

SERMON XXXIX

FAITH, THE FRUIT OF UNION

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}

You have heard from these words; first, an argument to prevail with the people of God to abstain from sinning, "my little children, I write these things to you that you sin not." This is urged as an argument to persuade them, namely, "we have an advocate with the Father." We have considered already the force of this argument, and the nature of it. 1. We have considered what the advocate-ship of Christ is, namely, to plead for his people's discharge according to the rules of justice and equity. 2. Whose cause it is that Christ pleads. 3. How Christ is qualified for this office of advocate-ship; he is Christ that is called of God, and furnished by the Lord unto it; and he is Jesus Christ, an effectual and prevailing advocate, that saves every client harmless, whose cause he pleads; his name Jesus, is as much as the Saviour of his people from their sins.

We have considered further, that Christ is qualified with righteousness; and herein also the strength of the plea of Christ, or the argument of it; he pleads discharge from sin by virtue of his own righteousness.

Now, because this discharge depends upon this righteousness of his; we posed to your consideration what this is that hath such strength of plea, as to obtain discharge from sin to the members of Christ, after they have committed sin; negatively, and affirmatively. The righteousness that obtains discharge from sin is no righteousness of our own; nothing we do hath prevalency in the court of heaven with God for our discharge; not our tears, prayers, or fastings, but the righteousness of Christ only. By the way, a word or two, before I go on; let none think that denying efficacy unto our performances, for the procuring of our discharge from sin, takes away, or eclipses these performances, which are the things God himself calleth for at our hand. I am not ignorant, what an aspersion is rather by men collected, than what can be justly raised out of what I have delivered; as if there should be a slighting and a derogating from the performances that are the business of a believer's conversation in Christ; as if denying efficacy to prevail for discharge, should be the overthrowing of these performances in God's people. You know what is said of fire, "it is a good servant, but a bad master," useful in the hearth, dangerous in the top of a house; I say, the like of all performances whatsoever; keep them within their due bounds, they are for excellent uses; let them break out of their bounds, and they are dangerous. Rivers are useful, but when they overflow their banks they drown all; they are good creatures within the banks, and water is useful and necessary for many purposes, but nothing more dangerous and destructive when it rises too high. Exalt performances once into the throne of Christ; give them his peculiar privileges, and they deny him; keep them in subordination to Christ, they are useful in their kind. Prayer, fasting, circumspect walking, and holiness of conversation, so far as they are kept within these bounds; namely, the glorifying of God, the manifestation of thankfulness, and our due obedience to Divine Majesty, doing good to others, and as they are looked upon as the ordinances of God, in the performances of which the Lord will be graciously pleased to meet with his people, and in them make good to them things that are freely given by him before in Christ; so far they are exceeding useful. For instance, God calls forth unto prayer and fasting; what is the encouragement of men to perform these services? Not a prevalency that these themselves have with God, but because he hath promised, that when his people call he will answer; so for the promise sake, we are encouraged in expectation that the Lord will be as

good as his word. These things will I do, "saith the Lord GOD; {but,} I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." {Ez.36:37} Observe it well, and in it you see the usefulness in seeking God, in any way that he will be sought in; he saith, "these things will I do;" he hath bound himself, he cannot alter it, the word is gone out of his mouth; the thing shall come to pass, he will make that good for his own sake; and I will be sought unto by the house of Israel; I will do it, you shall seek me; and when you seek me, I will make it good. So when we come to the ordinances, we look to what God hath promised, and engaged himself to make good to us; and when we are in ordinances, our eye is, or ought to be, upon the promises; not upon our own performances, and the ordinances, as if these were our qualifications, and doing this or that were the procurers of that we desire; but the procurer is that which moved the Lord to make a promise. As not our righteousness, so faith hath not any plea in it to prevail of itself for discharge from sin after commission. Faith improperly is called the righteousness of God. The apostle expresses himself thus, "but the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, &c," {Rom.10:6,} here by the "righteousness of faith," cannot be meant the righteousness of the act of believing, but the righteousness of Christ believed on.

