



**CONVICTION OF  
SIN**

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**AND**

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**OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

# Conviction of Sin and of Righteousness

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## Conviction of Sin

*“And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” John 16:8.*

When friends are about to part from one another, they are far kinder than ever they have been before. It was so with Jesus. He was going to part from his disciples, and never till now did his heart flow out toward them in so many streams of heavenly tenderness. Sorrow had filled their heart, and therefore divinest compassion filled his heart. “I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away.”

Surely it was expedient for himself that he should go away. He had lived a life of weariness and painfulness, not having where to lay his head, and surely it was pleasant in his eyes that he was about to enter into his rest. He had lived in obscurity and poverty — he gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; and now, surely, he might well look forward with joy to his return to that glory which he had with the Father before ever the world was, when all the angels of God worshipped him; and yet he does not say: It is expedient for me that I go away. Surely that would have been comfort enough to his disciples. But no; he says: “It is expedient for you.” He forgets himself altogether, and thinks only of his little flock which he was leaving behind him: “It is expedient for you that I go away.” O most generous of Saviours! He looked not on his own things, but on the things of others also. He knew that it is far more blessed to give than it is to receive.

The gift of the Spirit is the great argument by which he here persuades them that his going away would be expedient for them. Now, it is curious to remark that he had promised them the Spirit before, in the beginning of his discourse. In chapter 14:16-18, he says: “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not,

neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” And again: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (Verse 26). In that passage he promises the Spirit for their own peculiar comfort and joy. He promises him as a treasure which they, and they only, could receive: “For the world cannot receive him, because it neither sees nor knows him;” and yet, saith he, “he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” But in the passage before us the promise is quite different. He promises the Spirit here, not for themselves, but for the world — not as a peculiar treasure, to be locked up in their own bosoms, which they might brood over with a selfish joy, but as a blessed power to work, through their preaching, on the wicked world around them — not as a well springing up within their own bosoms unto everlasting life, but as rivers of living water flowing through them to water this dry and perishing world. He does not say: When he is come he will fill your hearts with peace and joy to overflowing; but: “When he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” But a little before he had told them that the world would hate and persecute them: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). This was but poor comfort, when that very world was to be the field of their labours; but now he shows them what a blessed gift the Spirit would be; for he would work, through their preaching, upon the very hearts that hated and persecuted them: “He shall convince the world of sin.” This has always been the case. In Acts 2 we are told that when the Spirit came on the apostles the crowd mocked them, saying: “These men are full of new wine;” and yet, when Peter preached, the Spirit wrought through his preaching on the hearts of these very scoffers. They were pricked in their hearts, and cried: “Men and brethren, what must we do?” and the same day three thousand souls were converted. Again, the jailer at

Philippi was evidently a hard, cruel man towards the apostles; for he thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks; and yet the Spirit opens his hard heart, and he is brought to Christ by the very apostles whom he hated. Just so it is, brethren, to this day. The world does not love the true ministers of Christ a whit better than they did. The world is the same world that it was in Christ's day. That word has never yet been scored out of the Bible: "Whosoever will live godly in the world, must suffer persecution." We expect, as Paul did, to be hated by the most who listen to us. We are quite sure, as Paul was, that the more abundantly we love you, most of you will love us the less; and yet, brethren, none of these things move us. Though cast down, we are not in despair; for we know that the Spirit is sent to convince the world; and we do not fear but some of you who are counting us all enemy, because we tell you the truth, may even this day, in the midst of all your hatred and cold indifference, be convinced of sin by the Spirit, and made to cry out: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

### **I. The first work of the Spirit is to convince of sin.**

1. *Who it is that convinces of sin:* "He shall convince the world of sin, because they believe not in me." It is curious to remark, that wherever the Holy Ghost is spoken of in the Bible, he is spoken of in terms of gentleness and love. We often read of the wrath of God the Father, as in Rom. 1: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." And we often read of the wrath of God the Son: "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way" or, "Revealed from heaven taking vengeance." But we nowhere read of the wrath of God the Holy Ghost. He is compared to a dove, the gentlest of all creatures. He is warm and gentle as the breath: "Jesus breathed on them, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He is gentle as the falling dew: "I will be as the dew unto Israel." He is soft and gentle as oil; for he is called "The oil of gladness." The fine oil wherewith the high priest was anointed was a type of the Spirit. He is gentle and refreshing as the springing well: "The

water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.” He is called “The Spirit of grace and of supplications.” He is nowhere called the Spirit of wrath. He is called the “Holy Ghost, which is the Comforter.” Nowhere is he called the Avenger. We are told that he groans within the heart of a believer, “helping his infirmities;” so that he greatly helps the believer in prayer. We are told also of the love of the Spirit — nowhere of the wrath of the Spirit. We are told of his being grieved: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit;” of his being resisted: “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost;” of his being quenched: “Quench not the Spirit.” But these are all marks of gentleness and love. Nowhere will you find one mark of anger or of vengeance attributed to him; and yet, brethren, when this blessed Spirit begins his work of love, mark how he begins — he convinces of sin. Even he, all-wise, almighty, all-gentle and loving, though he be, cannot persuade a poor sinful heart to embrace the Saviour, without first opening up his wounds, and convincing him that he is lost.

