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all delivered unto the saints.*

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The Saviour Of Sinners

By Dr. Wm. C. Robinson

*An Address delivered to a Convocation of Chaplains and Reserve Chaplains
at Columbia Theological Seminary on March 8, 1948.*

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." I Tim. 1:15.

On the road to Damascus the Savior met a sinner. The sinner was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the people of God. His heart was filled with enmity toward Christ. Yet the risen Lord spoke to him in judgment and in mercy. Blinded by the light of His judgment Saul fell down as one dead. And at the same time the Lord whose Church he was persecuting spoke to Saul in mercy. The One who had prayed, "Father forgive them," appeared to Paul to forgive this persecutor to receive His chief opponent as His dear friend.

Paul's testimony runs about as follows: "When I was dying under the unerring verdict of the law, then wonder of wonders, God revealed His Son in me. God revealed Him as crucified for my sins. And His dying in my stead drank up my curse and filled my heart with gratitude to Him who loved me and delivered Himself up for me!"

Never does the Apostle forget that he is the sinner for whom Christ died. In Romans God speaks in judgment until the Apostle cries: "O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death." "I know that in me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing." But here also the God of judgment is the God of Grace: "If it is by grace, it is no more of works." "To him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is reckoned for righteousness." "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord." In the epistle which speaks of the feather line between departing to be with Christ and abiding in this life, the Apostle is still sure that he has not yet attained nor been made perfect. In his final letters to Timothy, Paul the aged, both confesses himself the chief of sinners and shouts in victory, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

The Lord who reigns at the right hand of Power revealed to and through His Apostle the same good news for sinners He had taught "in the days of His flesh." There is a gentle sarcasm in Jesus' words: "I care not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Our Lord did not mean that there is a sinful class of men who need, and another, a righteous class, who do not need repentance. If one insists on finding two classes he will be closer to the Gospels if he says that one class is composed of the self-righteous sinners who think they are saints and the other of the penitent saints who know they are sinners. "Side by side let us set the words of Jesus spoken to religious men who were bent on punishing a sinful woman: 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her,' and the words of John, speaking of himself and others far on in the Christian life: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.'"

One of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray would not so much as lift up his

eyes unto heaven, but beat upon his breast crying: "God be merciful to me a sinner." And the Lord said: "That man went home justified." At the same time **a sinner and justified.**

Beside the crucified Saviour a thief was dying. At first there was railing on his lips. But God revealed Himself unto this particular thief, revealed Himself in the Christ in Whom He was reconciling the world unto Himself. A sense of the fear of the holy God came over the dying thief and with it a glimmer of hope in God's forgiveness. In penitence he cried to his fellow, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation. And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the just reward for our deeds. But this One hath done nothing amiss." Then in struggling faith, in faith without works or merit, he committed himself to the Saviour, thus: "Lord Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy Kingdom" — Thy Kingdom of grace for poor sinners like me. I am so bad that I deserve to be crucified. Yet verily so completely pardoned that, "today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." This is the Gospel of the Saviour of sinners.

Augustine

Augustine of Tagaste, the consummate teacher of the Gospel of the grace of God, had several of the penitential psalms copied on broad sheets of parchment and hung on the walls of the room in which he was dying. Thus, the outstanding Doctor of Latin Christianity decended into the Jordan reading and weeping as he read:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness:

According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. If Thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?

But with Thee there is forgiveness, That Thou mayest be feared."

"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity

I said, I will confess my transgression unto the Lord;

And Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

The Reformers

Among recent students of Luther, K. Holl, R. Seeberg and E. Hirsch take the position that justification was for Luther both an act of grace and an estimate. Holl claims that the righteousness which God recognizes must after all be man's own righteousness which God sees developing in the life of the justified. In answer, Walther, Barth and Althaus have effectively shown that justification **propter Christum** always means for Luther the sinner's justification solely by virtue of Christ's per-

*Smart, J. D., **What a Man Can Believe**, P. 210.

fect obedience. Luther's summary of the argument of the Epistle to the Galatians amply vindicates the position of the latter group. There Christian righteousness is not an active righteousness which man works out for himself by keeping the law of Moses. It is a passive righteousness which Christ wrought for us and which the Holy Spirit conveys to us. Christ is our righteousness, a righteousness which we **receive by faith**.