I came to this assertion, that faith hath not such prevalency of plea to discharge from sin; nay, not so much as to be an instrument to unite a soul unto Christ. I desire, beloved, in this case, to be marked and heeded attentively and spiritually, ingenuously and candidly. The assertion I delivered was this, and the reason why I deliver it again, I will tell you by-and-by; there is, I say, not such a thing as an uniting, cementing, or knitting power in faith, as that it doth, or should become the instrument to unite a soul unto Christ; for, before believing, a soul is united unto Christ, and it must be before it doth, or can believe.¹ I said this of elect persons still, and so carried it along to the end of the discourse; that an elect person is united unto Christ before he can believe on him. Something I said before, for the clearing up of this truth, that a soul must be united unto Christ, by Christ's own power, before there can be believing on him. But, beloved, whereas we had thought the truth had been cleared up sufficiently, I have found it otherwise; I find that many stick and stumble at this assertion; there must be believing, say some, before there can be union with Christ, and it is believing itself that makes up the first union with him.

Since the last time I spake unto you, I have received {and, I suppose, from an ingenuous spirit, for under such a style it comes} an objection against this assertion; and, weighing the objection, I find it of weight enough to require an answer. Besides, I find that divers other persons, exceedingly stick and stumble at it; and, therefore, I shall desire to clear this, both by answering such objections that may be made against it, as also by letting you see what dangers necessarily follow upon the contrary. I shall and do commend the candidness and ingenuity of those that seek to be informed in things they not yet so clearly understand, while they do it with a spirit, rather seeking satisfaction, than to maintain contention.

The objection proposed is briefly this, that our Saviour very frequently, in the scripture, holds forth believing, under the notion of coming unto him. The inference is, coming implies, or supposes, a distance between the person and Christ till there be coming. The effect seems to be, that he that comes to another, is at distance from him, till he be come. The conclusion is, if believing be a coming to Christ, then those persons that do thus come by believing, before their believing, are at distance from him, and if at distance from him, then there can be no union between Christ and them, till their coming draws them, and makes them nearer, and so that unites them. The ground of this objection is taken out of some portions of scripture; divers are objected, and one seems to have some strength with it, and that is, John 5:40, "and ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Whence it is

¹ The dangerous consequences following the contrary notion are afterwards observed by the Doctor, but this is condemned as an error by D.W. in his Gospel Truth, &c. pgs.90,91, but received and defended by many eminent divines; particularly the learned and judicious Witsius, who says, "the elect are united to Christ in the eternal decree of God; by the union of the eternal compact, and by a true and real union, but what on their part is only passive;" and adds, "since faith is an act flowing from a principle of spiritual life, it is plain, it may be said in a sound sense, that an elect man may be truly and really united to Christ before actual faith." See more of this in my Doctrine of Eternal Union, &c. pgs. 23-44. Gill

inferred, that there is no life till there be coming, and this coming is believing, and so consequently there can be no union till there be this believing. The argument, indeed, is laid as strong as may be; and, peradventure, may seem to bare an undeniable strength in it. How I shall endeavour to answer this objection as candidly as it was made; and, it may be, other objections that may be made, like unto this, shall be answered in this. And, that you may better understand the answer, it shall be in two ways. 1. In respect of the matter of the argument. 2. In respect of the proof of it.