Now, brethren, I ask of you, Should not the faithful minister of Christ just do the very same? Ah! brethren, if the Spirit, whose very breath is all gentleness and love — whom Jesus hath sent into the world to bring men to eternal life — if he begins his work in every soul that is to be saved by convincing of sin, why should you blame the minister of Christ if he be in the very same way? Why should you say that we are harsh, and cruel, and severe, when we begin to deal with your souls by convincing you of sin? Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? When the surgeon comes to cure a corrupted wound, when he tears off the vile bandages which unskilful hands had wrapped around it, when he lays open the deepest recesses of your wound, and shows you all its venom and its virulence — do you call him cruel? May not his hands be all the time the hands of gentleness and love? Or, when a house is all on fire the flames are bursting out from every window — when some courageous man ventures to alarm the sleeping inmates — bursts through the barred door — tears aside the close drawn curtains, and with eager hand shakes the sleeper

— bids him awake and flee — a moment longer, and you may be lost you call him cruel? or do you say this messenger of mercy spoke too loud — too plain? Ah, no. “Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” Why, then, brethren, will you blame the minister of Christ when he begins by convincing you of sin? Think you that the wound of sin is less venomous or deadly than a wound in the flesh? Think you the flames of hell are less hard to bear than the flames of earth? The very Spirit of love begins by convincing you of sin; and are we less the messengers of love because we begin by doing the same thing? Oh, then, do not say that we are become your enemy because we tell you the truth?

**II. What is this conviction of sin?** I would begin to show this by showing you what it is not.

1. *It is not the mere smiting of the natural conscience.* Although man be utterly fallen, yet God has left natural conscience behind in every heart, to speak for him. Some men, by continual sinning, sear even the conscience as with a hot iron, so that it becomes dead and past feeling; but most men have so much natural conscience remaining, that they cannot commit open sin without their conscience smiting them. When a man commits murder or theft, no eye may have seen him, and yet conscience makes a coward of him. He trembles and is afraid — he feels that he has sinned, and he fears that God will take vengeance. Now, brethren, that is not the conviction of sin here spoken of — that is a natural work which takes place in every heart; but conviction of sin is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God. If you have had nothing more than the ordinary smiting of conscience, then you have never been convinced of sin.

2. *It is not any impression upon the imagination.* Sometimes, when men have committed great sin, they have awful impressions of God’s vengeance made upon their imaginations. In the night time they almost fancy they see the flames of hell burning beneath them; or they seem to hear doleful cries in their ears telling of coming woe; or they fancy they see the face of Jesus all clouded

with anger; or they have terrible dreams, when they sleep, of coming vengeance. Now, this is not the conviction of sin which the Spirit gives. This is altogether a natural work upon the natural faculties, and not at all a supernatural work of the Spirit. If you have had nothing more than these imaginary terrors, you have had no work of the Spirit.

3. *It is not a mere head knowledge of what the Bible says against sin.* Many unconverted men read their Bibles, and have a clear knowledge that their case is laid down there. They are sensible men. They know very well that they are in sin, and they know just as well that the wages of sin is death. One man lives a swearer, and he reads the words, and understands them perfectly: “Swear not at all” — “The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” Another man lives in the lusts of the flesh, and he reads the Bible, and understands these words perfectly: “No unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Another man lives in habitual forgetfulness of God — never thinks of God from sunrise to sunset, and yet he reads: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.” Now, in this way most unconverted men have a head knowledge of their sin, and of the wages of sin; yet, brethren, this is far from conviction of sin. This is a mere natural work in the head. Conviction of sin is a work upon the heart. If you have had nothing more than this head knowledge that you are sinners, then you have never been convinced of sin.

4. *Conviction of sin is not to feel the loathsomeness of sin.* This is what a child of God feels. A child of God has seen the beauty and excellency of God, and therefore sin is loathsome in his eyes. But no unconverted person has seen the beauty and excellency of God; therefore, even the Spirit cannot make him feel the loathsomeness of sin. Just as when you leave a room that is brilliantly lighted, and go out into the darkness of the open air, the night looks very dark; so when a child of God has been within the veil — in the presence of his reconciled God — in full view of the

Father of lights, dwelling in light inaccessible and full of glory — then, when he turns his eye inwards upon his own sinful bosom, sin appears very dark, very vile, and very loathsome. But an unconverted soul never has been in the presence of the reconciled God; and therefore sin cannot appear dark and loathsome in his eyes. Just as when you have tasted something very sweet and pleasant, when you come to taste other things, they appear very insipid and disagreeable; so when a child of God has tasted and seen that God is gracious, the taste of sin in his own heart becomes very nauseous and loathsome to him. But an unconverted soul never tasted the sweetness of God's love; he cannot, therefore, feel the vileness and loathsomeness of sin. This, then, is not the conviction of sin here spoken of.

