

# SERMON XXXVII

## CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS ONLY DISCHARGE THE SINNER

Tobias Crisp

*"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." {1 Jn.2:1,2}*

In these words, you have the apostle's conclusion, and his argument to enforce it; his conclusion is that he would not have them to sin; his argument is, "if any man do sin, &c."

The first thing that we have observed out of these words is; that it is a powerful argument to prevail with persons, such as John writes unto, not to sin, to let them know, that though they do sin, they have an advocate with the Father.

We are fallen upon the consideration of the argument itself; the matter of it and the force of it. Every argument hath some firmness in itself, from whence is produced some good inference; that which hath none in itself, is not able to make good another thing. Concerning the matter of this argument, you have, the apostle's supposition; a provision against that which this supposition might do; or, against that which he supposes a man might do. Here is a supposition, you may sin, though you be little children; the provision against the evil that sin might do is, though we sin, yet we have an advocate with the Father. And, concerning the matter of the argument, we have these things proposed. 1. What the office is that is here ascribed unto Christ, in that he is called advocate, and how he in heaven exercises this office. 2. Whose cause it is he pleads by virtue of it. 3. How he is qualified for it. 4. The issue and event of the execution of it.

This advocate-ship of Christ is a plea founded upon justice; Christ doth not appeal in his plea to mere mercy, but his client stands or falls, as justice itself pronounces a sentence. And, concerning the second clause of this first part, Christ exercises this office in heaven, rather virtually, than vocally; he speaks as his blood speaks; "we are come to the blood of sprinkling, {saith the apostle,} that speaks better things than the blood of Abel." {Heb.12:24}

We come further to consider, whose cause it is that Christ maintains and pleads; the cause of all believers, even the cause of little children, even when they have sinned, without limitation; for he expresses himself in general terms, it is the cause of those that sin, "if any man sin." Yea, the cause not only of present believers, but also of all the elect; believers, or unbelievers, if they be elected. It is true, they shall believe in time, but yet, I say, Christ is an advocate of them, while unbelievers, if they be elected. There is not a sin, but as it is damnable in its own nature, in the rigor of justice, so it doth not allow of any forbearance; it is only Christ that makes the forbearance, even until they are called. Then we come to consider, how Christ, our advocate, is qualified to manage this office with that efficacy and success to the comfort of those whose cause he maintains. The qualifications of Christ are expressed in three things.

For the title, he is anointed to be an advocate; he hath a lawful call to the bar; nay, he is privileged, there is none to plead but himself; it is Christ anointed, that is, gifted and made able to minister. In Isaiah 42, the Lord tells us how he "shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law." This we must understand in two ways; that is, the isles shall now be directed and guided by him as their law-giver; or, he shall be so good a lawyer, that the isles shall wait for his law; as much as to say, if a man have a cause to be tried, and hears of a good counsel, very expert in the law, he waits for such a man's law, he waits for it out of

his mouth, and he hopes he will plead his cause so, that it shall go well with him. God makes Christ so good a lawyer, that when he comes to plead his law, he shall carry the sentence on his client's side.

He is Jesus, saith the text, and in that is imported a notable qualification of Christ to exercise his office of advocate-ship, Jesus, as much as a Saviour; and it shows the efficacy of his plea; he pleads the cause of his clients so strongly, that he saves.

Another qualification of Christ unto his advocate-ship is that he is Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is so in a double sense, and in both is declared the excellent qualification of Christ to advocate for us. Christ is "the righteous," that is, the Faithful, a Counsellor that will deal truly and uprightly with his client that will not fail. This advocate is righteous, or hath such a righteousness, as that the whole strength of his plea, and the force of his argument he urges in it, lieth altogether in his righteousness. The former expression imports what Christ himself is, this what his argument is; I say, the only argument that hath power to lead the cause, to state the conclusion for the client, the only force lies in the righteousness of Christ; this is that which God looks upon, and which prevails with him, and makes it a righteous thing with him to forgive and discharge a sinner; I say, his righteousness is the hinge upon which the whole frame turns, the pillar upon which all our safety hangs; the only hold-fast that keeps us from sinking. If this should fail, nothing could bear us up; therefore, nothing should be more searched into and understood than this truth; namely, that it is the righteousness of Christ that prevails in plea with God, for a person that sins, and this only. I shall therefore endeavour, for the clearing up of this, that the strength of Christ's plea with God lies in his righteousness, to show you evidently out of scripture, that it is this righteousness, and only this, that prevails with God for the discharge of a member of Christ when he sins; and then we shall consider what this righteousness is that so prevails with him.