1. In respect of the matter of it; before coming there must be a distance, and coming is believing; and therefore, before believing, there must be necessarily a distance, and so consequently no union. For answer to this, beloved, we are to take into consideration, what is meant by distance, and then what by coming. If by distance, in this place, be meant disunion, as it seems it is, {because the thing urged in the objection is, that there is not a union,} then we shall proceed on accordingly. You know, full well, that coming is but an allegorical expression; and that all coming will not necessarily infer a distance before coming. Mark the expression, Heb.7:25, "wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him;" here is mention made of coming to God, and of Christ's ability to save them that come. Now, consider this; suppose a man hath been a believer many years, and so as long united unto Christ, whether or no doth not such a believer still come to God by Jesus Christ? Certainly men, after they are believers, frequently come unto God; now, doth coming import a distance before it? Then there is a distance, even a disunion {for such a distance we are speaking of} between Christ and believers themselves, as oft as ever they come. Observe John 17:13, where Christ speaks to the Father himself, "and now {Father} come I to thee;" here Christ comes to the Father. I ask this question, was Christ at a distance, or was he disunited from him before he did come to him; for he saith, "now I come to thee." It seems, before this coming Christ was disunited, if the argument be good, that where is coming there is a distance, and this coming makes up a union that was not before. It seems by this there was no union, but a distance between Christ himself and his Father, till now at this very time that he comes; but Christ himself, in that same place, testifieth the contrary, saying, "thou Father; art in me, and I in thee." In a word, coming, it seems, must import believing; suppose it be so, must there be distance, or disunion, always before such coming? Then consider this, that believers, even to the end of their days, have occasion, ever and anon, to renew their acts of believing, that is, to renew their act of coming to Christ; for still, take this along with you, that coming and believing are all one, for so saith the objector. Well, be it so, then believers have cause every day and hour to believe afresh, that is, to renew acts of believing; and is there distance or disunion before there be such coming? Then it must follow, there must be union and disunion, and union again, and disunion again, and this as frequent as there is the renewing of the acts of faith. But some will say, peradventure, the first act of coming to Christ, or believing, imports disunion; but all after acts do not import it. To this, I answer, mark where the strength of the argument lieth, and you will plainly see, there is the very same reason for after believing, as there is for the first act of it. The first act of believing is coming, and are not two, three, or four acts of believing coming too? What coming is there more in one act than in others? If this be a general rule, that believing is coming, and coming argues a distance, and distance must necessarily be before coming; hence it must follow, that it is no solid argument, persons are disunited, or not united unto Christ before the act of believing, because believing is a coming unto him for, you say, and grant, that there may be, and often is a coming unto Christ by faith, and yet there may be union before such coming.

But now, to the texts of scripture; that are brought in for the confirmation of it. "You will not come to me, that you might have life." The strength of the argument, it seems, lies in this; there is no life till there be coming, and coming is for life itself; therefore there is no union till there be a coming by way of believing. To clear up the meaning of the Holy Ghost, in this scripture, we are first to consider, what our Saviour means by coming, and what this life is he speaks of, which they should have in coming to him.

First, what that coming is which our Saviour speaks of in this place. I will not insist upon this, that Christ speaks to opposers, men that contested with him, and to persons with reference unto

others; for, I verily believe, though our Saviour speaks this to the Pharisees, who certainly never should come to him, nor have life by him; yet his intent was to speak to them to whom the life of Christ did belong, and who should come to him; let us therefore, I say, consider what he means by coming in this place. In, John 6:44, our Saviour plainly expounds what he means by coming unto him, "no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Mark the expression well, and you will perceive what Christ means by first coming unto him, for, in both places he speaks of first, and not of after coming. In which words you may perceive the act of first coming to Christ, is rather by, and from the Father, than by any activity in the person that comes; for, coming there, is plainly attributed unto a drawing act of the Father; so that the first coming to Christ, is just like the coming of a froward child to meet the mother; the child is sullen and will not stir; if it be carried it strives and struggles, whereof the father is fain to take it up, and by a kind of force, carry it with an over-mastering strength where meat is; the child comes to his meat, but how? Not by any act of its own, as if he came of himself, but by the power of him that brings it. A coach, we say, comes to town, when it is but drawn. The coach is wholly passive, and the child in coming to meat; and so every elect person at his first coming to Christ is passive; his coming is nothing else but the Father's over-mastering and drawing of him unto Christ. "Thou hast chastised me, {saith Ephraim,} and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God." {Jer.31:18} Ephraim here appropriates the act of his conversion, not to any coming of his own, but to the Lord himself; acknowledging, that the work of bringing unto Christ is the work of God's own drawing; nay, he sheweth, that he himself was so far from coming, that he confesses, that when God took him first in hand to bring him to Christ, he was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. It is true, in common speech the bullock is said to come unto the yoke, even a bullock unaccustomed; but how? By mere force he is brought to it, and not willingly.