***What, then, is this conviction of sin?***

*Answer.* It is a just sense of the dreadfulfulness of sin. It is not a mere knowledge that we have many sins, and that God's anger is revealed against them all; but it is a heart feeling that we are under sin. Again: it is not a feeling of the loathsomeness of sin — that is felt only by the children of God; but it is a feeling of the dreadfulfulness of sin — of the dishonour it does to God, and of the wrath to which it exposes the soul. Oh, brethren! conviction of sin is no slight natural work upon the heart. There is a great difference between knowing a thing and having a just sense of it. There is a great difference between knowing that vinegar is sour, and actually tasting and feeling that it is sour. There is a great difference between knowing that fire will burn us, and actually feeling the pain of being burned. Just in the same way, there is all the difference in the world between knowing the dreadfulfulness of your sins and feeling the dreadfulfulness of your sins. It is all in vain that you read your Bibles and hear us preach, unless the Spirit use the words to give sense and feeling to your dead hearts. The plainest words will not awaken you as long as you are in a natural condition. If we could prove to you, with the plainness of arithmetic, that the wrath of God is abiding on you and your children, still you would sit unmoved — you would go away and



forget it before you reached your own door. Ah, brethren! he that made your heart can alone impress your heart. It is the Spirit that convinceth of sin.

1. *Learn the true power of the read and preached Word.* It is but an instrument in the hand of God. it has no power of itself, except to produce natural impressions. It is a hammer — but God must break your hearts with it. It is a fire — but God must kindle up your bosoms with it. Without him we may give you a knowledge of the dreadfulfulness of your condition, but he only can give you a just sense and feeling of the dreadfulfulness of your condition. The most powerful sermon in the world can make nothing more than a natural impression; but when God works through it, the feeblest word makes a supernatural impression. Many a poor sermon has been the means by which God hath converted a soul. Children of God, O that you would pray night and day for the lifting up of the arm of God!

2. *Learn that conversion is not in your own power.* It is the Spirit alone who convinces of sin, and he is a free agent. He is a sovereign Spirit, and has nowhere promised to work at the bidding of unconverted men. He hath many on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth. Perhaps you think you may take your fill of sin just now, and then come and repent, and be saved; but remember the Spirit is not at your bidding. He is not your servant. Many hope to be converted on their death-bed; and they come to their death-bed, and yet are not converted. If the Spirit be working with you now, do not grieve him — do not resist him do not quench him; for he may never come back to you again.

**III. I come to the argument which the Spirit uses.** There are two arguments by which the Spirit usually gives men a sense of the dreadfulfulness of sin.

1. *The Law:* “The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ” — “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped,

and all the world become guilty before God.” The sinner reads the law of the great God who made heaven and earth. The Spirit of God arouses his conscience to see that the law condemns every part of his life. The law bids him love God. His heart tells him he never loved God — never had a thought of regard toward God. The Spirit convinces him that God is a jealous God — that his honour is concerned to uphold the law, and destroy the sinner. The Spirit convinces him that God is a just God — that he can by no means clear the guilty. The Spirit convinces him that he is a true God that he must fulfil all his threatenings: “Have I said it, and shall I not do it?” The sinner’s mouth is stopped, and he stands guilty before God.

2. *The second argument is the Gospel:* “Because they believe not on Jesus.” This is the strongest of all arguments, and therefore is chosen by Christ here. The sinner reads in the Word that “he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;” and now the Spirit convinces him that he never believed on the Son of God indeed, he does not know what it means. For the first time the conviction comes upon his heart: “He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” The more glorious and divine that Saviour is, the more is the Christless soul convinced that he is lost; for he feels that he is out of that Saviour. He sees plainly that Christ is an almighty ark riding over the deluge of God’s wrath — he sees how safe and happy the little company are that are gathered within; but this just makes him gnash his teeth in agony, for he is not within the ark, and the waves and billows are coming over him. He hears that Christ hath been stretching out the hands all the day to the chief of sinners, not willing that any should perish; but then he never cast himself into these arms, and now he feels that Christ may be laughing at His calamity, and mocking when his fear cometh. O yes, my friends! how often on the death-bed, when the natural fears of conscience are aided by the Spirit of God — how often, when we speak of Christ — his love — his atoning blood — the refuge to be found in him — how safe and happy all are that are in him — how often does the dying sinner turn it all away with the awful question: *But am I in Christ?*

The more we tell of the Saviour, the more is their agony increased; for they feel that that is the Saviour they have refused. Ah! what a meaning does that give to these words: “The Spirit convinceth of sin, because they believe not on me.”