The scripture, or rather the Holy Ghost, in the word of grace, holds forth this truth frequently unto us; that all the strength of the plea with God, and consequently all the ground of solid comfort unto us, wholly depends upon the righteousness of Christ, and nothing else. Look at Psalm 50:5, for David, even in his time, was marvelous clear in the truth. "Gather my saints {saith the Lord} together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice, and the heavens shall declare his righteousness." Gather them together, that is, bring them to judgment, such as have made a covenant with me by sacrifice; and then, when they stand in judgment, "the heavens shall declare his righteousness." He saith not, the heavens shall declare my righteousness, though it is a truth, that they do declare both his and Christ's; his, in passing sentence of absolution, Christ's in pleading so for it, that God in justice cannot but pass it. Either understand it thus, the righteousness that shall be pleaded is that which comes down from heaven, of which we shall speak hereafter; or, the righteousness which Christ shall plead, shall be so clear and evident, in the prevalency of it, that the sun in the firmament hath not a clearer brightness in it, than this shall have to clear up the business. "Gather my saints together that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." What sacrifice, will you say, or what is there in sacrifice, that the Lord should be in covenant with his people? Look into Psalm 51:19, for you shall there see what there is in sacrifice that makes a covenant between God and his people. "Then shalt thou be pleased {saith David} with the sacrifices of righteousness;" righteousness in the sacrifice, is that which procures a pleasantness in God unto those persons unto whom sacrifice belongs, or for whose use sacrifice serves. I say, righteousness in the sacrifice, not an inherent righteousness in the typical sacrifice itself; for, saith the apostle, it is impossible that the "blood of bulls and goats should take away sin;" but there is a righteousness that is declared from heaven and annexed to the sacrifice, the righteousness of Christ; this is that which puts an end to the quarrel, and makes an agreement between those that are at difference; and in verse 14, you see, beloved, David hath such a confidence in the righteousness of Christ, and so makes it his refuge, as that in the greatest of sins he was ever overtaken with, he betakes himself unto it, "deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; {or righteousness;} and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." There you plainly see deliverance from blood guiltiness is ascribed unto the righteousness of God; and he waits for his deliverance, even out of the power that righteousness hath with God; for that purpose David in Psalm 71:2, makes the righteousness of Christ his refuge in

extremity. "Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline thine ear unto me, and save me;" and afterwards how he sticks to this righteousness for refuge still, and will not leave it, "my mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." {vs.15,16} Mark the expression well, let David be in what condition he will, he will make no other plea but this, "thy righteousness, and thine only;" whether you understand it of God's righteousness simply, as judge, or of Christ's righteousness, as he is the advocate, they come to one reckoning; for, if God deliver in a righteous sentence, or according to righteousness, deliverance proceeds from righteousness pleaded. So that, I say, if you understand it of the Lord, then you must conceive the righteousness of Christ is the ground, why, he pronounces a sentence of righteousness. And in Psalm 143:11, David there again ascribes his deliverance unto righteousness, "Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name's sake; for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble."

The prophet Isaiah comes behind none in evangelical sweet truths for the comfort of God's people, as he is marvelously full concerning this thing, namely, the discharge of the people of God by the righteousness of Christ. In chapter 1:27, "Zion {saith the Lord there} shall be redeemed with judgment and her converts with righteousness." Here you see, beloved, that the church of God shall be brought to judgment; judgment, you know, is a sentence passed by a judge, and there shall be redemption unto Zion, even by judgment; and this sentence of a judge must be pronounced for the deliverance of the client; and this is our comfort, we shall be saved by righteousness. In Isaiah 41:2, you see how the Lord sets out Christ in this very term, "who raised up the righteous man from the east?" "I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he," saith the Lord in verse 4. Christ, I say, is held forth unto men, as the righteous man raised up for "an horn of salvation for us." {Lk.1:69} In chapter 51:4, the Holy Ghost tells us, that God will "make my judgment to rest for a light of the people;" that is, when the Lord brings his people into judgment, it shall be a lightsome day unto them, and though it is, yet who can stand before his judgment? Mark the ground of the lightsomeness of it when they shall come unto their trial; "my righteousness is near; {saith the Lord;} my salvation is gone forth;" therefore it should be a lightsome day, because there shall be righteousness in it to plead out that judgment that shall be given on the behalf of the clients of Christ. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied;" {Is.53:11;} that is, God shall see the travail of the soul of Christ, and shall be satisfied. But how comes it pass, that God is pacified by beholding the travail of the soul of Christ? "By his knowledge, {saith he,} shall my righteous servant justify many." There is a great deal of difficulty to understand the meaning of the phrase "righteous servant." For my own part, I think the plain sense carries much light in it; as much as to say Christ knows so much concerning the prevalency of his own righteousness with the Father, that he shall be sure to carry the cause in behalf of his clients when he pleads it for their justification, when they come to their trial. The Lord, saith the text, wondered that there were none, that he could find never an intercessor; therefore, as it follows, my "arm hath brought salvation;" but how doth his arm bring salvation? "My righteousness, it sustained me." {Is.59:16}