Beloved, you must either establish the rotten principle of free will, that is, a previous principle of a man's own spirit to come to Christ, or you must confess that persons, at their first coming unto him, are merely passive, It is a known principle, we are first acted, or actuated, before we do, or can act; there is not only a weakness simply before calling, but a deadness, and therefore there cannot be coming; and if there be, it is merely passive, and the whole business must be the Father's own drawing. The Lord speaks to Christ thus; "thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power;" {Ps.110:3;} there is no willingness till the overcoming power of Christ comes in to make it, even contrary to the natural will. The sum then is briefly this, and so to apply to the text objected, "you will not come to me, that you might have life;" that it hath not pleased the Father to draw you unto me, that you might have life. I cannot conceive how there can be any other sense given to it, but that it is the Father's sole and only power to bring to Christ, that there may be life; or there is no principle of life from Christ, till the Father, by his over-mastering power, brings unruly and cross spirits unto him.

But it may be, some will say, though this coming to Christ be the act of the Father's drawing, yet there is an act of believing, when he draws.

I answer it is not possible, there should be an act of our believing, while the Father is first drawing; mark what believing is, in sum and substance, it is but a yielding to the mind of the Lord revealed. While persons are contradicting, they are not believing, in respect of those things that they contradict. To believe and to contradict the same thing, is a contradiction; for to believe, is to sit down satisfied with the thing that is related; as long, therefore, as persons are contradicting, their spirits are cross, and they kick against that which God proposes unto them, so long they believe not. Now, while the Father is drawing, that very drawing is an argument of resisting, and a kind of kicking against that he aims at; for, if there were yielding, submitting, a willing coming on to the truth revealed, what need there any drawing? Men do not draw those things that come of themselves. And therefore, I say, during the Father's first act of drawing, he laying violent hold, as it were, upon the person, there is no act of believing. The truth is, the Father gives his elect to Christ his Son; "thine they were, {saith Christ, Jn.17:6,} and thou gavest them me;" and the Father that gave the elect unto Christ, gives unto Christ also power, both in heaven and in earth, "all power, {saith he,} both in heaven and earth, is given me; go teach all nations;" {Mt.28:18;} as much as to say, I give you

apostles, and ministers, that follow you, a commission from myself to preach, and in preaching to convert; and how so? All power in heaven and earth is Christ's. So that, beloved, the Lord takes his elect as they are self-willed and untamed, and brings them as such to his Son, and by virtue of all power that is given to him, he himself breaks, tames, and brings them to his own bent. "For the Father {saith Christ} judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." {Jn.5:22} Take notice, that as Christ is ordained the Mediator of the covenant, the Father doth nothing towards or concerning his elect, but what he doth by his Son; it is the Son doth all; so that all that the Father doth is to deliver up elect persons, such as they are, in blood, enemies, and rebellious, to his Son; and the framing of their spirits to his own bent, is the sole work of Christ himself; Christ is become, by the donation of the Father, the life and soul of every elect person.

Now, philosophers observe of the natural soul, that it is the framer of its own body and organs, that so they may be fitted for it to act its own will; so, may I say, it is with Christ, he hath the framing and disposing of the whole man, to bring everything in him to his own bent; the Father bringing the creature, as he is a stubborn and stiff-necked one, delivers him up to his Son; so that, I say, there is not a previous act wrought by the Father without Christ, or by the Spirit, by which a person comes, and closes with him; but the Father gives that person, without any faith or qualifications whatsoever, to his Son; he frames and creates that very faith in them to come to him; and therefore in Isaiah 42:6, you plainly see, there is not an opening of blind eyes, a giving of believing eyes, to close with Christ before he himself be given, and given as a covenant to them; so saith the text, "I will give thee for a covenant;" and here you see Christ passed to persons, not with a supposition, that when they believe he shall be theirs, and they his; but, "I will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes," and the eyes are not opened before Christ comes, but he comes when the eyes are blind, and when he comes he opens them.

