompense it deserves, and the recompense that is appointed or stated. And [that] ‘tis not only intended that this is the wages of a wicked life or sinful course, but of one sin, of any one thing that is a sin or a breach of the divine law.<sup>6</sup>

“There is no particular sin but what deserves death...even those that were committed through ignorance,” as evidenced by the fact that all sin required an animal sacrifice, signifying that the sin was worthy of death.<sup>7</sup> All manner of sins deserve death, including sins great or small, or the omission of prescribed duties, where the mere “tendency” or “inclination” to neglect such duties is condemnable sin. Indeed, all actions or thoughts that fall short in degree, such as the command to love God with *all* our heart, or sins of positive disobedience to any command of God, are worthy of death.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Matthew 5:27-28,” *YMSS*, L. 4r. - 5r.

<sup>5</sup> “Matthew 5:27-28,” *YMSS*, L. 9r. - 9v.

<sup>6</sup> M 646, *Works* 18:179. That a single sin brings death “is evident by these texts: Genesis 2:17, ‘In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die’; James 2:10, ‘He that offends in one point, is guilty of all’; Galatians 3:10, ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.’”

<sup>7</sup> M 646, *Works* 18:182.

<sup>8</sup> M 646, *Works* 18:179-85. Edward provides a comprehensive list of the various types of sins that are damnable by death, with Scripture references in support, including “one idle word,” Matthew 12:36; “an ill spirit towards an enemy,” Proverbs 24:17-18; “inordinate desire,” “not only total omissions of what should be

Everything in the heart of life of men that is contrary to any rule of the gospel or anything in the whole Word of God, must merit the curse and must be implied when it is said, “Cursed is every one that continues not in all things that are found written in the book of the law to do them” [Gal. 3:11].<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the law is so strict that not only does it “forbid the exercises of corruption, but the very being of corruption.” As all are born into the world with a corrupt heart, all are therefore born “under sin” according to the law before the corruption of the heart is exercised in thought or deed. The law “requires...a perfectly holy nature.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, not only is the law strict in its rendering of sin, the penalty of the law is exceedingly strict in that it allows for no exceptions. The threat “thou shalt surely die” is “so positive and absolute” that it “binds the sinner to this punishment as it were with chains of brass that cannot be broken.” Indeed, “so firm is the connection between sin and death that no repentance, no tears, no cries or moans, will avail for a release.”<sup>11</sup>

God shows his justice in...that all that die unbelieving sinners shall by no means escape this punishment of hell. Whatever shrieks and cries and moans the punished may make there is no escaping because God is strictly just and will by no means depart from the strict rule of justice.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, all are condemned by the law to a “terrible,” “eternal,”<sup>13</sup> and “exceeding great and intolerable misery as all sin deserves.”<sup>14</sup> The judgment of God’s strict rule of justice is sure, for with respect to

in us in heart of life, but the failure of it in any degree wherein it ought to be,” Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 11:13, and several others.

<sup>9</sup> M 646, *Works* 18:184-5.

<sup>10</sup> “Matthew 5:27-28,” *YMSS*, L. 8r.

<sup>11</sup> “Matthew 5:27-28,” *YMSS*, L. 6v.

<sup>12</sup> “Deuteronomy 32:4,” *WJEO*, L. 8r.

<sup>13</sup> “Matthew 5:27-28,” *YMSS*, L. 6r. – L. 6v.

<sup>14</sup> “Deuteronomy 32:4,” *WJEO*, L. 8r.

the promised penalties of the law, "what God has once said, you may assuredly expect he will fulfill."<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, not only are all mankind sinners all the time, with all sins subject to the penalty of death by the "fixed and eternal rule of righteousness," "the Law condemns them to be entirely and only the objects of wrath without any favour or acceptance in any wise."<sup>16</sup> With respect to fallen creatures considered apart from Christ, "it is contrary to the Law that any thing should be accepted from them."<sup>17</sup> In other words (as will be discussed below), no work of fallen creatures considered apart from Christ, however positive, is acceptable to God according to the strict requirements of the law. "Our guilt and pollution is such that we can't come to God by our selves," for "our guilt is such that the glory and honour of God suffers not our coming in our own names." "God is a holy, sin-hating God, is of purer eyes than to behold evil," for "evil shall not dwell with him."<sup>18</sup> Man has made himself an enemy of God by his sin.

But man has broken this friendship. He has broken the covenant that was made between God and man and broken the command of God and departed from his allegiance with heaven. Departed from his subjection to him as his sovereign, hereby man became an enemy of God.<sup>19</sup>

"Where sin is, there God's displeasure and hatred will be."<sup>20</sup> Adam, by his sin as surety for mankind, plunged all mankind into a state of enmity with God, with no hope of reconciliation apart from Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 11r. – 11v.

<sup>16</sup> "1 Peter 2:5," *YMSS*, L. 5r.

<sup>17</sup> "1 Peter 2:5," *YMSS*, L. 4v.

<sup>18</sup> "Job 33:6-7," *WJEO*, L. 4r. Edwards here quotes and cites Habakkuk 1:13.

<sup>19</sup> "A Glorious Foundation for Peace," *MDM*, 176. Notice Edwards' reference to the sin of Adam as the sin of "man," and the covenant with Adam as the covenant with "man." Seeing Adam as representative and surety for all mankind, Edwards often speaks in this manner.

<sup>20</sup> "A Glorious Foundation for Peace," *MDM*, 176-7.

God can't be reconciled unto sin, though he may be reconciled unto sinners. Wrath must be executed upon sin till that be done. God never will be reconciled to them that committed it. Now the wrath of God is diverted from the head of the sinners and is executed upon the head of his beloved Son, who interposes himself and stands in the gap and bears all upon his own body and soul.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, all mankind is bound to the strict and comprehensive stipulations of the law and the unforgiving and unalterable requirement of its penalty. Further, as will be discussed below, the strict nature of God's law is founded upon the infinite excellence, goodness, and unchanging righteousness of God as the moral governor of the universe. As such, the law is a reflection of the very standard of God's own holiness and immutability, requiring the unqualified subjection of the creature to its requirements.

*The Law Has No Provision for Deliverance from Sin and Guilt*

Fallen sinners are under the "dominion of sin" as "it governs their hearts and behaviour" and holds them "bound to punishment."<sup>22</sup>

The Law indeed strictly forbids sin, and not only so, but very severely threatens the commission of it, but yet administers no other principle to preserve from it but only a servile fear, the spirit of bondage, which principle can never deliver the heart from the love and so the power of sin or make them sincere and hearty in their obedience, and therefore is called a dead Letter.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "A Glorious Foundation for Peace," *MDM*, 176-7.

<sup>22</sup> "Romans 6:14," *WJEO*, L. 1r.

<sup>23</sup> "Romans 6:14," *WJEO*, L. 1r. – 1v. See also Edwards' commentary on Galatians 4:9, in *Works* 24:1084, wherein he writes, "the law is here called 'weak,' because it could not give righteousness and life. See Romans 8:3 and Galatians 2:21. And it is called 'beggarly,' because it kept men in the poor estate of pupils from the possession of the inheritance. See vv. 1-3."



What's more, rather than diminishing the power of sin, the law excites and intensifies it to a "more violently raging in the heart."<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the Ten Commandments and "other passages of the Law of Moses" were given to highlight mankind's inability to meet the strict standard of God's rule of righteousness and the corresponding need of a mediator.

Nothing is more apparent by the Scripture than that the terms of the covenant of works, or terms of that kind, were often proposed in the Old Testament to men as though God insisted on their being fulfilled, and as though God expected that they should fulfill 'em, and in that way obtain life, because the fulfillment of those terms was indeed their duty, and because God would put 'em on trial for their conviction and humiliation, to fit them for the proper exercise of faith in a Mediator.<sup>25</sup>

Both the Old and New Testaments testify that the law was given "as though" it should be perfectly fulfilled to obtain eternal life.<sup>26</sup> "Christ, after He appeared in the flesh, still went on to treat men after the same manner. He proposed legal terms to the rich young man for his conviction."<sup>27</sup> In commenting on Christ's encounter with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:17-18, Edwards writes,

And so doth God still in the law of Moses promise life upon condition of perfect obedience, that men, by trial and experience of themselves, might be convinced of the impossibility of their being justified by the law. God

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<sup>24</sup> "Romans 6:14," *WJEO*, L. 1r. – 1v.

<sup>25</sup> M 1354, *Works* 23:511.

<sup>26</sup> "It is out of all dispute that the Ten Commandments were delivered at Mt. Sinai as a covenant of works, in this manner and for these ends, by what the Apostle says, Gal. 3:17-25, Rom. 7:1-13, Rom. 3:19-21 with ch. 5:13-14, II Cor. 3:7-9.

The same is no less manifest concerning other passages in the Law of Moses, as particularly that in Lev. 18:5, 'Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them,' and other passages of the same tenor." M 1354, *Works* 23:511.

<sup>27</sup> M 1354, *Works* 23:512.

promises life for future obedience, for though if a man should perfectly obey for the future, he could not be justified according to the tenor of the law, because he is guilty of Adam's sin and of original sin.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, Moses and Christ offer "a thing impossible" in proposing life by obedience to the law for another purpose, for "it could not be God's design to leave the matter so, having only revealed to the people a way for them to obtain righteousness that is impossible." The purpose, therefore, of "the former revelation of an impossible way was only to make way for this," that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."<sup>29</sup> The giving of the law, in light of the unforgiving strict nature of the law, reveals the impossibility of salvation by human effort and the need of salvation by faith in Christ alone. The strict nature of the law precludes the obtaining of eternal life any other way. Even Abraham was not justified by works of the law, because "the promise that he should be the heir of the [world] was not to Abraham or to his seed through the Law but through the righteousness of faith." If the promise to Abraham was "made through the law the promise would be of no effect because the Law worketh wrath. There are none of the seed of Abraham that ever perfectly kept the Law."<sup>30</sup>

The greatest evidence of the strict nature of the law is the extent to which God went to fulfill it.

There is in some respects the most glorious discovery of God's vindictive justice in the work of redemption by Jesus in his punishing of sin when imputed to his own and only son intimately near and dear to him...rather than justice should not have its course. He would bring such sore and dreadful pain, misery distress and wrath upon the son of his eternal and infinite delight. This shows the se-

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<sup>28</sup> "Matthew 19:17-18," *Works* 24:859.

<sup>29</sup> "Romans 10:4-8," *Works* 24:1026.

<sup>30</sup> "Romans 4:16," *WJEO*, L. 1v.

verity and inflexibleness of God's justice beyond any thing else and so as nothing else can do.<sup>31</sup>

The nature of Christ's redemptive work in meeting the requirements of God's justice will be examined in chapter five.