Observe it well, there is none to deal with God on the behalf of men, but the Son of God, Christ himself, there could not one come in to help him. There is a mighty charge laid against poor believers, containing such a bulk of transgressions, with so many aggravations, that Christ himself had sunk under them, being alone, had not his righteousness sustained him; this was that which held him up in the whole plea, till the sentence was given on the behalf of his clients; for he put on righteousness as a breast-plate. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." {Jer.23:5,6} Here is a righteous branch raised up, then follows, "they shall be saved." How so? In that there is a righteous branch to plead for them, Israel shall dwell safely, and Judah shall be saved, in the world, and from the world; a righteous branch being raised up, Judah shall be saved from the wrath of God himself that it shall not break out. God himself shall not cast Judah out of possession, not only Judah in the letter, but also in the

spiritual sense; God in judgment shall not cast out Israel, because this righteous branch is raised up, which shall in righteousness establish them to dwell safely; and the reason of all this is notably rendered; namely, in that this righteousness is become ours, and he is so become our righteousness, that his very name is, "the Lord our Righteousness."

It is very well worth your observation, how still the last refuge is fastened upon the righteousness of Christ. In Daniel 9:24, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy." Mark it well; the sealing up of the vision, that is, the establishment of the forgiveness of sins, follows after the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, and this is the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, in Malachi 4:2, healing is appropriated unto Christ, and shown where the virtue lies, that he hath such healing, "unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings;" therefore, a healing Sun, because he is the Sun of righteousness; and the virtue in the wing of Christ to heal, is his righteousness. I have been more copious in these passages of scripture, before the coming of Christ, that people may not think, that to depend only, and solely upon his righteousness, for security and comfort, is a new thing, but was known, and was a refuge from the beginning. The apostle Paul speaks more clearly than the rest; I shall instance but in two passages; for the truth is, all the epistles are full of this. The strength of the plea of Christ, in the behalf of his people sinning, stands in his righteousness; for this purpose, Rom.3:9-12, and see how mightily the apostle pleads to the convincing of all the world of sin, and the fruit of it; from verse 13, is a description of the sins of men; and in verse 20, he makes a conclusion, "therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Now, after he had taken off all that might possibly be in man towards his remedy, or in the law for the people to rest in, he begins to establish the foundation, upon which the safety and security of God's people depends. But now, saith he, beginning in verse 21, "the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." You see here is an inculcating again and again, that it is Christ's righteousness, which God hath set forth to be a propitiation to declare this upon all, imports unto us, the sole refuge for the remission of sins is only that righteousness. Look also into Rom.5:18,19, "therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Our transgressions are the issue which Adam's disobedience brought forth; that obedience of one man is our security, and deliverance from hell, and death, which one man's disobedience brought into the world; all of it is frustrated by the obedience and righteousness of that one; nothing but that setting persons free from the fruits of unrighteousness and disobedience in Adam, is able to make them righteous. I hope, by this time, the truth is cleared enough, that there is nothing to be mentioned, but only his righteousness, nothing can be a plea, but that. You shall therefore consider out of all these passages, what that righteousness is, that has efficacy and prevalency with the Father, for the discharge of a member of Christ when he sins.