(1). Now, my friends, there are many of you who know that you never believed on Jesus, and yet you are quite unmoved. You sit without any emotion — you eat your meals with appetite, and doubtless sleep sound at night. Do you wish to know the reason? You have never been convinced of sin. The Spirit hath never begun his work in your heart. Oh! if the Spirit of Jesus would come on your hearts like a mighty rushing wind, what a dreadful thought it would be to you this night, that you are lying out of Christ! You would lose your appetite for this world’s food — you would not be able to rest in your bed — you would not dare to live on in your sins. All your past sins would rise behind you like apparitions of evil. Wherever you went you would meet the word: “Without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world;” and if your worldly friends should try to hush your fears, and tell you of your decencies, and that you were not so bad as your neighbours, and that many might fear if you feared, ah! how you would thrust them away, and stop your ears, and cry: There is a city of refuge, to which I have never fled; therefore there must be a blood avenger. There is an ark; therefore there must be a coming deluge. There is a Christ; therefore there must be a hell for the Christless.

(2). Some of you may be under conviction of sin — you feel the dreadfulness of being out of Christ, and you are very miserable. Now, (a) Be thankful for this work of the Spirit: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father.” God hath brought you into the wilderness just that he might allure you, and speak to your heart about Christ. This is the way he begins the work in every soul he saves. Nobody ever came to Christ but they were fast convinced of sin. All that are now in heaven began this way. Be thankful you are not dead like those around you. (b) Do not lose these convictions. Remember they are easily lost. Involve yourself over head and ears in business, and work even on the

Sabbath day, and you will soon drive all away. Indulge a little in sensual pleasure — take a little diversion with companions, and you will soon be as happy and careless as they. If you love your soul, flee these things — do not stay — flee away from them. Read the books that keep up your anxiety — wait on the ministers that keep up that anxiety. Above all, Cry to the Spirit, who alone was the author of it, that he would keep it up. Cry night and day that he may never let you rest out of Christ. Oh I would you sleep over hell? (c) Do not rest in these convictions. You are not saved yet. Many have come thus far and perished after all — many have been convinced, not converted — many lose their convictions, and wallow in sin again. “Remember Lot’s wife.” You are never safe till you are within the fold. Christ is the door. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.”

### **Conviction of Righteousness**

***“And when he [the Comforter] is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” John 16:8.***

In my last discourse from this passage we saw that the first work of the Spirit on the heart of a sinner is to convince of sin — to give him a sense of the dreadfulfulness of his and to make him feel how surely he is a lost sinner. And from that I drew an argument, that it is the duty of all faithful ministers to do the same; that if the Spirit of gentleness and love begins his work on the soul by awakening in it a deep sense of sin and coming wrath, we are not to be called cruel, or harsh, or too plain and outspoken, if we begin in the very same way — by convincing you of sin, and showing every unconverted soul among you how utterly undone you are.

But I now come to the second work of the Spirit, from which he is properly called the Comforter: “He will convince the world of righteousness.” When he has first *broken the bones* under a sense of sin, then he reveals the good Physician, and makes the very bones which he hath broken to rejoice. When he has first revealed the coming storm of wrath, so that the sinner knows not where to flee, then he opens the secret chamber, and whispers: Come in

hither; it may be thou shalt be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. When he has cast light into the sinner's bosom, and let him see how every action of his life condemns him, and how vain it is to seek for any righteousness there, he then casts light upon the risen Saviour, and says: Look there. He shows the Saviour's finished sufferings and finished obedience, and says: All this is thine, if thou wilt believe on Jesus. Thus does the Spirit lead the soul to accept and close with Christ, freely offered in the Gospel. The first was the awakening work of the Spirit — this is the comforting work of the Spirit. And this shows you plainly that the second work of the faithful minister is to do the very same — to lead weary souls to Christ — to stand pointing not only to the coming deluge, but to the freely offered ark — pointing not only to the threatening storm, but to the strong tower of safety — directing the sinner's eye not only inwards to his sin, and misery, but outwards also, to the bleeding, dying, rising, reigning Saviour.

Brethren, he is no minister of Christ who only terrifies and awakens you — who only aims at the first work of the Spirit, to convince you of sin, and aims not at the second work of the Spirit, to convince you of righteousness. He would be like a *surgeon* who should tear off the bandages of your wounds, and lay open their deepest recesses, and then leave you like Israel with your sores not closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. He would be like a man who should awake you when your house was all on fire, and yet leave you without showing you any way of escape.