### **All Sinners Possess Infinite Guilt and Cannot Obtain Eternal Life by Obedience**

#### *All Sin Bears Infinite Guilt Requiring Infinite Satisfaction*

The infinite demerit of sin in light of the infinite holiness of God is foundational to Edwards' understanding of the necessity of Christ's perfect obedience.<sup>32</sup> The principle that renders sin against God an infinite demerit is this: the greater the excellence of the being to be loved and honored, the greater the obligation to love and honor that being. Therefore, "if a being be infinitely excellent and lovely, our obligations to love him are therein infinitely great."<sup>33</sup>

Further, "the sin of the creature against God is ill-deserving in proportion to the distance there is between God and the creature, the greatness of the object, and the meanness of the subject that aggravates it."<sup>34</sup> Thus, in consideration of the excellent worthiness of God as compared to the creature, "all sin is infinitely heinous," and the sinner, "before he is justified, is under infinite guilt

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<sup>31</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 9r.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards' *Quaestio*, in *Works*, 14:55-64, delivered at Yale in September of 1723, represents his early understanding of the absolute inadequacy of "sincere obedience" for the salvation of sinners, and the absolute necessity of Christ's perfect obedience for the same in light of God's infinite holiness and the corresponding infinite demerit of sin. It is not apparent that Edwards ever deviated from this view, though over the years of his ministry he further developed and expounded it.

<sup>33</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:161. See also M 713, *Works* 18:343.

<sup>34</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:162.

in God's sight."<sup>35</sup> And despite the fact that everything is "infinitely easy" to God by virtue of His omnipotence, we are by sin "so deeply plunged into a most miserable and sinful condition," that "with respect to God's holiness and justice, God himself could not redeem us without...infinite costs."<sup>36</sup> "God is a God of infinite justice and it is impossible there should be any breach made in it."<sup>37</sup> Sin is of "infinite demerit" and therefore requires something of "infinite worth and value" to purge it away.<sup>38</sup> There can be no alternative, for the infinite demerit of sin can only be paid by an infinite price. It is "requisite that God should punish all sin with infinite punishment; because all sin, as it is against God, is infinitely heinous, and has infinite demerit," and "is justly infinitely hateful to him, and so stirs up infinite abhorrence and indignation in him."<sup>39</sup> "It would not be a prudent, decent and beautiful thing for a being of infinite glory and majesty, and the sovereign of the world, to let an infinite evil go unpunished."<sup>40</sup> "The honor of the greatness, excellency, and majesty of God's being requires that sin be punished with an infinite punishment."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, God's glory requires that He take vengeance on sin.

If it be to God's glory that he is in his nature infinitely holy and opposite to sin, then it is to his glory to be infinitely displeased with sin; and if it be to God's glory to be infinitely displeased with sin, then it must be to God's glory to exercise and manifest that displeasure, and act according to it. But the proper exercise and testimony of displeasure against sin, in the supreme being and absolute governor of the world, is taking vengeance.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:163. Also, "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 11v: "The justice of God obliges Him to punish every one of your sins. The least of your sins you deserve eternal burnings for."

<sup>36</sup> "Glorious Grace," *Works* 10:393.

<sup>37</sup> "Christ's Sacrifice," *Works* 10:601.

<sup>38</sup> "Christ's Sacrifice," *Works* 10:599.

<sup>39</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:435. See also "Glorious Grace," *Works* 10:601.

<sup>40</sup> M 306, *Works* 13:391.

<sup>41</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:439.

<sup>42</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:438.

It would not be “becoming” of “the sovereign of the world,” of “infinite glory, purity, and beauty,” to make no opposition or display “of his infinite abhorrence” in the world to such “an infinitely detestable pollution” as sin. Such “would be countenancing of it, which God cannot do: For ‘he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.’”<sup>43</sup>

Further, “it is not consistent with the perfections of the divine to justify on account of...repentance, which is so slight that it bears absolutely no proportion to the offense,” and is “infinitely inadequate to the fault, and hence is a repentance utterly worthless if it is compared to the sin.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, “it would be as dishonorable for God to pardon the injury upon repentance that did not bear the least proportion to the injury, as for him to pardon without any repentance at all.”<sup>45</sup> “There can be no repentance of it, or sorrow for it, in any measure answerable, or proportionable, to the heinousness of the demerit of the crime.”<sup>46</sup> “The greatest finite repentance bears no proportion at all” to “infinite wickedness,” while “the same thing can be said of all good works, namely that they are infinitely inadequate for sin.” Thus, “it is contradictory to the divine attributes that a sinner should somehow in the least degree be justified because of sincere repentance or obedience.”<sup>47</sup>

Sin, of which he [fallen man] is guilty, is an evil of infinite badness....So that let him do what good works he will, yet if they are put in the scale with the evil, they bear absolutely no proportion at all; the scale of evil is not at all raised by it: the man taken together is every whit as bad in the sight of God as if he had no good works at all, because his evil infinitely outweighs it, and the good is perfectly adequate to nothing in comparison of it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:438. Edwards cites Habakkuk 1:13.

<sup>44</sup> “Quæstio,” *Works* 14:61-2.

<sup>45</sup> M 00, *Works* 13:188.

<sup>46</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:435.

<sup>47</sup> “Quæstio,” *Works* 14:62.

<sup>48</sup> M 40, *Works* 13:223.

Apart from Christ, God views man “as he is in himself; and so his goodness can’t be beheld by God, but as taken with his guilt and hatefulness, and as put in the scales with it,” thus “his goodness is nothing; because there is a finite on the balance against an infinite, whose proportion to it is nothing.”<sup>49</sup> “There is no merit in the goodness that is in them, or gracious works that they perform, but there is infinite demerit in the sins that they have been guilty of.”<sup>50</sup> If good works are “considered separately and by themselves, they are infinitely abominable” and cannot compensate for the “infinite evil and demerit of sin.”<sup>51</sup>

All said, sin is an infinite evil and demerit against an infinitely holy God, who as a righteous judge must judge sin according to its desert. Therefore, an infinite price must be paid if sin is to be adequately punished. Indeed, it requires the blood of Christ, the “least drop” of which renders “all created beings” as “nothing” to God by comparison.<sup>52</sup>

When we were fallen, it was come to this: either we must die eternally, or the Son of God must spill his blood; either we, or God’s own Son must suffer God’s wrath, one of the two; either miserable worms of the dust that had deserved it, or the glorious, amiable, beautiful, and innocent Son of God. The fall of man brought it to this; it must be determined one way or t’other.<sup>53</sup>

In view of this, the infinite demerit of sin is most clearly manifest in the sufferings of Christ for sin, in the “sufferings of a person of infinite glory.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:164. See also “None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness,” *Works* 14:341.

<sup>50</sup> “1 Peter 2:5,” *YMSS*, L. 4r.

<sup>51</sup> “1 Peter 2:5,” *YMSS*, L. 3v.

<sup>52</sup> “Christ’s Sacrifice,” *Works* 10:599.

<sup>53</sup> “Glorious Grace,” *Works* 10:393.

<sup>54</sup> M 941, *Works* 20:199-0.

*All Good Works Are Corrupt and Infinitely Hateful*

In the previous section we have seen that good works possess infinite demerit, since they can never compensate for the infinite demerit of sin. In this section we see that the good works themselves are infinitely sinful, apart from consideration of the infinite demerit of other sins that may accompany, precede, or follow. In other words, “the virtuous acts themselves,” viewed apart from Christ and the consideration of any accompanying sin, are “corrupt.”<sup>55</sup> The best acts are defective, and “that defect is properly sin, and expression of a vile sinfulness of heart, and what tends to provoke the just anger of God.”<sup>56</sup> It is impossible that any human or angelic work of “love” or “grace” can be equal to the loveliness of God.

The act is so very disproportionate to the occasion given for love or other grace, considering God’s loveliness, and the manifestation that is made of it, and the exercises of kindness, and the capacity of human nature, and our advantages (and the like) together. A negative expression of corruption may be as truly sin, and as just cause of provocation, as a positive....And so it is with respect to our exercise of love, and gratitude, and other graces towards God, they are defectively corrupt and sinful.<sup>57</sup>

Accordingly, “this defect is sin, it is infinitely hateful.” And as our best response to the infinite goodness of God toward us is so out of proportion to the goodness received, it constitutes “an act of ingratitude, or positive exercise of a base unworthy spirit.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, should someone live an entirely perfect life according to the law with the exception of a single sin, he or she would become

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<sup>55</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:212-3.

<sup>56</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:212.

<sup>57</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:212-3.

<sup>58</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:213. See also “1 Peter 2:5,” *YMSS*, L. 7v.

an object of God's infinite displeasure.<sup>59</sup> And while the works themselves corrupt in this manner, they are also "mixed" with large amounts of corruption.<sup>60</sup> So, in both respects, all that we do is corrupt.

Further, even the best works and most "gracious exercises" of the saints are corrupt, and would be abhorrent to God if their sin and corruption were not concealed by Christ.<sup>61</sup> "God...accepts them for Christ's sake, which but of him would be worthy of his detestation."<sup>62</sup> Thus the "freeness and sovereignty of the grace of God in saving sinners" is seen by the fact that our good works or personal righteousness cannot be a positive influence in the matter. "Surely all that they do before they love God can have no influence to draw God's love," for *all* human works of themselves are odious to God and only made acceptable for Christ's sake alone. Therefore:

How unreasonable is it to think that God's love should be drawn by what they do from no sort of respect to him at all. And what they do after they love God don't draw the love of God, and don't at all the more incline God to be gracious to them, to forgive their sins and show and bestow any outward or spiritual mercy upon them, for that

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<sup>59</sup> M 627, *Works* 18:156. "If we had never committed but one sin and at all other times had exercised perfect holiness and performed perfect obedience, yet looking upon us as we are by ourselves, with all that belongs to us, we should be in no degree lovely persons but hateful, though we had performed many lovely acts; and no one act of holiness is a lovely act in itself and with consideration of any relation to Christ, unless it be a perfect act."

<sup>60</sup> "1 Peter 2:5," *YMSS*, L. 5v. Also, in commenting on Romans 3:10 and following, Edwards writes: "The passages here quoted out of the Old Testament are to prove three things. 1. That mankind are universally sinful; that everyone is corrupt. That is what is aimed at in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses. 2. That everyone is not only corrupt, but everyone totally corrupt in every part. That is aimed at by the quotations in the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth verses, where the several parts of the body are mentioned. And 3. That everyone is not only corrupt in every part, but corrupt throughout in an exceeding degree, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth verses." "Romans 3:13ff," *Works* 24:991.