As early as 1516, Luther writes to Spenclein, an Augustinian monk: "I should be glad to know what is the state of your soul. When you were living with me we were both in the greatest of all errors, seeking to stand before God on the ground of our own works. I am still struggling against that fatal error. O, my dear brother, learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Beware of pretending to such purity as no longer to confess thyself the Chief of Sinners. If our labours, and obediences and afflictions could have given peace to the conscience, why should Christ have died on the Cross? You will never find true peace till you find it and keep it in this—that **Christ takes all your sins upon Himself, and bestows all His righteousness upon you.**" Again Luther says:

"A Christian is at the same time a **sinner and a saint**; he is at once **bad and good**, for in our own person we are in sin and in our own name we are sinners. But Christ brings us another name in which there is forgiveness of sins, so that for His sake our sin is forgiven and done away. Both are true. There are sins . . . and yet there are no sins. For Christ's sake, God will not see them. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ alone is the garment of grace that is put upon us, that God our Father may not look upon us as sinners but receive us as righteous, holy, godly children and give us eternal life."

Calvin put the truth in this incisive way, "The question is not how we can be righteous, but how though unrighteous we can be considered as righteous." And the answer is that "Christ alone must be proposed for righteousness who exceeds all the perfection of the law." "When we are facing the tribunal of God, we must dismiss all thoughts of our own works in reference to justification, we must embrace the Divine mercy alone, and turning our eyes from ourselves fix them solely on Christ." (Institutes III. xix. 2).

When there was no room in England for William Tyndale to translate the Bible, he fled to Wittenberg. Luther's colleague Bugenhagen interested himself in the English refugee and wrote for him the first Reformation tract addressed to the English speaking people. Bugenhagen admits that there are many erroneous statements, charges and calumnies levelled at the Reformers. He does not stay to answer them, but boldly declares. "We have but one doctrine: **Christ is Our Righteousness.**"

English Faith

Small wonder that the Gospel bore fruit on English soil. There are no finer testimonies to the righteousness of God our Saviour than these words of the judicious Hooker:

"Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are found in Him. And in Him God findeth us, if we be believers; for by believing we are incorporated into Christ. Then, although in **ourselves** we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man who is in himself impious, full of iniquity, full of sin—**him being found in Christ** through faith, and having his sin in hatred through re-

pentance—**him God beholdeth with a gracious eye and accepteth him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous as if he had fulfilled all that is commanded him in the holy law of God—shall I say accepteth him as more perfectly righteous than if himself had fulfilled the whole law? I must take heed what I say; but the Apostle saith: 'God hath made Him to be sin Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.'** Let it be counted folly or phrenzy or fury, or whatsoever; it is our wisdom and our comfort: we care for no knowledge in the world but this—that man hath sinned and God hath suffered: that God hath made Himself the sin of men, and that men are made the righteousness of God in Him."*

Bread From Bunyan

Bunyan's **Pilgrim's Progress** is not quite forgotten, and some courageous souls are digging out his **Holy War**. In **Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners**, "the Bishop of the Baptist," tells us of the seven abominations that seared his heart and of God's grace that brought relief. Here are some crumbs from the table God spread for this servant:

"I remember that one day, as I was travelling into the country, and musing on the wickedness and blasphemy of my heart, and considering of the enmity that was in me to God, that scripture came to my mind, **He hath made peace by the Blood of His Cross**. By which I was made to see, both again and again that day, that God and my soul were friends by this Blood; yea, I saw that the justice of God and my sinful Soul could embrace and kiss each other through this **blood**. This was a good day to me; I hope I shall not forget it."

"But as I was walking up and down in the house, as a man in a most woeful state, that Word of God took hold of my heart, **Ye are freely justified by His Grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. But oh, what a turn it made in me!"

"And as I was thus in a muse, that Scripture also came with great power upon my Spirit, **Not by works of righteousness that we have done but according to his mercy, He hath saved us**. Now was I got on high; I saw myself within the arms of Grace and Mercy."

"But one day, as I was passing in the field and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul. **Thy righteousness is in heaven**, and me thought I saw with the Eyes of my Soul, Jesus Christ at God's Right Hand. There, I say, was my righteousness; so that whatever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, **He wants my righteousness, for that was just before Him**. I also saw, moreover that it was not my good frame of heart that made my Righteousness better, not yet my bad frame that made my Righteousness worse; for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, **the same yesterday, today and forever**.

"Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed; I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God. So when I came home, I looked to see if I could find that sentence. **Thy Righteousness is in Heaven**, but could not find such a saying; wherefore my heart began to sink; only that was brought to my remembrance. He is made unto us of God Wisdom

*Richard Hooker on Justification, 1585.

and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption, by this Word I saw the other sentence true.