But to go further; let us suppose, that coming, in this place, is spoken of believing; it cannot follow that though there be no life till believing, therefore there can be no union before. I say, if it could be imagined, that there may not be life from Christ, till believing, yet it follows not, that there must be believing before union; nay, beloved, there is nothing clearer than this; namely, suppose there cannot be life before there be believing, yet there must be union before there can be life from Christ; for, suppose that the fruit upon a branch, should have such a faculty to draw life into the branch from the root; though this would be a strange conceit; whereas the root communicates life to the branch, and the branch, by virtue of that life communicated, brings forth fruit; but yet, suppose the fruit should draw life into the branch from the root; that is, suppose that faith, which is a fruit growing upon a member of Christ, that is, a believer, and a branch of that body, should have such a faculty to draw life from Christ, the root, into the branch; yet, it is impossible that faith should draw life into the branch, till the branch be united into the stock; for, beloved, that is Christ's comparison, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Now, suppose a branch, growing upon a wild olive, is cut off from it, and for the present is not united to the good olive tree; can a wild olive, or suppose it to be a good olive upon this branch of the wild tree; can this fruit upon the branch draw life from the root of the good olive tree, while it is separated and laid aside, and is not united to it, from which root it must draw life? It is known to all, that communication is the fruit of union; there is no participation, nor communion of anything that is Christ's, but as it flows from union with him; so that either you may say, that faith, which you speak of, is not of Christ, the root, but hath some other root from whence it hath its being; or else you must confess, if Christ be the root, it must come from him, by virtue of union to him first.

Finally, suppose it should be, that coming is believing and that this life, spoken of here, is not in persons till they believe; what is meant by life here? The apostle tells us that "our life is hid with Christ in God;" and that "Christ is the life of the world," that is, of the elect. It seems then, that the life of every elect person hath a being in Christ, before he believes; believing, therefore, doth not produce a new life that was not before, only it manifests that which was before; and it makes that life, which was before, an active life; or is an instrument by which that life that is hid in Christ, after

believing, becomes an active and appearing life in this person. So that all that can be made of it, is but this; till believing, there is no activeness of the life of Christ in the person that is elected; his life is in Christ, and was reserved in him till the time of believing for him; and then doth he, the elect person, become active in life, when Christ gives him to believe actually; but to say, that this believing should give the first being of that life in persons, is to say, there is not that life of the elect in Christ, before they believe. In a word, beloved, I seriously desire you, that with candidness and ingenuity of spirit, you would take into your consideration, those dangerous consequences that must of necessity follow, if you will receive this for a principle, that there is no justification and union at all belonging unto elect persons, till they actually believe in Christ; if persons are not united unto Christ, and do not partake of justification before they believe, but that believing is the instrument by which they are first united, then mark what will follow.

1. In some respect there will be a bringing to life again, the covenant of works. How will that be, you say? I beseech you to consider it well; the apostle will tell you so, as well as I, for the Lord told Adam at first, "do this, and live;" and Christ to the rich man, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;" and the apostle, {Rom.10:4,5,} tells us of the covenant of works clearly, for Moses, saith he, describing the righteousness of the law, saith thus; "he that doth these things, shall even live by them." Mark here, the covenant of works out of these expressions, is this; namely, for persons to do, that they may live. The covenant of grace runs upon contrary terms; men must first live, that they may do. God in his covenant of grace gives life first, and from that life freely bestowed comes doing; in the covenant of works, there must be first doing for life. But, you will say, how doth this follow out of this conceit that men must believe, before they shall live in Christ? Thus you must of necessity press upon yourselves these terms, or such like, I must do, that I may have life in Christ; I must believe, there is no life till I do believe; now, if there must be living first, then there is doing before living; but, it may be, you will say, faith is opposed to works; when it is opposed to works, it is understood objectively, that is, it is understood of Christ believed on, and not of the act itself believing; for it is certain, beloved, our act of believing, is as much our doing, as our acts of love, or others. So that here must first be doing before life be obtained; if persons must first believe, before they have union with Christ.