<sup>61</sup> "Colossians 3:17," *Works* 24:1117.

<sup>62</sup> "Colossians 3:17," *Works* 24:1117-8.



love is a fruit of God's love to them. All their good works be not the cause of God's love, but the effect of it. God in his infinite love gives them grace to love him and enables them to do things of love to him. Their good works are God's gift to them and not their Gift to God.<sup>63</sup>

In the same way, the good works of the saints are only rewarded in Christ, for the sake of His righteousness alone (to be discussed further in chapter five).

### **Adam's Sin Does Not Cancel or Alter God's Rule of Righteousness**

#### *The Nature of God and His Law Will Not Allow It*

Much of what has been said thus far gives evidence that God's rule of righteousness is unalterable. And as will be seen in chapter five, the fact that it was necessary for Christ to fulfill God's rule of righteousness clearly shows that Adam's sin did not alter its requirements, but necessitated that Christ fulfill the requirements on behalf of sinners if any sinners were to obtain eternal life. Additionally, however, Edwards provides a concise list of five reasons why "the law of God should be maintained and executed, and not dispensed with or abrogated for the sake of the sinner," answering the question of why God would not reduce the requirements of the law in light of the impossibility of the sinner to meet its standards.<sup>64</sup> He gives the following reasons.

First, a law that is not fixed with respect to those subject to its requirements is without authority and is no longer a law. "It fails of being a rule of the supreme Judge."<sup>65</sup>

The law is the great rule of righteousness and decorum, that the supreme and universal Rector has established and

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<sup>63</sup> "1 John 4:19," *WJEO*, L. 8r.

<sup>64</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:442-5.

<sup>65</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:442.

published, for the regulation of things in the commonwealth of the universality of intelligent beings and moral agents, in all that relates to them as concerned one with another; a rule by which things are not only to be regulated between one subject and another, but between the King and [his] subjects, that it may be a rule of judgment to the one, as well as a rule of duty to the other.<sup>66</sup>

“Tis needful that this great rule of regulation of things in this universal commonwealth, should be fixed and settled, and not vague and uncertain,” for if it is not fixed, “it ceases to be of a nature of a rule.”<sup>67</sup>

Second, the design of the law is to regulate the sinner, not to be regulated by the sinner. The law is made “that [it] might prevent sin, and cause that not to be, and not that sin should disannul that, and cause it not to be.” “It would be very indecent for the supreme Rector to cause this great rule to give place to the rebellion of the sinner.”<sup>68</sup>

Third, “the perfection of the law” is “an expression of the perfection of the Lawgiver.”

The holiness and rectitude and goodness of this great rule, that the supreme Lawgiver has established for the regulation of the commonwealth of moral agents, and its universal fitness and wisdom and absolute perfection, render a partial abrogation for the sake of them that dislike it, and won’t submit to it, needless and unseemly. If the great rule should be set aside for the sake of the rebel, it would carry too much of the face of an acknowledgement in the Lawgiver, of want of wisdom and foresight, or of some defect in point of holiness or righteousness in his law.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:442.

<sup>67</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:443.

<sup>68</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:443.

<sup>69</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:443.

To “set aside” even a part of the law would be “unfit” and “a dishonor to the excellency of the law and Lawgiver.” Moreover, “if the rule be perfect, perfectly right and just and holy, and with infinite wisdom adapted to the good of the whole, then the public good require that it be strongly established.” Accordingly, “the more strongly it is guarded and defended, the better, and the more is it for the public benefit,” while “everything by which it is weakened, is a damage and loss” to the same.<sup>70</sup>

Fourth, “the authority of a ruler should be sacred proportionably to the greatness of that authority,” of “his worthiness of honor and obedience, the height of his exaltation above us, and the absoluteness of his dominion over us, and the strength of his right to our submission and obedience.” Thus, the “sacredness of the authority and majesty of the Lawgiver” must “maintain and fulfill his law, when it is violated by a rebellious subject.”<sup>71</sup>

It is not becoming the sacredness of the majesty and authority of the great παντοκράτωρ<sup>72</sup> that that perfectly holy, just, and infinitely wise and good law that he has established, as the great rule for the regulation of all things in the universal commonwealth of beings, should be set aside to give place to the infinitely unreasonable and vile opposition that sinners make to it, and their horrid and daring rebellion against it.<sup>73</sup>

Fifth, “the truth of the Lawgiver” requires “that the threatenings of the law should be fulfilled in every punctilio. The threatening of the law is absolute: ‘Thou shalt surely die’ [Gen. 2:17]”<sup>74</sup>

The laws of “weak and fallible and very imperfect” lawgivers may be discarded, but not so the laws of “the great, infinitely wise, omniscient, holy, and absolutely perfect Rector of all, to whom it

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<sup>70</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:444.

<sup>71</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:444.

<sup>72</sup> Almighty, omnipotent.

<sup>73</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:445.

<sup>74</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:445.

belongs to establish a rule for the regulation of the whole universality of beings, throughout all eternity,” of one who rules “in the exercise of an infinitely strong right of supreme, absolute dominion and sovereignty.” The more wise and good a law, and “the nearer any law approaches to the supreme in perfection and in extent of jurisdiction, the more care should be taken of its execution.”<sup>75</sup>

*God’s Rule of Righteousness Is Eternal and  
Unaltered by Salvation by Grace*

Connected to Edwards’ understanding of the nature of God and the law prohibiting its abrogation by the sinfulness of its subjects is that the law is eternal, “a fixed and eternal rule of righteousness.”<sup>76</sup> As noted in chapter three, the command to Adam was an expression of God’s unchanging rule of righteousness. Moreover, as Adam stood as representative and surety for all mankind in his trial of obedience to God’s rule of righteousness, the covenant made with Adam was made with all mankind. Thus, with respect to “the condition of eternal life,”

God never made but one with man, to wit, the covenant of works; which never yet was abrogated, but is a covenant stands in full force to all eternity without the failing of one tittle. The covenant of grace is not another covenant made with man upon the abrogation of this, but a covenant made with Christ to fulfill it.<sup>77</sup>

Accordingly, “for this end came Christ into the world, to fulfill the law, or covenant of works, for all that receive him.”<sup>78</sup> In other words,

The covenant of grace or redemption (which we have shown to be the same) cannot be called a new covenant,

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<sup>75</sup> M 779, *Works* 18:448.

<sup>76</sup> “1 Peter 2:5,” *YMSS*, L. 4v.

<sup>77</sup> M 30, *Works* 13:217.

<sup>78</sup> M 30, *Works* 13:217.

or the second covenant, with respect to the covenant of works; for that is not grown old yet but is an eternal immutable covenant, of which one jot nor tittle will never fail.<sup>79</sup>

Though Edwards often speaks of the covenant of grace in distinction from the covenant of works, “there have never been two covenants, in strictness of speech,” rather, “only two ways constituted of performing of this covenant” (the covenant of works). The first was with Adam as “the representative and federal head,” and the second was with Christ as “the federal head;” the former a “dead way,” the latter “a living way and an everlasting” way.<sup>80</sup> In either case, perfect obedience is the required condition of the covenant.

We noted earlier that Israel was under the covenant of works and made “to understand that none of those promises he had made could be challenged without perfect obedience,” that they might be driven by their inability to meet its terms to trust only in the “mere underserved mercy of God” and be “saved by grace.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the Old Testament sacrifices “were necessary...for the maintaining the honor of God’s law and authority.”

If they had only been taught that upon their repentance and flying to God’s mercy they should be pardoned by mercy, without giving any hints wherefore, it would lead them into this thought, that howsoever wicked men were and how much soever they had provoked and affronted God, yet he was ready at any time to forgive them; which would tend to their despising and making little of God’s commanding authority, and to lessen their thoughts of his holy majesty.<sup>82</sup>

God was “careful to instruct them that he was a jealous God and would in no wise clear the guilty; and by requiring these sacrifices

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<sup>79</sup> M 35, *Works* 13:219.

<sup>80</sup> M 35, *Works* 13:219.

<sup>81</sup> M 250, *Works* 13:362.

<sup>82</sup> M 326, *Works* 13:405.

intimated to them that he would not pardon without satisfaction.” Moreover, “the sufferings of the slain beast intimated that sin must be suffered for, hereby showing his holy hatred and discountenancing of sin and trespasses against his authority.”<sup>83</sup>

The same principle applies to the present day, though the nature of its presentation may differ.

We are indeed now under the covenant of works so, that if we are perfectly righteous we can challenge salvation. But herein is the difference betwixt us and them: to us God has plainly declared the impossibility of obtaining life by that covenant, and lets us know that no mortal can be saved but only of mere grace, and lets us know clearly how we are made partakers of grace. All ever since the fall were equally under the covenant of grace so far, that they were saved by it all alike, but the difference is in the revelation: the covenant of works was most clearly revealed to the Israelites, to us the covenant of grace.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, the way of salvation and the underlying requirement of perfect obedience remain the same in both the New and Old Testaments. And as the Old Testament saints received grace with the understanding of God’s “holy hatred and discountenancing of sin and trespasses against his authority,” and that pardon could not be without satisfaction, as He “would in no wise clear the guilty,” so also New Testament saints, in trusting “the mere mercy of God,” God’s holiness and “sovereign authority” are understood as upheld by Christ crucified.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> M 326, *Works* 13:405.

<sup>84</sup> M 250, *Works* 13:362.

<sup>85</sup> M 326, *Works* 13:405-6.

## **God's Unalterable Rule of Righteousness Requires Perfect Positive Righteousness for Justification**

In introducing the present section concerning the requirement of perfect positive righteousness for justification, a review of the main points of chapter three will help explain how Edwards defines justification as consistent with and founded upon the unchanging nature of God and the rule of righteousness by which God regulates His relationship to His creatures. Additionally, this will further clarify the many facets of his overall understanding of the doctrine.

First, the justification of sinners relates to Adam's original trial of obedience as substitute and surety for mankind. Mankind, in Adam, was to obey and give honor to God's authority and law by perfect and positive obedience in order to obtain eternal life. As a result of Adam's sin, however, mankind did not and could not meet the standard of perfect positive obedience for the obtaining of eternal life.

Second, all God's commands are comprehended in that one great law that demands perfect obedience and fixes death as the penalty for any and all disobedience. The command to Adam was a manifestation of God's unchanging rule of righteousness, to which all mankind in all ages is subject. Moreover, the requirement of positive and perfect obedience for the obtaining of eternal life and the penalty of death for any and all acts of disobedience to God's rule of righteousness has never been abrogated. Thus, when mankind sinned in Adam, the requirement for mankind to obtain eternal life went unmet.