"For by this Scripture, I saw that the Man Christ Jesus, as He is distinct from us, as touching His bodily presence, so He is our Righteousness and Sanctification before God. Here, therefore, I lived for some time, very sweetly with God through Christ. Oh me thought, Christ! Christ! there was nothing but Christ before my Eyes."

"Now was I as one awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream and listening to this heavenly sentence; I was as if I had heard it thus expounded to me: Sinner, thou thinkest that because of Thy Sins and Infirmities I can not save Thy Soul: but behold my Son is by me, and upon Him I look, and not on thee, and deal with thee according as I am pleased with him."

John Wesley

Columbia professors have shared in the vigorous polemics between Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism.* But at the moment when the world is hanging on the brink of disaster, when the Christian faith is being challenged by humanism's self-sufficiency and communism's atheism, it seems better to remind oneself of John Wesley's fundamental affirmations of man's sin and God's grace. In demolishing Dr. John Taylor's attack on original sin, Wesley said: "If the sin of Adam was not imputed to us, neither is the righteousness of Christ" (Works 5:647). "A denial of original sin contradicts the main design of the Gospel which is to humble man and to ascribe to God's free grace, not man's free will, the whole of salvation." (p. 648). Indeed Wesley uses large portions of Thomas Boston's *Fourfold State* to state his position here. In another place, Wesley insists on grace alone and comes "to the very edge of Calvinism" in ascribing all good to free grace, in denying all natural free will and all power antecedent to grace, and in excluding all merit from man for what he has or does by the grace of God (8:285). It has become popular to assume that all men are naturally children of God. Like our own Robert A. Webb, Wesley taught that we sinners become God's children by adoption, that is by faith in Jesus Christ.

The great William Law pressed mysticism in these words: "There is but one salvation for all mankind, and the way to it is one; and that is the desire of the soul turned to God. This desire brings the soul to God and God unto the soul: it unites with God, it cooperates with God, and is one life with God." But nothing so stirred Charles Wesley to indignation as the idea that man can save himself apart from the mediatorial work of Christ. And John Wesley declared: "All the other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous of its enemies. They stab it in the vitals; and its most serious professors are likely to fall by them. May I praise Him who has snatched me out of this fire likewise, by warning all others that are set on fire of hell." A Gospel without Christ? Why Wesley's description of his own preaching runs thus: "I have been offering Christ to men for three hours."

The sun arose for England's great evangelist in that strange warming of his heart in Aldersgate Street Mission when God gave him an assurance that Christ had taken away his sins and saved him from the law of sin and death. At his dying bed, this great campaigner for souls testifies, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of

Jesus." A Duke scholar, who has traced the story of Wesley's dying further than the account in the Journal, says that when the evangelist became too weak to speak his lips were forming these words of the Apostle: "The chief of sinners, I."

Thomas Adam

Another English evangelical of Wesley's century is Thomas Adam. After suffering under the toils of the law, Adam found the Gospel in Romans and began to preach salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone to man who is always a sinner. In his *Private Thoughts on Religion*, he confesses, "Sin is still here, deep in the centre of my heart and twisted about every fibre of it." "The moment we think we have no sin we shall desert Christ for Christ came to save just sinners." "If I were to live to the world's end and do all the good that man can do I must still cry, Mercy."

No, this does not mean easy acquiescence in sinning. "I would rather be cast into the burning fiery furnace, or the lion's den, than suffer sin to lie quiet in my spirit." Christ never comes into the soul unattended. He brings the Holy Spirit with Him and the Spirit His train of gifts and graces. Christ comes with a blessing in each hand, forgiveness in one and holiness in the other. "Christ's forgiveness of sins is complete at once, because less would do me no good; His holiness is dispensed by degrees and to none wholly in this life lest we should slight His forgiveness."

"On earth it is one of the hardest things in the world to see sin and Christ at the same time, to be penetrated with a lively sense of our desert of punishment and absolute freedom from condemnation: but the more we know of both, the nearer approach we shall make to the state of heaven." "It is a great paradox but the glorious truth of Christianity that a good conscience may consist with a consciousness of evil." And Dr. Warfield who has culled these testimonies from Adam adds: "Sin and Christ; ill desert and no condemnation; we are sinners and saints all at once! That is the paradox of evangelicalism. The Antinomian and the Perfectionist would abolish the paradox—the one drowning the saint in the sinner, the other concealing the sinner in the saint." We must ever see both members of the paradox and see them whole. "Though we can have no satisfaction in ourselves, we may have perfect satisfaction in Christ."