2. If there must be our act of believing before there be participating in Christ, then mark what will follow, those sins which were once laid upon Christ, and taken away from the elect; for they could not be laid upon him, unless they were taken from them; are, it seems, returned back again upon these believers; whereas they were charged upon Christ; he once paid the full price; upon the payment of this, there was acknowledged full satisfaction, so that those sins were once blotted out. I say, if there must be believing before there be union with, or interest in Christ, it must necessarily follow, that, till such believing, the person of that elect bears his own transgressions, is chargeable for them that are imputed unto him. But how can it stand with the glory of the redemption of Christ, that he should have all iniquity laid upon him, carrying all iniquity, like the scape-goat, into the land of forgetfulness, whither they were once carried, and they are afresh charged upon this person. Did Christ bear them away; and did he return them back again? Where did you ever find, that sin once taken and carried away by Christ from the person offending, did return back again upon the person from whom Christ took it away?

3. Suppose this, that men have no interest in Christ till they actually believe in him, then it must follow, that these persons, till they are actually believers, are under the hatred of God; for, if they bear their own transgressions themselves, then God being a jealous God, his holy and pure nature everlastingly hating iniquity, and also the person upon whom iniquity is charged; there must be a hatred of God upon these persons till they believe; and to conceive that God hates these persons, is to conceive that God may love and hate the same person; whereas he saith, {Rom.9:13,} concerning Jacob, that being yet unborn, "Jacob have I loved;" here you see love is communicated to Jacob, being yet unborn. Now mark, Jacob, when he was not yet born, was not an actual believer. Well, had Jacob no interest in Christ and the love of God, till such time as he believed? Yea, he had; so saith the text. Aye, but yet Jacob, must be hated till he believes, because Jacob, till he believes, must bear his

own transgressions; so that here must be, at the same time, upon the same person, both the love and hatred of God; and how can these contraries stand together?

Yet again; suppose persons have no interest in Christ, till they actually believe, it must follow from thence necessarily, that there is a believing in such persons before they have union with Christ, and then you must make some other root from whence this believing must spring; as for Christ, it hath nothing to do with him; for he hath nothing, in regard of communicating his grace and Spirit, to do with them; but they are believers, and their believing is that which knits the knot between Christ and them; whence comes this believing? Where is the root of it? Is Christ the root? Then have they first union with Christ, that they may receive it from him; then must they first be united unto him, and made one with him, and live in him, and by virtue of union with him, receive this faith as a fruit of that union. If it proceed from some other root, I beseech you consider how it can be, and how can this be avoided, but that this conceit must needs be exceeding derogatory to Christ, to make another foundation besides Christ; whereas, {Heb.12:2,} it is expressly said that Christ is the author, as well as the finisher of faith. Beloved, upon these considerations, for my own part, I have received this principle that I have delivered unto you, and merely the vindication of the glorious privileges which are proper and peculiar unto Christ alone, is the occasion that I refer the being of faith itself unto Christ, and to nothing else, and that I may uphold these particular and glorious prerogatives that are proper to Christ, that he may not be robbed of any of them.

To this end, I deliver it to you, that elect persons have a participation and share in Christ himself, even before they believe; and let none conceive that this takes away, or diminishes from the prerogative of believing neither. For there are glorious things done by faith unto believers; God hath honored it above all mere creatures in the world; he hath made it the conduit pipe for the conveyance of all that peace and comfort; nay, of all that strength which believers bare all their lives; no faith, no comfort, no peace of conscience, no pleasure to walk with God; through faith, Christ conveys himself in speaking peace to the soul, in bidding the soul to be of good cheer; the soul lies in darkness, while it lies in unbelief. But still that which is proper and peculiar to Christ alone, is not to be ascribed unto believing. I should now proceed, {having as well as I can, taken away the rubs,} to that which I purpose to follow. But the time is past.