Third, God's rule of righteousness reflects the righteousness of God's own nature. Perfect righteousness characterizes God's justice. To act in any one instance in a manner inconsistent with righteousness is impossible, for God would not be God. Moreover, as the sovereign moral ruler of the universe, He must at all times uphold His authority and law. And as Creator, perfect obedience is owed Him by the creature.

Thus, Edwards' understanding of the nature of justification is founded upon and consistent with the nature of God in His unchangeable and righteous authority as the moral creator and sovereign ruler over the universe. God's requirement of perfect obedience from Adam for the obtaining of eternal life was neither arbitrary nor alterable, as it reflected an eternal principle rooted in the very nature of God Himself. This will be explained further in the present discussion and in chapter five.

*Pardon Gives Freedom from Punishment Only,  
Justification Requires Perfect Positive Righteousness*

Edwards' two-fold definition of justification as requiring a "negative" and "positive" righteousness further reveals how Adam's sin made Christ's perfect obedience the only possible basis for the salvation of sinners. He defines justification as follows:

A person is said to be justified when he is approved of God as free from the guilt of sin, and its deserved punishment, and as having that righteousness belonging to him that entitles to the reward of life.<sup>86</sup>

Further, to be justified or "approved" requires a "law or rule" by which one is judged.

To justify a person in a particular case, is to approve of him as standing right, as subject to the law or rule in that case; and to justify in general, is to pass him in judgment, as standing right, in a state correspondent to the law or rule in general.<sup>87</sup>

To be justified by God, therefore, is to be judged by God as "standing right" with respect to God's rule or law. So, if conformity to God's law requires more than the "negative" righteousness of the absence of the guilt of sin, requiring also that the "positive" re-

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<sup>86</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:150.

<sup>87</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:150.



quirement of the law be met, then justification requires more than the absence of guilt.<sup>88</sup>

We are no more justified by the voice of the law, or of him that judges according to it, by a mere pardon of sin, than Adam our first surety, was justified by the law, at the first point of his existence, before he had done the work, or fulfilled the obedience of the law, or had had so much as any trial whether he would fulfill it or no.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, if the mere absence of guilt met the requirement of God's law by which Adam and all mankind were judged, then Adam would have been justified and fit for eternal life prior to his trial of obedience, for he was created without sin. Nonetheless, despite his sinless status prior to his fall, Adam was to be tried for his obedience to God's authority and law for the obtaining of eternal life.

As we have seen above, all mankind are sinners bearing infinite guilt that can only be remedied by an infinite satisfaction. Additionally, none have met the standard of perfect positive obedience as required by God's unchanging rule of righteousness for the obtaining of eternal life. Both would need to be satisfied, however, for the obtaining of eternal life according to God's eternal rule of righteousness, of which the command to Adam was representative. To be pardoned apart from possessing righteousness, therefore, would not meet God's standard of righteousness.

Edwards defines pardon as that which "signifies forgiving one freely, though he is not innocent, or has no right to be looked on as such." Though guilty, the sinner is "freed from punishment." When Christ acquits people from the penalty of sin, however, He

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<sup>88</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:150. See also "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost," *Works* 14:394: "Justification consists in these two things, viz. in removing guilt in the pardon of sin and reconciliation, which is only a negative righteousness and a mere removal of God's anger; and then second, a looking upon the sinner as positively righteous and receiving him as the object of favor, not only as merely not the object of anger."

<sup>89</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:150.

acts according to justice, for He views and accepts them as possessing satisfaction for sin, the “equivalent to innocence.”<sup>90</sup>

‘Tis called pardon because, though in itself it be an act of justice, and strictly speaking the person pardoned has no sin or guilt to be pardoned, yet considered with those preceding free and sovereign acts of God that are its foundation, viz. the free gift of Christ, and the free establishment of the covenant of grace, the free giving us repentance and faith in Christ for remission, I say, considered with these things, ‘tis a most free and wonderfully gracious act, and may well be called pardon.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, insofar as “pardon” signifies a gracious sovereign act of God as judge, Christians are “pardoned,” though not according to the common meaning of the guilty released from punishment. For justification is more than pardon of sin, and strictly speaking, is not equivalent to pardon of sin, but a “sentence approving” the sinner “as innocent and positively righteous, and so having a right to freedom from punishment, and to the reward of positive righteousness.”<sup>92</sup> The believer’s freedom from punishment, or “pardon,” is founded on innocence and satisfaction. Accordingly, justification entails the imputation of righteousness as the basis of the believer’s pardon.

To pardon sin is to cease to be angry for sin. But imputing righteousness and ceasing to be angry for sin are two

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<sup>90</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:522.

<sup>91</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:522.

<sup>92</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:522. See also “Romans 5:1-2,” *Works* 24:995: “There is a threefold benefit of justification mentioned in these two verses. 1. Peace with God, which consists in deliverance from God’s displeasure and wrath. 2. The present free and rich bounty of God that we are admitted to, those spiritual enjoyments, and that spiritual good and blessedness, which is bestowed upon us in this life, as in the beginning of the next verse, ‘By whom also we have access by faith to this grace wherein we stand.’ 3. Our hope of future blessedness, or those fruits of God’s grace that are to be given hereafter, in these words, ‘And rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.’” The latter two blessings are the reward for Christ’s positive righteousness.

things; one is the foundation of the other. God ceases to be angry with the sinner for his sin because righteousness is imputed to him.

Mere pardon can in no propriety be called justification. If one that is called before a judge, and is tried—whether he be guilty of such a crime, and so whether he be bound to the punishment of it—be acquitted in judgment as being found innocent, and so under no obligation to punishment, then he may properly be said to be justified. But if he be found guilty, and is condemned, but afterward, as a justly condemned malefactor, is freely pardoned, whoever calls that justifying of him?<sup>93</sup>

Therefore, “persons cannot be justified without a righteousness consistent with God’s truth, for it would be a false sentence.”<sup>94</sup> “To suppose a sinner pardoned without a righteousness implies no contradiction, but to justify without a righteousness is self-contradictory.”<sup>95</sup> God justifies the sinner in pronouncing him “perfectly righteous” with respect to “the rule that he is under,” and this, “according to the established rule of nature, reason, and divine appointment, is a positive perfect righteousness.”<sup>96</sup>

The declaration of the believer’s righteousness is no fiction, no proclamation contrary to the facts of the case.

Now in order to a sinner’s being thus accepted with God, there must be some real righteousness that must be the sinner’s. God don’t look upon sinners as righteous for

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<sup>93</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:522-3.

<sup>94</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:523.

<sup>95</sup> M 812, *Works* 18:522-3.

<sup>96</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:190-1. See also, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:395: “All that is needed therefore in order to a sinner’s reconciliation and acceptance {with God} is a righteousness. And then the righteousness must be perfect, that is, righteousness fully and completely answerable to God’s commandments, because one sin brings guilt and a desert of punishment incurs displeasure and hatred. And then it is necessary according to the law, the eternal, invariable rule {of God}.”

nothing, when they have no righteousness properly theirs; he don't look upon them to be or to have what they are or have not. 'Tis not a notion, but a reality.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, to be "entitled to happiness in God's favour," one must have a "positive" and "perfect" righteousness that "must some way or other be ours."<sup>98</sup>

Either we our selves must perform such a righteousness, or such a righteousness performed by some other must be imputed to us and we must some way or other become entitled to it so that it should be ours in the sight of God.<sup>99</sup>

Having no righteousness of our own, "we have a necessity that some other person worthy to be accepted of God on our account should perform that righteousness for us."<sup>100</sup> God will have "no regard" for an imperfect righteousness, "but will reject it and cast it as dung in our faces if we pretend to bring it and offer it to him. He is so righteous and holy a being that he will not accept such an offering."<sup>101</sup> The righteousness accepted by God must be "a reality."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost," *Works* 14:395.

<sup>98</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 10r.

<sup>99</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 10r. That "some way or other" by which one is "entitled" to the righteousness performed by another is union with Christ by faith, whereby Christ's perfect righteousness becomes the believer's righteousness. An adequate discussion of Edwards' understanding of the application of redemption is well beyond the scope of this work, as the present topic concerns the accomplishment of redemption, primarily. Nonetheless, the nature of faith as the believer's part of union with Christ, and the nature of the union will be discussed briefly in chapter five. Such is Edwards' answer to how the perfect righteousness of Christ becomes the believer's righteousness in a manner that God, in truth and according to reality, justifies a sinner in declaring him or her to be perfectly righteous, as having met the strict requirement of His unchanging rule of righteousness.

<sup>100</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 10v.

<sup>101</sup> "Deuteronomy 32:4," *WJEO*, L. 10r. Edwards here alludes to the requirement of unblemished animals to be used in the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament.

<sup>102</sup> "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost," *Works* 14:395.

Therefore, for the sinner to be justified according to the “negative” and “positive” righteousness required by God’s rule of righteousness is to be judged as having fulfilled its requirements, “such as Adam would have had if he had withstood the temptation and had persevered in obedience.”<sup>103</sup> Granted, the exaltation earned for the believer by the infinite merit of Christ’s obedience will greatly exceed that which Adam would have gained by his obedience (as will be explained in chapter five). Nonetheless, the principle for obtaining eternal life is exactly the same for Adam as for his posterity, as it is according to the same requirements of the same rule of righteousness.

Therefore, to be forgiven one’s sins only, without having performed the positive righteousness required by the law, would render one’s status with respect to eternal life as equal to that of Adam’s status before his fall.<sup>104</sup> “Supposing...that the sinner himself could by suffering pay the debt, and afterwards be in the same state that he was in before his probation,” namely, “negatively righteous, or merely without guilt,” and “should have eternal life bestowed upon him, without performing that condition of obedience, then God would recede from his law” and “never have respect and honor shown to it.”<sup>105</sup>

Christ by suffering the penalty, and so making atonement for us, only removes the guilt of our sins and so sets us in the same state that Adam was in the first moment of his creation: and it is no more fit, that we should obtain eternal life, only on that account, than that Adam should have the reward of eternal life, or of a confirmed and unalterable state of happiness, the first moment of his existence, without any obedience at all.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> “Romans 4:16,” *WJEO*, L. 2v.

<sup>104</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:396-7. “Christ, by suffering in our stead and removing guilt, only places us in the state Adam was in the first moment [he was created], without any probation at all.”

<sup>105</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:188. See also M 322, *Works* 13:403, from which Edwards apparently quoted in “Justification by Faith Alone.”