The God in whom we trust is the pardoning God, God in Christ. And every step of our salvation is His work. The work He has undertaken is now in process. Neither for the individual nor for the world is God's work complete. The pacifists, who talked of rejecting God if God permitted war to come, forgot that the world was only in process of salvation, not yet completely saved. The perfectionists make a similar mistake. Believer and world are both in the hands of the Maker and in process of salvation. Sin continues throughout the whole saving process and the religion that saves is the religion for sinners.* Christianity is the religion of the common man who lives daily by the sacrifice of Christ.**

We share in this process by working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in us to will and to do for His good pleasure. We reign with Him in righteousness, His righteousness imputed to us. And as we do, the light of that Reign sanctifies every relation in life.

*Warfield, B. B., *Perfectionism* I. 126-132.

**Forsyth, P. T., *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*.

*E. G., Girardeau, J. L., *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*.

Words From Old Scotia

The Presbyterian divines are not wanting in such confessions. Samuel Rutherford has been called "the saint of the covenant," but Rutherford's own word is: "Woe, woe is me that men should think there is anything in me. The house devils that keep me company and this sink of corruption make me carry low sails . . . But howbeit I am a wretched captive of sin, yet my Lord can hew heaven out of worse timber than I am if worse there be."

When he heard that his colleague of the Westminster Assembly, George Gillespie, was dying, Samuel Rutherford wrote him: "My reverend and dear brother, look to the East. Die well. Your life of faith is just finishing. Finish it well. Let your last act of faith be your best act. Stand not upon sanctification, but upon justification. Recollect that your apprehensions are not canonical." And George Gillespie replied: "There is nothing that I have done that can stand the touchstone of God's justice. Christ is my all. I am nothing."

In Scotland, there are no names more celebrated by picture, statue, or story than Thomas Chalmers. How eloquent he was in preaching and in praying! And yet when Chalmers came to die, he declared: "What would I do if God did not justify the ungodly."

John "Rabbi" Duncan

Scotland's tale would not be told without a word from John Duncan. The beloved teacher tells us: "God showed me a biography, an autobiography—and a heart, my heart. There are seven abominations in a man's heart. And mine eye was fixed on that heart for horror. For it was not simply my eye fixed on the heart but God showing me His own eye looking on it and saying, 'See thy sin under MY eye; see MY eye sees that.' God be merciful to me a sinner! . . ."

"Methought then I stood at **Calvary** and heard these words! 'It is finished.' God said, 'Look into the heart of Christ and behold Him in His vicarious death. Behold Him and know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich . . . Return unto ME, for I have redeemed thee. And the Lord showed me a heart into which He had put a **new song** . . ."

"It was the song of a soul known to God; and many such there are. It was the song of one to whom much had been forgiven, and who therefore loved much; and many such there are. But it was the song of the chief of sinners; of the one to whom **most** had been forgiven, and who loved **most**."*

Pascal's Pensees

This testimony may well close with a word from Pascal. Incidentally this widens our witness in two ways. It shows the heart of an Augustinian within the Roman Catholic fold, and it indicates the current position of French Protestantism. For Protestantism in France has swung "from Fosdick to Pascal." Blaise Pascal writes:

"The knowledge of **God** without the knowledge of our own misery produces **pride**. The knowledge of Jesus Christ exempts us both from **pride** and **despair**; because in Him we see God, our **own misery**, and the only way of recovery from it.

*Macleod, John, *Scottish Theology*, Pages 284-286.

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THE MAGNA CHARTA OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

The Christian man finds in the Bible the very Word of God. Let it not be said that dependence upon a book is a dead or an artificial thing. The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it set the world aflame. Dependence upon a word of man would be slavish, but dependence upon God's Word is life. Dark and gloomy would be the world, if we were left to our own devices, and had no blessed Word of God. The Bible to the Christian is not a burdensome law, but the very Magna Charta of Christian liberty.

—J. Gresham Machen.

"We may know **God** without knowing our own miseries, our own miseries without knowing God; or we know both without knowing the means of **deliverance** from the miseries which oppress us. But we cannot know Jesus Christ without at the same time knowing **God**, our **own miseries** and the **remedy** for them; because Jesus Christ is not only God, but He is God, the **healer of our miseries**.

"... We ought therefore wholly to direct our inquiries to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, since it is in Him alone that we can hope to know God, in a manner that shall be really advantageous to us.

"He is the true God to us men; that is, to miserable and sinful creatures: He is the centre of all and the object of all."*

*B. Pascal, *Pensees* XX.