Negatively; there is not any righteousness of a believer which he acts, which can possibly have any force in plea with the Father for his discharge that hath committed sin; I mention that righteousness which he acts, because the very righteousness of Christ itself, is indeed the righteousness of a believer; for he is "the Lord our righteousness," as you have heard. As he was made sin by imputation, so we are made the righteousness of God in him; that is, Christ's righteousness is as much become our righteousness, as our sins became Christ's; and as Christ bore

the whole fruit of our sins, by being made sin for us, so we enjoy the whole fruit of Christ's righteousness, by being made righteous in him; therefore, I say, not simply that no righteousness of a believer, but none which he himself acts, hath the least force in plea, to prevail for the discharge of sin. There is no divine rhetoric, or omnipotent excellency in any righteousness whatsoever, which a believer can put up unto God; it is not your turning from your evil ways, your repentance, though never so cordial and large, nor your departing from iniquity, or doing good that hath the least force of plea with the Father, to prevail with him, for your discharge; or to move him to give the sentence upon you, that you are discharged. No righteousness, I say, whatsoever you can do; for the best righteousness that ever man did perform, Christ only excepted, hath more in it to make against him, than for him to obtain a sentence of discharge; and my reason is this, in the best righteousness of man, in turning from sin, repenting, or mourning, or whatever else there is to be thought of, there is abundance of sin, even in the very best actions that are performed; and where there is, there is a plea against the person; so that if you bring that righteousness to plead with God, to prevail with him, you bring that, which may be rejected against you, and may prove a strong plea, or mar the cause that is in hand. I beseech you, beloved, observe the apostle, Rom.7:18-23, where, I think, I shall meet with those things, which most people in ignorance commonly make their chiefest plea, whereon they build their whole comforts, as if all were between God and them thereby; yet, you will there find, how the apostle, though qualified as he was, both renounces any such plea, and also betakes himself to that in hand; he saith expressly, "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not; for the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin;" out of which, observe, I beseech you, these particulars.

The apostle, though he said that he fell through infirmity, yet he clearly perceived his heart was upright towards God, "to will is present with me; the good that I would do, that do I not; and the evil that I would not do, that do I." Though he was overtaken, yet his heart was towards God still; when he did evil, his heart said plainly, it is not with my consent; when he could not do good, his heart told him, it was for lack of power, and not because he did not desire it. Now, come to persons that walk exactly, as he did, they are overtaken with a sin; what is their comfort when they sin? Though I be overtaken, the frame of my heart is right still, my heart is sincere towards God; it is directly contrary to my disposition; I do not do that evil I do, with a full bent of my spirit; and in regard my heart is thus right, there is comfort in me, though I have sinned. Suppose your spirits were in that frame, the apostle's was in at that time; I ask but this, do you not draw comfort still from the plea of this disposition your spirits make? When you have committed a sin, do you not fetch comfort from thence? Ask your hearts, and they will answer, yea, we have done so. I beseech you, consider it well, when the apostle had urged the case thus, what was the final conclusion, and the sole refuge that he flies unto, or the plea that he would trust unto, for his deliverance and comfort? He doth not say in the conclusion, "I thank God, to will is present with me;" or, "I thank God, my heart is in a good frame and temper, though I was overtaken;" I say, Paul doth not make use of this plea, but he betakes himself to this, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ; and there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ; and it is the law of the spirit of life that is in Christ, has freed me from the law of sin and death." {Rom.8:1-2} So that the whole refuge of the apostle, was not any inward disposition, as if he could plead out comfort unto himself therefore; but the plea was without himself, even in Christ, therefore he gives thanks unto him for deliverance.

So in Phil.3:5-9, he pleads the same thing there, as he did here; namely, that it is not any righteousness that he can reach unto, he dare venture the plea, or his own comfort upon; first, he tells us, that "touching the righteousness of the law, he was blameless;" this was before his conversion, you say, it is true; but after his conversion, he tells us also of a righteousness he had then; but, beloved, doth Paul put out his own righteousness to plead for him? Doth he expect his comfort, or the answer of heaven for discharge upon the plea of that? No, saith he, "I count all things

but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Surely, beloved, if he had reckoned that his righteousness could have had any force in plea, he would never have rejected it as dung. That man that thinks he hath strength in an argument, will not fling it away, and not make mention of it for the trial of his cause. But this the apostle did, he accounted his righteousness dung, even after he was converted; and, in that regard, he durst not be found in it, but only in the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Christ. He doth not simply say, he would not be found in the righteousness of the law, but exclusively he would not be found in his own righteousness; so that he bars it quite out, there shall be no plea at all go along through it; the righteousness of Christ shall be his plea, or else he would look for no good issue at all; this, beloved, is the way.