<sup>106</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:187.

If Adam were to be rewarded with eternal life for his innocence, “he would have had it fixed upon him at once, as soon as ever he was created; for he was as innocent then as he could be.”<sup>107</sup> “There would have been no occasion to make any covenant at all with our first parents: for they were free from guilt the first moment they were created.”<sup>108</sup> On the contrary, “he was to have the reward on account of his activeness in obedience; not on the account merely of his not having done ill, but on account of his doing well.” In the same way, believers do not possess eternal life “merely on the account of being void of guilt,” but also “on the account of Christ’s activeness in obedience, and doing well.”<sup>109</sup>

Christ is our second federal head, and is called the second Adam (I Cor. 15:22), because he acted the part for us, that the first Adam should have done: when he had undertaken to stand in our stead, he was looked upon, and treated as though he were guilty with our guilt; and by his satisfying, or bearing the penalty, he did as it were free himself from this guilt. But by this, the second Adam did only bring himself into the state that the first Adam was in on the first moment of his existence, viz. a state of mere freedom from guilt; and hereby indeed was free from any obligation to suffer punishment: but this being supposed, there was need of something further, even a positive obedience, in order to his obtaining, as our second Adam, the reward of eternal life.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:187. See also M 1220, *Works* 23:154.

<sup>108</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:397.

<sup>109</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:187. See also M s, *Works* 13:173, from which Edwards apparently quoted in “Justification by Faith Alone.”

<sup>110</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:187. See also “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:151, and M 711, *Works* 18:340-1: “And again, that a believer’s justification implies not only deliverance from the wrath of God, but a title to glory, is evident by Rom. 5:1-2, where the Apostle mentions both these as joint benefits implied in justification. ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we *have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*’ So remission of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, are mentioned together as what are jointly obtained by faith in Christ. Acts 26:18, ‘That they may receive

Thus, as the requirement of perfect obedience went unanswered by Adam's disobedience on behalf of all mankind, the requirement of God's unchanging rule of righteousness remains to be answered by mankind to obtain eternal life. This was answered on behalf of the elect through Christ's perfect obedience.

*God's Law and Authority are Not Honored Without  
the Righteousness of Christ's Perfect Obedience*

Edwards' understanding of Adam's trial of obedience was that the honor of God's authority and law could only be upheld by Adam's perfect obedience to God's unchanging rule of righteousness. As the sin of Adam and mankind did not alter or abrogate God's rule of righteousness, so the requirement of perfect obedience to honor God's authority and law remained to be fulfilled. And given that all mankind were made sinners in Adam's disobedience, the

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forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in me.' Both these are without any doubt implied in that passing from death to life, which Christ speaks of as the fruit of faith, and which he opposes to condemnation. John 5:24, 'Verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life.'" See also "Quaestio," *Works* 14:60: "But there can be no doubt that justification is a certain act of *positive* favor that not only frees a person from sin but is also understood in fact as the approval of him as righteous through the righteousness of Christ, both active and passive in both obedience and satisfaction. For in all respects the reason why positive righteousness is now required from us by God so that we may be received into eternal life is the same reason such righteousness was required of Adam and why he was not immediately secured into immutable happiness at the first moment of creation without any testing at all." Edwards early understood Christ's death as "active" obedience and employed the "active" and "passive" obedience language in his earlier writings, the traditional Reformed distinction between the suffering and death of Christ ("passive" obedience) and His life of obedience ("active" obedience). He later rejected the "active" and "passive" obedience terminology as confusing, while maintaining and emphasizing the traditional Reformed understanding of Christ's death as both meritorious active obedience *and* propitiatory, and His entire life of active obedience in His state of humiliation as both meritorious *and* propitiatory. See "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works*, 19:194-5. Edwards' rejection of the "active/passive" terminology will be discussed further in chapter five.

requirement of perfect positive righteousness for eternal life could only be met by the perfect obedience of Christ on their behalf, for “if sinners should be saved without the active righteousness of Christ, God’s authority would not be sufficiently honored.”<sup>111</sup>

There is the very same need of Christ’s obeying the law in our stead, in order to the reward, as of his suffering the penalty of the law, in our stead, in order to our escaping the penalty; and the same reason why one should be accepted on our account, as the other, there is the same need of one as the other, that the law of God might be answered: one was as requisite to answer the law as the other.<sup>112</sup>

“Christ’s active obedience was as necessary to retrieve the honor of God’s law and authority as his suffering,” for if eternal life is given “without active righteousness, this would not be honorable to that rule which God had fixed, because now God recedes from it.” God’s law would “never have respect and honor shown to it in that way of being obeyed.”<sup>113</sup>

But God in wisdom saw it meet that he should not only be free from guilt, but should be required to perform an active righteousness before he should have eternal life confirmed to him. This was the price that God fixed—perfect active obedience to his law—and he never altered that price. If

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<sup>111</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:397.

<sup>112</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:186. Edwards cites Galatians 3:10-13 as support, “for this the Scripture plainly teaches: this is given as the reason why Christ was made a curse for us, that the law threatened a curse to us (Gal. 3:10, 13). But the same law that fixes the curse of God, as the consequent of not continuing in all things written in the law to do them (v. 10), has as much fixed doing those things as an antecedent of living in them (as v. 12, the next verse but one): there is as much of a connection established in one case as in the other. There is therefore exactly the same need from the law of perfect obedience being fulfilled, in order to our obtaining the reward, as there is of death’s being suffered, in order to our escaping the punishment, or the same necessity by the law, of perfect obedience preceding life, as there is of disobedience being succeed by death: the law is without doubt, as much of an established rule in one case as in the other,” 186-7.

<sup>113</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:398.



he has, the law is dispensed with, and we need trouble ourselves no more about answering the law.<sup>114</sup>

Additionally, if the positive requirement could be so easily altered or abrogated, why then the threat of death for disobedience and the “dreadful consequences,” the “dreadful havoc” of death, and its “universal reign” and “dismal calamities, which overspread the nations of the earth through all generations?” Or, how is it consistent with God’s wisdom to insist on the trial of obedience, to require the honor of His authority and law as the prerequisite for eternal life, if only to later forego the requirement and bestow heaven for mere freedom of guilt, the state of Adam before his trial? Why not confirm Adam without the trial?<sup>115</sup> Though Edwards does not give the rhetorical answer in the passage quoted here, the apparent conclusion is that the trial of Adam’s obedience would be neither reasonable nor according to God’s wisdom should the requirement of perfect obedience be altered or abrogated on account of Adam’s sin.

### **God as a Righteous Judge Cannot Falsely Justify Imperfect Righteousness**

The historical backdrop and impetus for much of Edwards’ discussion regarding the inadequacy and absurdity of imperfect righteousness to meet the perfection required by God’s law was the threat of “Arminianism.”<sup>116</sup> For Edwards, the Arminian doctrines with respect to justification “exceedingly derogate from the glory of the gospel or new covenant” and are “very displeasing to

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<sup>114</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:397.

<sup>115</sup> M 1220, *Works* 23:154.

<sup>116</sup> For basic historical context of the Arminian controversy in New England see Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 137-41, 175-82. For a more specific analysis of Arminianism with respect to justification, and Edwards’ specific target in “Justification by Faith Alone,” see Michael McClenahan, “Jonathan Edwards’ Doctrine of Justification in the Period up to the First Great Awakening,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford (2006).

God.”<sup>117</sup> Increasingly popular in Edwards’ lifetime, the “Arminian” and “modern” doctrine posited that the “old law given to Adam, which requires perfect obedience is entirely repealed” and replaced with a “new law” that “requires no more than imperfect, sincere obedience.” Because of the “poor, infirm, impotent circumstances since the fall...we are unable to perform that perfect obedience that was required by the first law.”<sup>118</sup> According to this view, “it would be unjust in God to require anything of us that is beyond our present power and ability to perform.”<sup>119</sup> Christ only “purchases heaven for us, in this sense, that he satisfies for the imperfections of our obedience, and so purchases that our sincere imperfect obedience might be accepted as the condition of eternal life.”<sup>120</sup> He “purchases an opportunity for us to obtain heaven by our own obedience.”<sup>121</sup> To the contrary, Edwards argues that justi-

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<sup>117</sup> “Romans 4:16,” *WJEO*, L. 8v. – 9r.

<sup>118</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works*, 19:166. See also “Romans 4:16,” *WJEO*, L. 8r. – 9r., where Edwards describes Arminianism, with respect to justification, as follows: “Arminians...maintain justification upon the account of sincere obedience. They hold that seeing we have broken the first covenant that proposed perfect obedience as the condition of justification, that now God has given us another covenant wherein sincere obedience is proposed in the room, and herein they suppose the grace of the new covenant appears, that seeing we have made ourselves unable to perform perfect obedience, that God will take up with sincere [obedience], though imperfect obedience, in the room of it. They suppose that Christ has satisfied for the imperfections of our obedience and purchased an abatement of the strictness of the terms of justification, viz., the perfection of obedience for us, and made God willing to accept of imperfect [obedience] in the room of it. They hold indeed that faith has something to do in the affair of justification, but ‘tis as a good work, as a principal part of evangelical obedience and not merely as a reception of Christ.”

<sup>119</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:166.

<sup>120</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:192-3.

<sup>121</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:192-3. This “Arminian” doctrine is problematic to Edwards in that it posits a justification by works. Though the defects of imperfect obedience are paid for, heaven is earned by the righteousness of the believer’s acts. He writes: “But to purchase heaven for us, only in this sense, is to purchase it in no sense at all; for all of it comes to no more than a satisfaction for our sins, or removing the penalty by suffering in our stead: for all the purchasing they speak of, that our imperfect obedience should be accepted, is only his satisfying for the sinful imperfection of our obedience, or (which is the same thing) making atonement for the sin that our obedience is attended

fiction concerns law, and a law that requires imperfect obedience is not a law, but a contradiction, while justification without perfect righteousness would be a “false sentence.”

*Righteousness and Justification Concern Judgment According to Law*

In addition to the inflexible and strict nature of God's law that requires perfect obedience as the price of eternal life, God as a righteous judge must uphold His law in accord with His own righteousness and justice. “God is inflexibly and unalterably a righteous Judge and therefore is inflexibly determined to punish sin according to its deserts,”<sup>122</sup> and will “never accept of any person except it be for a perfect righteousness.” God is righteous and can never depart from His “eternal rule” that neither men nor angels be accepted without “perfect righteousness.”<sup>123</sup>

As noted above, Edwards' two-fold definition of justification includes both a “negative” and “positive” righteousness, corresponding to freedom from guilt and punishment and a righteousness that entitles to eternal life, respectively. The standard for God's judgment in each case is His rule of righteousness, by which He must judge rightly, consistent with His own nature as a righteous judge. In justification, therefore, God acts as a judge, and judges according to a fixed rule. Without a “rule” or “law,” there is no basis of judgment or standard by which the creature can be deemed in conformity or violation of the requirement of eternal life. Without a rule, there can be no justification.