Brethren, let us rather be taught to follow in the footsteps of the blessed Spirit, the Comforter. He first convinces of sin, and then convinces of righteousness. And so brethren, bear with us, when we first awaken you to a sense of the dreadfulness of your sins, and then open the refuge and say: Come in hither — “hide thee as it were for a little moment, till the indignation be overpast.”

I know there may be many of you quite offended because we preach Christ to the vilest of sinners. It was so with the Pharisees; and doubtless there are many Pharisees among us. When we enter into the haunts of wickedness and profligacy, and, in accents of

tenderness, proclaim the simple message of redeeming love — that the wrath of God is abiding on sinners, but that Christ is a Saviour freely offered to them, just as they are; or when a child of sin and misery comes before us, and the minister of Christ first plainly tells of God’s wrath against his sin, and then as plainly, and with all affection, of Christ’s compassion, and freely offered righteousness — oh! how often the decent moral men of the world are affronted. The very imagination that the same Saviour is offered as freely to the, veriest offscourings of vice as to themselves — this is more than they can bear. What! they cry; do you offer these wretches a Saviour before they have reformed their lives — before they have changed their character? I answer, Yes. The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: and I beseech you to mark that this is the very way of the Spirit of God.

He is the Holy Spirit — of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. He is the Sanctifier of all that are in Jesus; and yet, when he has convinced a sinner of sin, his next work is to speak peace — to convince that sinner of righteousness. If you ask me, then, why I do not say to the child of sin and shame, Go and reform your self — become honest and pure, and then I will invite you to the Saviour? I answer, Because even the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier, does not do this. He first leads the soul into the wilderness, and then he allures it to come to Christ. He first shuts up the soul in prison under a sense of guilt, and then opens a door — reveals Christ an open refuge for the chief of sinners.

Brethren! do not forget it — he is the Comforter before he is the Sanctifier. Ah, then, do not blame us, if, as messengers of Christ, we tread in the very footsteps of that blessed Spirit. If even he, the holy sanctifying Spirit, whose very breath is all purity — if even he invites the vilest sinner to put on these beautiful garments — the divine righteousness of Jesus — do not say that we are favouring sin — that we are the enemies of morality, if we carry this message to the vilest of sinners: “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.”

### **I. What is this righteousness?**

I answer, It is the righteousness of Christ, wrought out in behalf

of sinners. Now righteousness means righteousness with respect to the law. When a person has never broken the law, but has rendered complete obedience to it, that person is righteous. Righteousness consists of two parts — *first*, freedom from guilt; and *second*, worthiness in the sight of God.

1. *In the case of an unfallen angel*, for example, he may be called righteous in two ways. (1). He is negatively righteous, because he has never broken the law of God — he has never loved anything which God would not have him love — never done anything which God would not have him do — he has acquired no stain of guilt upon his snow white garments. But, (2). He is positively righteous, because he has fulfilled the law of God. He has obeyed in all things his all-holy will. He has spread his ready wings on every errand which the Father commanded — ministering night and day to the heirs of salvation. In all things he has made it his meat and drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. So, then, he has not only kept his snowy garments clean, but he has gained the laurel wreath of obedience — he is worthy in the sight of God — God smiles on him as he approaches. Now, brethren, both of these put together make up a righteousness in the sight of God.

2. *In the case of unfallen Adam*. (1). He was negatively righteous. He was made free from all guilt. Innocent and pure he came from the hands of his Maker. Not more truly did the calm rivers of Paradise reflect the blue heaven from their untroubled bosom, than did the tranquil bosom of unfallen Adam reflect the blessed image of God. His soul was spotless as the white robes of angels. His thoughts were all directed heavenward. He had not once broken the law of God, in thought, word, or deed. His will was even with God's will. He had no conscience of sin. But, (2). Adam did not acquire a positive righteousness; that is, the righteousness of one who has obeyed the law — who has done the will of God. He was put into Paradise in order to acquire that righteousness. He was put there in pure and holy garments, to acquire the laurel wreath of obedience — like the holy angels. But

man fell without acquiring this meritorious righteousness in the sight of God. Now, brethren, both these put together — both freedom from guilt and perfect obedience — make up a perfect righteousness in the sight of God.

3. I come, then, to show that the righteousness of Christ, freely offered to sinners, includes both of these. *There is freedom from guilt in Christ*, because he is gone to the Father. When he came to this world, he was not free from guilt. He had no sin of his own. Even in his mother's womb he was called "That holy thing;" but yet he did not breathe one moment in this world, but under the load of guilt. When he was an infant in the manger, he was under guilt; when he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he was under guilt; when he sat down wearied at the well, he was under guilt; when he was in that dreadful agony in the garden, when his sweat was as it were great drops of blood, he was under guilt; when he was in his last agony on the cross, he was under guilt. He had no sin of his own, and yet these are his words: "Innumerable evils; have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me."