Let me give one touch by way of application; for you may easily perceive how mightily people are mistaken, and therefore, no marvel they live so uncomfortably; that they are in fear of death, and thereby in bondage all their life long, while they run for the refreshment of their spirits, to their own righteousness, to the plea of their own works, and will have their hearts eased upon that which they themselves do; whereas, nothing gets a gracious discharge from their Father, but only Christ, and his righteousness. Therefore, beloved, however it may, with some a harsh thing, to take men off from their own righteousness, in respect of speaking comfort unto them, and to lead them to the righteousness of Christ revealed in the gospel, as that from which they may draw all their comfort; though this may sound harsh to some people, that have not been trained up in the way of grace of God, and in the freeness of it, revealed in the gospel; yet, I doubt not, but in time, the Lord will be pleased to reveal to us, that running to Christ out of ourselves, and disclaiming our own righteousness and comfort from it; that leaving our own actions, and all that can be imagined to be in us, or can be done by us, will be the thing that in the end, will establish our own hearts and spirits, yea, and "fill them with joy and peace in believing."

It remains, that we should consider one thing, that I know startles some, or, at least, lays blocks in their way, before I can possibly come unto the righteousness of Christ itself, that makes up the strength of plea with God for poor sinners.

Some will object, though all that we do of our own will not hold plea; yet there is a righteousness of faith that pleads with the Father, and gets the discharge of sin from him. Beloved, there is some dispute about this point, and I shall not desire to enter into it; only, in a few words, endeavour to clear up the truth, that I may go on.

I answer, in general, so far as the righteousness of faith is the righteousness of Christ, there is strength in the plea; but this must be considered merely as it is Christ alone, and not as it is any righteousness of faith itself. If any strength of faith be brought in as concurrent to that righteousness that pleads out the discharge of a sinner, over and above what is simply and only Christ's own; I say, it is not to be pleaded, nor hath power, or force, in plea, at all. I shall give two or three passages. It is true, the apostle in Rom.10:6-8, tells us, "the righteousness of faith speaks on this wise;" importing, what indeed before was called the righteousness of God himself, they submitted not to; but, beloved, I take it, the righteousness here, is called the righteousness of faith, as faith is the hand that closes with the righteousness of God; not as if this righteousness were properly, but faith merely objective, as we say; as it lays hold upon that righteousness which is only Christ the object thereof. In Rom.1:16, the apostle saith, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth." Mark it well, here is the power of God to salvation revealed; in what is the power of God to salvation? It is in the gospel, of which he was not ashamed; so that though the power of God to salvation is to every one that believeth, that is not in believing, but in the gospel. And what is the gospel there? Certainly not faith, but the object of it; for it is said to be revealed from faith to faith.

In Luke 2:10, you will see plainly what the gospel of Christ is, an angel came down from heaven to the shepherds, and speaks thus, "behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy," that is, I

evangelize, so the word is in the original; "I bring you glad tidings of exceeding great joy; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, that is Christ the Lord." The word gospel, in Romans, is the very same word drawn from Luke; it is as much as to say, the gospel is glad tidings of great joy; and what are these glad tidings? "A Savior is born unto you." So Christ, a Saviour, born to men, is the gospel; and, saith the apostle, "I am not ashamed of it;" that is, I am not ashamed of Christ, born a Saviour, for this reason; Christ "is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth."

In I Peter 1:5, the apostle tells us that "we are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation;" where it is plainly imported, that faith unto salvation, is but a mere channel through which the righteousness of Christ runs; not communicating any righteousness itself, by which a man may stand righteous before God, or have a discharge by, the Lord, or from him. This I would fain know, beloved, in every, or in any act of believing, is that absolutely perfect and complete, without any defect or weakness; or, is there some imperfection? There is some, you will say. If then, this I would fain know, how that thing, that hath imperfection, unrighteousness in itself, can constitute a person, by itself, righteous? Can faith, chargeable with unrighteousness, make a person, righteous in himself, stand righteous before God?

The apostle, in Heb.7:26, telling us of Christ, saith, "for such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;" if Christ himself had had sinfulness with his righteousness, that very righteousness of Christ itself, would not have served the turn; and, therefore; it behooved him to be holy, harmless, and undefiled, and without offence. Beloved, Christ himself could not constitute us righteous before the Father, if he himself had not been holy, and without sin; and can it be imagined, that faith, that hath unrighteousness in it, can make us righteous? This is the sum of that I shall speak at this time. I hope, the things I have spoken will not be offensive to any; for I desire freely, that this, and all that I have, or shall deliver unto you, may be received as they agree with the light of the gospel; that is to be the rule to measure all truths by; and the rest, that remains, I shall come to the next day.