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with. But that is not purchasing heaven, merely to set us at liberty again, that we may go, and get heaven by what we do ourselves: all that Christ does is only to pay a debt for us; there is no positive purchase of any good. We are taught in Scripture that heaven is purchased for us, 'tis called 'the purchased possession' (Eph. 1:14). The gospel proposes the eternal inheritance, not to be acquired, as the first covenant did, but as already acquired and purchased: but he that pays a man's debt for him, and so delivers him from slavery, can't be said to purchase an estate for him, merely because he sets him at liberty, so that henceforward he has an opportunity to get an estate by his own hand labor.”

<sup>122</sup> “Deuteronomy 32:4,” *WJEO*, L. 10v.

<sup>123</sup> “Deuteronomy 32:4,” *WJEO*, L. 9v.

The judge's work is two-fold: it is to determine first what is fact, and then whether what is in fact be according to rule, or according to the law. If a judge has no rule or law established beforehand, by which he should proceed in judging, he has no foundation to go upon in judging, he has no opportunity to be a judge; nor is it possible that he should do the part of a judge. To judge without a law or rule by which to judge, is impossible, for the very notion of judging is to determine whether the object of judgment be according to rule.<sup>124</sup>

Additionally, the nature of a law is to require perfect obedience, for it is "a contradiction to suppose otherwise; for...a law that don't require perfect obedience to itself...is a law that don't require all that it requires." The introduction of a "new law" that only requires imperfect obedience "won't help" the difficulty. Whether an old or new law, "an imperfect righteousness cannot answer the law of God we are under...for every law requires perfect obedience to itself: every rule whatsoever requires perfect conformity to itself."<sup>125</sup> In reducing the Arminian view to a logical absurdity, Edwards writes:

That law that now forbids sin, is certainly the law that we are now under (let that be an old one, or a new one); or else it is not sin: that which is not forbidden, and is the breach of no law, is no sin: but if we are now forbidden to commit sin, then 'tis by a law that we are now under, for surely we are neither under the forbiddings, nor commandings of a law that we are not under. Therefore if all sin is now forbidden, then we are now under a law that requires perfect obedience; and therefore nothing can be accepted as a righteousness in the sight of our Judge, but perfect righteousness.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:190.

<sup>125</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:190.

<sup>126</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:190. No doubt this was a simple statement of the obvious for Edwards.

In other words, we are under a law that forbids all sin, and that which is not sin, the law does not forbid. Therefore, all commands of the law must be obeyed, or we sin. As all sin is forbidden, the law requires perfect obedience.

Further, “a law without sanctions, that is, without being enforced with threatenings of punishment and promises of rewards, is no law at all.” If violations “pass unregarded and without any compensation,” God’s authority appears without authority.<sup>127</sup>

*Justification Would Be a “False Sentence”  
Without Perfect Righteousness*

God will always judge according to truth and “reality” according to the requirement of His rule of righteousness.

Justification is manifestly a *forensic* term, as the word is used in Scripture, and the thing a judicial thing, or the act of a judge: so that if a person should be justified without a righteousness, the judgment would not be according to truth: the sentence of justification would be a false sentence, unless there be a righteousness performed that is by the judge properly looked upon as his.<sup>128</sup>

“When he acts as a judge he will not justify the wicked, and cannot clear the guilty” and “cannot justify without righteousness.”<sup>129</sup> “God’s judgment will be a true judgment; he will judge things as they be, or that his judgment will be conformed to the nature of things.” If “sin was not punished according to its desert, God’s judgment would not be according to truth.”<sup>130</sup> And for God “to accept of something that falls short of the rule, instead of some-

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<sup>127</sup> “None Are Saved by Their Own Righteousness,” *Works* 14:335.

<sup>128</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:188-9.

<sup>129</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:189-90.

<sup>130</sup> “Romans 2:2,” *Works* 24:987.

thing else that answers the rule, is no judicial act, or act of a judge, but a pure act of sovereignty.”<sup>131</sup>

*The Purpose of God’s Judgment is to “Glorify God’s Righteousness”*

As noted in chapter one, the final result of the accomplishment of God’s ultimate purpose to display and communicate His glory is that the holy bride of Christ will spend eternity in intimate fellowship with God in heaven, the holy abode prepared by God for the enjoyment of Christ and the elect. The saints will forever be happy in enjoying a view of the excellent perfections of the Father and the Son. However, the salvation of sinners by an incomplete righteousness is incompatible with God’s purpose to display and communicate His glory.

With respect to the *display* of God’s glory in the ultimate purpose of God, the admittance into heaven of a single sinner with imperfect righteousness would be a breach of God’s law and authority, a compromise of His righteousness and justice, and thus contrary to God’s excellent perfections.<sup>132</sup> The glory of God’s perfections could not be displayed in such circumstances, for as noted earlier, God could not be God if He ever committed an act of unrighteousness. In fact, “at the day of judgment there will be the most glorious discovery of the justice of God that ever was made,” for “God will appear to all to be universally righteous towards everyone; the justice of all God’s moral government will at that day at once be discovered.”<sup>133</sup>

<sup>131</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:189.

<sup>132</sup> “Christ’s Sacrifice,” *Works* 10:601.

<sup>133</sup> “The Day of Judgment,” *Works* 14:515-516. See also “Deuteronomy 32:4,” *WJEO*, L, 8v: “There will be a more remarkable discovery of the justice of God at the day of judgment when all shall be judged in the most open and solemn manner possible, all the inhabitants of heaven and earth being present. Then God will wonderfully display his justice in acquitting of believers who are legally innocent and in rewarding of holy men according to his promise in fulfilling and completing all those good things to them which he so often spoke of to them. He will then remarkably display his vindictive justice in so open and solemn a manner, condemning and punishing men and devils, in punishing the princes of darkness

All objections will be removed; the consciences of every man shall be satisfied; the blasphemous cavils of the ungodly will be forever put to silence; and there will be argument given for the saints and angels to praise. Rev. 19:1-2, "And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power be to the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments."<sup>134</sup>

If God were to allow a single person into heaven without perfect righteousness, the Day of Judgment could neither be a display of the glory of God's righteous justice, nor a vindication of His righteous judgments.

With respect to the *communication* of God's glory in the ultimate purpose of God, no sinner could be admitted to heaven apart from a perfect righteousness. The communication of His glory to the redeemed would be impossible without perfect righteousness, as God's justice would require their condemnation, while His holiness could not suffer their presence in heaven. It is "contrary to God's justice, to make a wicked man eternally happy."<sup>135</sup>

"Tis impossible by reason of God's holiness, that anything should be united to God and brought to the enjoyment of him which is not holy. Now is it possible that a God of infinite holiness, that is perfect and hates sin with perfect hatred, that is infinitely lovely and excellent, should embrace in his arms a filthy, abominable creature, a hideous, detestable monster, more hateful than a toad and more poisonous than a viper?"<sup>136</sup>

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and the great men of this world, wicked proud kings and emperors, princes and noblemen, in punishing those rulers who gathered themselves against him when he was on earth. God's justice in many things now lies hid, as it were, but then it came forth into the light and will be wonderfully discovered."

<sup>134</sup> "The Day of Judgment," *Works* 14:515-516.

<sup>135</sup> "The Way of Holiness," *Works* 10:474.

<sup>136</sup> "The Way of Holiness," *Works* 10:475.

Thus, the smallest compromise of God's justice in the redemption of a single sinner, apart from perfect righteousness, has monumental implications in the theology of Edwards, as the very accomplishment of redemption in fulfilling God's ultimate purpose of displaying and communicating His glory to His creatures is precluded, rendering Christ's redemptive work useless.

### **Christ Died Needlessly If Believers Are Under a Law That Only Requires Imperfect Obedience**

In responding further to the Arminian contention that the strict law requiring perfection has been abolished and that imperfect and sincere obedience is the new requirement for eternal life, Edwards identifies the unintended implication that Christ's death is thereby rendered needless.

To begin, if sinners are put under a "more mild constitution" in the cancelling of the strict law that required perfection, "there is no need of supposing that the condemnation of it remains, to stand in the way of the acceptance of our virtue."<sup>137</sup>

There is no other way of avoiding this difficulty; the condemnation of the law must stand in force against a man till he is actually interested in the Savior, that has satisfied and answered the law, effectually to prevent any acceptance of his virtue, before, or in order to such an interest, unless the law or constitution itself be abolished.<sup>138</sup>

Accordingly, "this doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is utterly inconsistent with the doctrine of our being justified by our own virtue, or sincere obedience."<sup>139</sup> Eternal life cannot be given for our obedience and Christ's obedience.

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<sup>137</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:165.

<sup>138</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:165-6.

<sup>139</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:199.



If acceptance to God's favor, and a title to life, be given to believers, as the reward of Christ's obedience, then it is not given as the reward of our own obedience. In what respect soever, Christ is our Savior, that doubtless excludes our being our own saviors, in that same respect. If we can be our own saviors in the same respect Christ is, it will thence follow that the salvation of Christ is needless, in that respect; according to the Apostle's reasoning. Gal. 5:4, "Christ is rendered of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law."<sup>140</sup>

Furthermore, if the law is abolished, and nothing more than imperfect obedience is required, then imperfect obedience is no longer sin as it meets the requirement of the new law.

I would ask what law these imperfections of our obedience are a breach of? if they are a breach of no law, then they ben't sins; and if they ben't sins, what need of Christ's dying to satisfy for them? but if they are sins, and so the breach of some law, what law is it? they can't be a breach of their new law, for that requires no other than imperfect obedience or obedience with imperfections; and they can't be a breach of the old law, for that they say is entirely abolished, and we never were under it; and we can't break a law that we never were under.<sup>141</sup>

The Arminian "mild law" is founded upon the principle that sinners are unable to meet the strict requirement of the "old law," for "they [Arminians] strenuously maintain that it would be unjust in God to require anything of us that is beyond our present power and ability to perform." But, if God would be unjust to require perfect obedience, God would be unjust to punish imperfect obedience. Why, then, did Christ die for what did not deserve

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<sup>140</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:199. Edwards devotes 16 pages of detailed and convincing Scriptural arguments to show that the "law" by which no one can be justified, as cited here in Galatians 5:4, as well as elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, is the moral law, not the ceremonial law.