**Inquiry.** *How do you know that Christ was under guilt?*

*Answer.* (1). Because he was under pain. He suffered the pain of infancy in the manger — he suffered weariness, and hunger, and thirst, and great agonies in the garden and on the cross. But God has eternally connected guilt and pain. If there were no guilt, there could be no pain. (2). Because God hid his face from him: "My God, my God." Now, God hides his face from nothing but guilt; therefore Christ was bearing the sins of many. He was all over with guilt. He was as guilty in the sight of God as if he had committed all the sins of his people. What wonder, then, that God hid his face even from his own Son?

But Christ is now free from guilt. He is risen and gone to the Father. When a man is lying under a debt — if he pays it, then he is free from the debt. So Christ was lying under our sins, but he



suffered all the punishment, and now is free; he rose, and we see him no more. When a man is banished for so many years, it is unlawful for him to return to his country till the time has expired, and the punishment is borne; but when the time is expired, then he is free from guilt in the eye of the law. He may come back to his home and his country once more. So Christ was banished from the bosom of the Father for a time. God hid his face from him; but when he had borne all that God saw fit to lay on him, then he was free from guilt — he was free to return; and so he did — he rose, and went back to the bosom of the Father, from which he came. Do you not see, then, trembling sinner, that there is freedom from all guilt in Christ? He is quite free — he never shall suffer any more. He is now without sin, and when he comes again, he is coming without sin. If you will become one with him, you, too, are free from guilt — you are as free as Christ is — you are as safe from being punished as if you were in heaven with Christ. If you believe on Christ, you are one with him — a member of his body; and as sure as Christ your Head is now passed from the darkness of God's anger into the light of his countenance, so surely are you, O believer, passed from darkness into God's marvellous light. O what a blessed word was that of Christ, just before he ascended: I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God! God is now as much ours as he is Christ's.

**Inquiry.** *What good is it to me that Christ is free from guilt?*

*Answer.* Christ is offered to you as your Saviour. *There is perfect obedience in Christ*, because he hath gone to the Father, and we see him no more. When he came to this world, he came not only to suffer, but to do — not only to be a dying Saviour, but also a doing Saviour — not only to suffer the curse which the first Adam had brought upon the world, but to render the obedience which the first Adam had left undone. From the cradle to the cross he obeyed the will of God from the heart. When he came into the world, his word was: “Lo! I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O God; yea,

thy law is within my heart.” When he was in the midst of his obedience, still he did not change his mind. He says: “I have meat to eat that ye know not of: my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” And when he was going out of the world, still his word was: “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.” So that it is true what an apostle says — that he was “obedient even unto death.” The whole law is summed up in these two commands — That we love God and our neighbour. Christ did both. (1). He loved God perfectly, as God says in the 91st Psalm: “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high.” (2). He loved his neighbour as himself. It was out of love to men that he came into the world at all; and everything he did and everything he suffered in the world, was out of love to his neighbour. It was out of love to men that he performed the greatest part of his obedience, namely, the laying down his life. This was the principal errand upon which he came into the world. This was the most dreadful and difficult command which God laid upon him; and yet he obeyed. But a short while before he was betrayed, God gave him an awful view of his coming wrath, in the garden of Gethsemane. He set down the cup before him, and showed that it was a cup without any mixture of mercy in it; and yet Christ obeyed: his human nature shrunk back from it, and he prayed: “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” but he did not waver one moment from complete obedience, for he adds: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

Now this is the obedience of Christ, and we know that it is perfect. (a) Because he was the Son of God, and all that he did must be perfect. (b) Because he has gone to the Father. He is ascended into the presence of God. And how did the Father receive him? We are told in the 110th Psalm. A door is opened in heaven, and we are suffered to hear the very words with which God receives his Son: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

So, then, God did not send him back, as one who had not obeyed perfectly enough. God did not forbid him his presence, as

one unworthy to be accepted; but God highly exalted him — looked upon him as worthy of much honour — worthy of a seat on the throne at his right hand. Oh! how plain that Christ is accepted with the Father! — how plain that his righteousness is most lovely and all divine in the sight of God the Father!

Hearken, then, trembling sinner! — this righteousness is offered to you. It was wrought just for sinners like you, and for none else; it is for no other use but just to cover naked sinners. This is the clothing of wrought gold, and the raiment of needlework. This is the wedding garment — the fine linen, white and clean. Oh! put ye on the Lord Jesus. Why should ye refuse your own mercies? Become one with Christ, by believing, and you are not only pardoned, as I showed before, but you are righteous in the sight of God; not only shall you never be cast into hell, but you shall surely be carried into heaven — as surely as Christ is now there. Become one with Christ, and even this moment you are lovely in the sight of God comely, through his comeliness put upon you. You are as much accepted in the sight of God as is the Son of Man, the Beloved, that sits on his right hand. The Spirit shall be given you, as surely as he is given to Christ. He is given to Christ as the oil of gladness, wherewith he is anointed above his fellows. You are as sure to wear a crown of glory, as that Christ is now wearing his. You are as sure to sit upon Christ's throne, as that Christ is now sitting on his Father's throne. O weep for joy, happy believer! O sing for gladness of heart: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

## **II. What is conviction of righteousness?**

### **Let us show what it is not.**

1. *It is not any impression on the imagination.* Just as men have often imaginary terrors, so men have also imaginary views of Christ, and of the glory of being in Christ. Sometimes they think

they see Christ with the bodily eye; or sometimes they think they hear words borne in upon their mind, telling of the beauty of Christ. Now this is not conviction of righteousness. Indeed, such things may accompany true conversion. There is no impossibility in it. Stephen and Paul both saw Christ, and most of you remember a very singular example of something similar in more modern times. (Alluding to a recent occurrence). But, however this may be, one thing is certain, that conviction of righteousness is very different from this. It is a far higher and nobler thing — given only by the Spirit of God. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.

2. *It is not a revelation of any new truths not contained in the Bible.* When the Spirit revealed Christ to the apostles and prophets of old, he revealed new truths concerning Christ. But when he convinces a sinner of the righteousness of Christ, he does it by opening up the truths contained in the Bible. If he revealed new truths, then we might put away the Bible, and sit alone, waiting for the Spirit to come down on us. But this is contrary to the Bible and experience. David prays: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wonders.” Where? Not in heaven above nor earth beneath, but, “out of thy law.” It is through the truth that the Spirit always works in our hearts: “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy Word is truth.” Therefore, when you look for conviction of righteousness, you are not to look for new truths not in the Bible, but for divine light cast upon old truths already in the Bible.

3. *It is not mere head knowledge of what the Bible says of Christ and his righteousness.* Most unconverted men read their Bibles, and many of them understand very wonderfully the doctrine of imputed righteousness; yet these have no conviction of righteousness. All awakened souls read their Bibles very anxiously, with much prayer and weeping; and many of them seem to understand very clearly the truth that Christ is an all — sufficient righteousness; yet they tell us they cannot close with Christ — they cannot apply him to their own case. Again: the devils believe and tremble. The devil has plainly much knowledge

of the Bible; and from the quotations he made to Christ, it is plain that he understood much of the work of redemption; and yet he is none the better for it — he only trembles and gnashes his teeth the more. Ah, my friends! if you have no more than head knowledge of Christ and his righteousness, you have no more than devils have — you have never been convinced of righteousness.

### **What is it?**

*Answer.* It is a sense of the preciousness and fitness of Christ, as he is revealed in the Gospel.

1. I have said it is a sense of the preciousness of Christ, that you may see plainly that it is no imaginary feeling of Christ's beauty; that it is no seeing of Christ with the bodily eyes; that it is no mere knowledge of Christ and of his righteousness in the head — but a feeling of his preciousness in the heart. I before showed you that there is all the difference in the world between knowing a thing and feeling a thing — between having a knowledge of a thing, and having a sense of it. There is all the difference in the world between knowing that honey is sweet, and tasting that it is sweet, so as to have a sense of its sweetness. There is a great difference between knowing that a person is beautiful, and actually seeing, so as to have a present sense of the beauty of the person. There is a great difference between knowing that a glove will fit the hand, and putting it on, so as to have a sense of its fitness. Just so, brethren, there is all the difference in the world between having a head knowledge of Christ and of his righteousness, and having a heart feeling of his fitness and preciousness. The first may be acquired from flesh and blood, or from books; the second must come from the Spirit of God.

2. Again, it is a sense of the fitness of Christ. It is conceivable that a person may have a sense of Christ's preciousness, without having a sense of his fitness. Some awakened souls appear to feel that Christ is very precious; and yet they dare not put on Christ: they seem to want a sense of his fitness to their case. They cry out: "O how precious a Saviour he is to all his people!" — "O that I were one of his people! O that I were hidden in his bleeding

side!” And yet they have no sense of his fitness to be their Saviour; they do not cry out: “He just fits my case! — he is the very Saviour for me!” For, if they felt this, they would be at peace — their lips would overflow with joy. But no; they dare not appropriate Christ. Now, then, conviction of righteousness is to have such a sense of Christ as leads us, without hesitation, to put on Christ; and that I have called a sense of his fitness.

It gives me no comfort to know that Christ is a precious Saviour to others, unless I know that he is a precious Saviour to me. If the deluge is coming on — the windows of heaven opening, and the fountains of the great deep broken up — it gives me no peace to know that there is an ark for others, unless you tell me that it is an ark for me. You may tell me of Christ’s righteousness forever and of the safety of all that are in him; but if you would comfort me by the news, you must convince me that that righteousness answers me, and is offered to me. Now, this is what the Spirit does when he convinces of righteousness. This and this only, is conviction of righteousness.