<sup>141</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:166.

punishment?<sup>142</sup> Also, if “Christ died to satisfy that law for us, that so we might not be under that law,” but “under a more mild law,” did Christ have to die to bring sinners out from under an unjust law of God? Or, “is there any need of Christ’s dying to persuade God not to do unjustly?”<sup>143</sup> In other words, if God sent Christ to die to remove sinners from under God’s “unjust” requirement, God and His law are made the problem to be remedied, not the sin and guilt of the sinner. For Edwards, this is both contrary to God’s perfections and absurd.

### **God’s Rule of Righteousness Precludes Justification by Any Virtue or Merit in Faith**

As noted earlier, all the works of a sinner are of infinite demerit and worthy of an infinite penalty, including the best works of the saints when viewed by themselves apart from Christ. We have seen that Adam’s sin did not cancel or alter God’s rule of righteousness, and that perfect positive obedience and pardon of sins is required for justification. Moreover, God as a righteous judge must judge in righteousness and according to reality. Accordingly, no virtue or sincere obedience can avail anyone of justification, including imperfect faith, for nothing but the perfect righteousness of Christ can meet the strict standard of God’s rule of righteousness for the obtaining of eternal life. The requirement of perfect positive righteousness remains, and nothing of sinful mankind can meet it.

Concerning Romans 4:5, wherein the Apostle Paul writes that Abraham’s faith “is counted for righteousness,” Edwards writes:

There is no need to understand the Apostle that his faith, though in itself an imperfect righteousness, is accepted instead of a perfect righteousness, as that God had respect to any goodness or righteousness at all in faith; but only

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<sup>142</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:166.

<sup>143</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:166-7.

that God by reason of his faith in God, accepted of him and dealt with him as though he had been righteous in himself.<sup>144</sup>

How then can Abraham's imperfect faith meet God's strict unchanging rule of righteousness?

*Faith Unites to Christ That Salvation Might Be by Grace*

As the focus of this work is Edwards' understanding of the accomplishment of redemption by Christ, an adequate treatment of the nature of the application of redemption by faith and union is beyond the present scope. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Edwards' understanding of the nature of faith as union with Christ, who alone met the standard of God's rule of righteousness, is not only consistent with the justice of God in the salvation of sinners according to His righteous rule, but highlights and sustains it.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, there can be no other way by which a sinner can be justified according to God's standard of justice.<sup>146</sup> As we have seen, God cannot accept an imperfect righteousness, and must in

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<sup>144</sup> "Romans 4:5," *Works* 24:993.

<sup>145</sup> An adequate treatment of the nature of faith, faith as the condition of the covenant of grace, or union with Christ is beyond the scope of this work. For a helpful discussion of Edwards' understanding of the nature of faith and justification, see Bogue, *Jonathan Edwards and the Covenant of Grace*, 253-78; Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, 90-106. For a treatment of the Holy Spirit as the bond of union in Edwards' theology, see Caldwell, *The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*.

<sup>146</sup> See also "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:188: "'Tis absolutely necessary that in order to a sinner's being justified, the righteousness of some other should be reckoned to his account; for 'tis declared that the person justified is looked upon as (in himself) ungodly; but God neither will nor can justify a person without a righteousness." Also, "Matthew 5:27-28," *YMSS*, L. 10r. -10v: "This should stir us all up to labour to get an interest in him who has perfectly answered this strict Law of God. We cannot do it [and] it is in vain for us to aim at any such thing, and yet we are all naturally under the Law. The Law takes hold of us and exacts perfect obedience, upon pain of eternal death. We are held bound by it as with chains of brass. There is therefore no other way for us, but to get into Christ, who alone has answered and fulfilled this Law. Though it be so strict, yet Christ answered exactly and perfectly in every point. He perfectly

perfect righteousness judge according to reality. In light of this, faith itself cannot be the righteousness that justifies, as it neither meets the standard of righteousness required, nor pays the infinite debt of sin. Faith as a work of righteousness is as infinitely inadequate and sinful as all human works. Faith, therefore, cannot be that in the believer that meets the perfection required by God's rule of righteousness, for that is impossible and contrary to God's righteous and perfect justice.

This is plainly what our divines intend when they say that faith don't justify as a work, or a righteousness, viz. that it don't justify as a part of our moral goodness or excellency, or that it don't justify as a work, in the sense that man was to have been justified by his works by the covenant of works, which was to have a title to eternal life, given him of God in testimony of his pleasedness with his works, or his regard to the inherent excellency and beauty of his obedience. And this is certainly what the apostle Paul means, when he so much insists upon it that we are not justified by works, viz. that we are not justified by them as good works, or by any goodness, value, or excellency of our works.<sup>147</sup>

Rather, faith is the human act of union with Christ, the union of God to the elect having taken place in the Father and Son setting their benevolent love upon the elect in eternity past. Faith allows for the believer, with no merit of his or her own, to obtain eternal life in a manner consistent with God's unchanging justice, while the merit that earned it completely resides in the perfect righteousness of Christ.<sup>148</sup> In union with Christ by faith the sinner is

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fulfilled the commands of the Law, and has answered the demands of it for our sins, its demands of suffering eternal death."

<sup>147</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:160.

<sup>148</sup> "Grace so greatly appears in the manner of justification proposed by it. We that have justification offered to us only for our acceptance of Christ, notwithstanding all our unworthiness and provocations, that God is willing freely to pardon us and accept us into favour and bestow eternal life upon us, upon the account of the righteousness of another that we were at no pains to work out,

justified, for the fulfillment of God's standard of righteousness by the bridegroom becomes the possession of the bride. To see faith any other way is contrary to the gospel of Christ.

Neither salvation itself, nor Christ the Savior, are given as a reward of anything in man: they are not given as a reward of faith, nor anything else of ours: we are not united to Christ as a reward of our faith, but have union with him by faith, only as faith is the very act of uniting, or closing on our part....By these things it appears how contrary to the scheme of the gospel of Christ, their scheme is, who say that faith justifies as a principal of obedience, or as a leading act of obedience; or (as others) the sum, and comprehension of all evangelical obedience: for by this 'tis the obedience or virtue that is in faith, that is the thing, that gives it its justifying influence; and that is the same thing as to say, that we are justified by our own obedience, virtue or goodness.<sup>149</sup>

Moreover, the idea that one is accepted into God's favor prior to possessing Christ's righteousness and satisfaction is self-contradictory, for "if our interest in God be the fruit of God's favor, then it can't be the ground of it."

Such a scheme destroys itself, for it supposes that Christ's satisfaction and righteousness are necessary for us to recommend us to the favor of God; and yet supposes that we have God's favor and acceptance before we have Christ's satisfaction and righteousness, and have these given as a fruit of God's favor.<sup>150</sup>

In other words, if God cannot accept sinners into His favor apart from a perfect righteousness, the sinner must possess that righteousness before he or she is accepted into God's favor. As dis-

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and upon the account of sufferings that we had no share in." "Romans 4:16," *WJEO*, L. 9v.

<sup>149</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:200-1.

<sup>150</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:200.

cussed in chapter two, God's benevolent love to sinners precedes any worth in the sinner and is despite the infinite unworthiness of the sinner, whereas God's love of complacency, the love of any excellence in the sinner, is purchased by Christ and consists of God's love of Christ's righteousness possessed by the believer. With respect to John 16:27, "the Father loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed," God's "love of favor and acceptance...is consequent on believing," for the believer's love to Christ is the fruit of union with Christ, for "love to Christ is included in faith in Christ."<sup>151</sup>

But if you answer, That though God loves us because we love Christ, but 'tis not in the same sense that he loves us, because we believe on him, the words of the verse don't allow of that, for 'tis said, "the Father loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed," etc. Loving and believing would not thus have been coupled together, if it was not because of one in the same sense as the other. But this, in general, is what Christ would signify to them, viz. that the Father loved them because of their union to him, and so he loved them for his sake.<sup>152</sup>

Sinners cannot be accepted into God's favor and then given the righteousness and satisfaction of Christ as the fruit of that favor. The sinner must possess righteousness and satisfaction in order to be accepted into God's favor in the first place. If the sinner's acceptance precedes the possession of Christ's merit and satisfaction,

<sup>151</sup> "John 16:27," *Works* 24:957.

<sup>152</sup> "John 16:27," *Works* 24:957. Edwards also cites John 14:20-21, 23, and 1 Timothy 1:14 in this regard. In commenting upon the latter, he writes: "But the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.' This seems to be by the figure which is called hendiadys, and by faith and love are not meant two proper distinct things. But 'tis as much as to say, a loving faith, or that faith whose life and spirit is love, or that faith which works by love, as when it is said, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire' [Luke 3:16], i.e., with a fiery Spirit, or a Spirit that shall be like fire." Editor Stephen Stein, footnote 6, notes that hendiadys is "a grammatical term referring to the expression of an idea by two nouns connected by 'and,' instead of by a noun and an adjunct."

the sinner is thereby justified on account of some virtue of his or her own, be it faith or otherwise.

For a rewarding anyone's excellency, evermore supposes favor and acceptance on the account of that excellency: it is the very notion of a reward, that it is a good thing, bestowed in testimony of respect and favor for the virtue or excellency rewarded. So that it is not by virtue of our interest in Christ and his merits, that we first come into favor with God, according to this scheme; for we are in God's favor before we have any interest in those merits; in that we have an interest in those merits given as a fruit of God's favor for our own virtue.<sup>153</sup>

But as we have seen, no virtue in a sinner could merit God's favor. To the contrary, the best work of a sinner or saint falls infinitely short of God's rule of righteousness and deserves the penalty of death.

Further, there can be no difference between earning an interest in the merits of Christ and earning heaven directly. In either case, the redeeming work of Christ is not needed.

If God gives us Christ, or an interest in him, properly in reward of our obedience, he does really give us salvation in reward for our obedience; for the former implies the latter; yea it implies it as the greater implies the less. So that indeed it exalts our virtue and obedience more, to suppose that God gives us Christ in reward of that virtue and obedience, than if he should give salvation without Christ.<sup>154</sup>

To give us "an interest in Christ in reward for our virtue, is as great an argument that it instates us in God's favor, as if he bestowed a title to eternal life, as its direct reward," in which case Christ's righteousness is not needed. But to imagine that it is "our own goodness, virtue, or excellency, that instates us in God's acceptance

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<sup>153</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:200.

<sup>154</sup> "Justification by Faith Alone," *Works* 19:200.

and favor,” is “the thing that the Scripture guards, and militates against.”<sup>155</sup>

God don’t give those that believe, an union *with*, or an interest *in* the Savior, in reward for faith, but only because faith is the soul’s active uniting with Christ, or is itself the very act of union [uniting], on their part.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, faith cannot be earned, or God cannot be made favorably disposed to give sinners saving faith by their acts of righteousness, for “thus is the same, in effect, as trusting in their own righteousness for justification.”<sup>157</sup> Such will “keep men from embracing the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>158</sup>

### **Justification by Man’s Righteousness Insults the Glory of the Trinity**

The sin of Adam and mankind made salvation by the sinner’s own works impossible by virtue of the perfection required by God’s rule of righteousness. God, however, in His ultimate purpose of displaying and communicating His glory in accord with His perfect justice, conceived and initiated the covenant of redemption, the terms of which would accomplish redemption for elect sinners. As will be seen in chapter five, the infinite extent to which Christ went in bearing infinite humiliation and suffering that He might communicate God’s happiness to the elect in the giving of the Holy Spirit accomplishes God’s ultimate purpose in the display and communication of His glory. The Trinity is thereby glorified in the salvation of unworthy sinners. But to posit salvation by the righteousness of the sinner, however small, is to render God’s eternal plan of salvation, via the covenant of redemption, “to no purpose” and “altogether needless.”<sup>159</sup> In speaking to the hypo-

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<sup>155</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:200.

<sup>156</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:158.

<sup>157</sup> “Romans 9:31-32,” *YMSS*, L. 5v.

<sup>158</sup> “Romans 9:31-32,” *YMSS*, L. 7r.

<sup>159</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:410.



thetical proponent of a redemption based on righteousness in the sinner, Edwards writes:

And what a reflection do you cast upon them as the contrivers of this wonderful way. The persons of the Trinity, they consulted from all eternity about it as being the main work of divine wisdom. The Father entered into a covenant of redemption with the Son before the foundation of the world, and if your way be true, it was all for nothing; it was only for a frivolous notion.

The Father, Son [and] Holy Ghost, they busied themselves about it needlessly. You, by your practice, reflect upon them as though they made a great ado and consulted to do some great and strange thing to no purpose, but only to surprise and amuse the world.

Is not this the plain language of your practice? And what a horrid reflection is it upon the wisdom and majesty of the glorious Trinity, as though they were only mere triflers.<sup>160</sup>

With respect to the Father, those that trust in their own worthiness “do as much say that God the Father was unreasonable in his demands to go to require so hard a thing,” and imply that God is “cruel, and delighted in the pain and disgrace of his own Son.” Moreover, they “rob God of all the glory of his mercy in sending his Son” and make the act of sending His Son “as much to his dishonor as it is indeed to his honor.” The act by which God would be most glorified, they “would make the greatest reproach to God that can be.”<sup>161</sup>

With respect to the Son, the opinion that one’s own righteousness is sufficient for salvation “robs the Son of God of all the glo-

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<sup>160</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:410-11.

<sup>161</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:411.

ry of his love” in His suffering and death.<sup>162</sup> Scripture speaks of Christ’s work as “a wonderful act of love and grace,” and “Christ counts it his glory, and would have men admire him for it.” On the other hand, in speaking to those viewing their righteousness as sufficient, Edwards writes:

You don’t see that there is any such glory in it: you don’t thank him for his love, for he only did this to give you that that you have already without his giving; he did [this] that you might be partakers of his righteousness, and you want none of his righteousness: you have righteousness enough of your own.<sup>163</sup>

Christ saw sinners as “poor” and in need of help, “but you think he was mistaken,” and “he might have kept his gifts to himself, for all you [care].”<sup>164</sup>

According to your opinion of your own righteousness, he was guilty of the most egregious folly in running himself into such a miserable case for nothing. Self-righteousness blasphemes Christ as though he were the greatest fool in the world to leave heaven, where he had perfect happiness. Christ stands high in reputation in the gospel for his {sacrifice}, but in your account, he was the greatest fool in the world for his pains.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:411. In commenting on Exodus 20:25, Edwards writes: “Their being forbidden to lift up their tool on the stones of the altar seems to signify to us these two things, viz. 1. That we must not add anything of our own works to Christ, because Christ is sufficient alone without our righteousness. If we go to add our works to make up his deficiencies, instead of making the altar of the foundation of our acceptance with God better, we shall utterly spoil it. We must depend on Christ as he is....

The altar was that which sanctified the gift, and added worth or merit to the sacrifice. We must not add our works to that by which acceptance is merited, must not join our works to Christ to make the merit greater or better in order to the acceptance of the offering. Hewn stone seem to be used as a type of our own righteousness in Is. 9:10.” “Exodus 20:25,” *Works* 24:236-7.

<sup>163</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:411.

<sup>164</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:411-12.

<sup>165</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:411-12.

“To suppose a man is justified by his own virtue or obedience, derogates from the honor of the Mediator, and ascribes that to man’s virtue, that belongs only to the righteousness of Christ.”<sup>166</sup>

With respect to the Holy Spirit, “you rob him of all the glory of convincing men of righteousness, or of convincing men of the way of justification.” The Holy Spirit is glorified in the “application of Christ’s redemption,” in giving people the knowledge of the way of justification, in His effects on the soul, but “is robbed of all this glory by men’s opinion of their own righteousness.” If people are justified by their own righteousness, “this work of the Holy Ghost is altogether needless; ‘tis no glorious work.” The Holy Spirit’s work is to convince mankind “that the righteousness of Christ is that alone by which we can have acceptance. But this is a lie, if men’s own righteousness be sufficient.”<sup>167</sup> In qualifying his language somewhat, Edwards writes:

Perhaps self-righteous [men] don’t distinctly think of all [this]; but yet so, these are the direct and plain consequences of a self-righteous opinion. They rob God of all his glory in this glorious work or redemption, by which he designed such peculiar glory to himself...[They] rob every person [in the Trinity] of their special glory.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, according to the requirement of God’s unchanging rule of righteousness and the perfections of God’s nature which it reflects, no amount of human righteousness can be attributed to the justification of a sinner without injury to the Trinity in His ultimate purpose to display and communicate His glory through Christ. The following quotation is lengthy, but is an excellent summary of

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<sup>166</sup> “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Works* 19:185. Edwards continues, “it puts man in Christ’s stead, and makes him his own savior, in a respect, in which Christ only is his Savior: and so ‘tis a doctrine contrary to the nature, and design of the gospel which is to abase man, and to ascribe all the glory of our salvation to Christ the Redeemer. It is inconsistent with the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, which is a gospel doctrine.”

<sup>167</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:412.

<sup>168</sup> “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost,” *Works* 14:412.

Edwards' understanding of the relationship of a works righteousness to the glory of the Trinity.

He that is entrusted with the rights and honor of the majesty and authority of the whole Trinity, surely will not forgive sin without a perfect satisfaction [and] a perfect obedience. Therefore, [we] presume not to go to him in our own righteousness. If he should bestow salvation upon you in any other way, he would not only injure the honor of his majesty and justice, but he would disparage his own wisdom [and] oppose all that he has done in the great things he has contrived and approved and brought to pass to reproach [sin and evil]. But if you come to him in the way that he has appointed, then his regard to the honor of his own wisdom, and his regard to the honor of his Son, and his regard to his own eternal promise and oath made to him and through him to believers, all will engage to receive you and make you happy. And Christ, the second person, he will be engaged: he will present you to the Father, yea, [to] all the persons [of the heavenly society]: not only the Father and the Son, but the Holy Spirit and the glorious angels, yea, all creatures. For all things shall be yours whatever they be, whether the world or life or death, or things past or things to come: all will be yours in that you are Christ's and Christ is God's.<sup>169</sup>

### Summary

In the present chapter we examined Edwards' understanding of the result of Adam's sin with respect to the nature of God's rule of righteousness and the accomplishment of God's ultimate purpose in the redemption of sinners. As a result of Adam's sin as surety and representative of all mankind, all were made guilty sinners under God's wrath according to the strict and unchanging nature of God's rule of righteousness. The strict and exacting terms

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<sup>169</sup> "Of God the Father," *Works* 25:154.

of that law render everyone sinners at all times, with no provision for deliverance from sin and guilt. Moreover, the guilt of every sin is infinite as an affront to the infinite majesty of God. Even the best acts of saints are mingled with sin, or, considered by themselves apart from intermingled sin, fall infinitely short of the standard required by the nature of God and His goodness. As God's rule of righteousness is reflective of His perfect righteousness and justice, Adam's sin neither altered nor abrogated its requirements. Justification of sinners, therefore, requires both freedom from the penalty of sin *and* the perfect positive righteousness required by the rule of righteousness. Apart from perfect obedience to God's law, God's authority is not properly honored and the requirement for eternal life is not met. Therefore, apart from the perfect obedience of Christ, the salvation of sinners is impossible, for the honor of God's authority and law and the requirement for the obtaining of eternal life would go unanswered. The nature of God as judge demands this, for in righteousness He must judge according to rule or law, or He cannot judge. Indeed, a law by definition requires perfect obedience to its requirements or it is not a law, for it "does not require all that it requires." In judging according to His rule of righteousness, justification apart from perfect righteousness would be a false judgment, contrary to God's nature as a righteous judge. If God were to make a single unjust judgment, He would no longer be God, for God is perfectly righteous in all His ways.

In light of the nature of God and His law, any scheme of justification that posits a new law that requires imperfect obedience only renders Christ's perfect obedience and death needless. If imperfect obedience meets the demands of such a law, then no satisfaction or perfect obedience is required, for all sinners meet its requirements. Additionally, the strict nature of God's law precludes justification by any virtue or merit in faith. Rather, faith is union with Christ, in whom the perfect righteousness of Christ's obedience becomes the possession of the believer. Indeed, the favor of God to the believer is consequent upon his or her possession of Christ's righteousness, and does not precede it on the basis of

any virtue or righteousness in the believer, including any virtue or righteousness in faith.

Lastly, as all persons of the Trinity are equally involved and equally glorified by the salvation of elect sinners, so the justification of a sinner by any supposed virtue or merit in the sinner is an insult to the Trinity in His ultimate purpose to display and communicate His glory by the perfect obedience of Christ to God's unchanging rule of righteousness. Thus, we see that Christ's perfect obedience to God's rule of righteousness is the only possible basis of the justification of sinners, and the only means by which God's ultimate purpose to display and communicate His glory to sinful creatures can be accomplished.

We turn now to an examination of Edwards' understanding of the basis and nature of the merits of Christ's perfect obedience in fulfillment of God's ultimate purpose.