O brethren! it is no slight work of nature to persuade a soul, even an anxious soul, to put on Christ. If it were a natural work, then natural means might do it; but it is a supernatural work, and the hand of the Spirit must do it. Flesh and blood cannot reveal Christ unto you, but my Father which is in heaven. No man can call Jesus Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

### **Let me speak a word to three classes.**

1. *To the unawakened.* See how far you are from salvation. Many of you may be saying just now in your heart: “It is quite true I am not at present a saved person; but I am not very far from the kingdom of God. I have just to repent and believe on Jesus, and then I am saved. And since this is so short and simple a matter, I may do it any time. I may enjoy the world and its pleasures a little longer; and then, when death or disease threatens me, it may be good time to become anxious.” Now, all this argument proceeds upon a falsehood. You think you are not far off from salvation; but, ah! my friend, you are as far from

salvation as any one can be that is in the land of the living. There is only one case in which you could be farther from salvation, and that is in hell. You are as far from salvation as any one that is out of hell. (1). In my last discourse, I showed you that there must be a divine work upon your heart before you can repent. You may have much head knowledge of sin without the Spirit, but he only can convince you of sin. That Spirit is a sovereign Spirit. He is given to the children of God as often as they ask him; but he is not at the bidding of unconverted men. You cannot bid him come when you fall sick, or when you are going to die; or if you should bid him, he has nowhere promised to obey. (2). And now, I wish you to see that there is a second divine work needful on your heart before you can believe. The Spirit must convince you of Christ's righteousness. Flesh and blood cannot reveal Christ unto you, but my Father which is in heaven. God is a sovereign God. He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy. He is not at the bidding of unconverted men. He has nowhere promised to bring to Christ all whom he awakens. Oh! how plain that you are as far from salvation as any soul can be that is out of hell. And can you be easy when you are at such a distance from salvation? Can you go now, and sit down to a game of chance — to while away the time between this and judgment? Can you go and laugh and be merry in your sins? How truly, then, did Solomon say: "The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot" — a loud noise for a moment, then everlasting silences short blaze, and a dark eternity.

## *2. To the awakened.*

(1). Remember, unless you attain to conviction of righteousness, your conviction of sin will be all in vain. Remember, anxiety for the soul does not save the soul. Sailors in a shipwreck are very anxious. They cry much to God in prayers and tears; and yet, though they are anxious men, they are not saved men — the vessel goes to pieces, and all are drowned. Travellers in a wilderness may be very anxious — their hearts may die within them; yet that does not show that they are safe —

they may perish in the burning sands. So you are much afraid of the wrath of God, and it may be God has, in mercy, stirred up these anxieties in your bosom: but you are not yet saved — unless you come to Christ all will be in vain. Many are convinced who are never converted. Many are now in hell who were once as anxious to escape as you.

(2). Remember, God only can give you this conviction. The Spirit convinces of righteousness. It is not flesh and blood that can give you a sense of the preciousness of Christ. It is true, the Bible and preaching are the means through which God works this conviction. He always works through the truth — never without the truth. If you be truly awakened, I know how anxiously you will wait on these means — how you will search the Scriptures with tears, and lose no opportunity of hearing the preached Word. But still, the Bible and preaching are only means of themselves — they can only make natural impressions on your mind. God only can make supernatural impressions. Cry, then, to God.

(3). But remember, God is a sovereign God. Do not cry to him to convert you, as if it were a debt he owed you. There is only one thing you can claim from God as a right, and that is a place in hell. If you think you have any claim on God, you are deceiving yourself. You are not yet convinced of sin. Lie at the feet of God as a sovereign God — a God who owes you nothing but punishment at his feet as the God who alone can reveal Christ unto you. Cry night and day that he would reveal Christ unto you — that he would shine into your darkness, and give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. One glimpse of that face will give you peace. It may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

*3. To those of you who have come to Christ.*

Oh, what miracles of grace you are! Twice over you are saved by grace. When you were loathsome in your sins, and yet asleep, the Spirit awakened you. Thousands were sleeping beside you. He left thousands to perish, but awakened you.

Again: though awakened, you were as loathsome as ever: you were as vile in the sight of God as ever, only you dreaded hell. In



some respects you were more wicked than the unawakened world around you. They would not come to Christ, because they felt no need. But you felt your need, yet would not come. You made God a liar more than they, yet God had mercy on you. He led you to Christ — convinced you of righteousness. So you are twice over saved by grace. “O to grace how great a debtor!” “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?” Will you not love him with all your heart? Will you not serve him with all you have? And when he says: Feed this poor orphan for my sake, will you not say: Lord, when I give for thee, it is more blessed to give than to receive?

