

George Whitefield

Sermon 14

The Lord our Righteousness

Jeremiah 23:6, "The Lord our Righteousness"

Whoever is acquainted with the nature of mankind in general, or the propensity of his own heart in particular, must acknowledge, that self-righteousness is the last idol that is rooted out of the heart: being once born under a covenant of works, it is natural for us all to have recourse to a covenant of works, for our everlasting salvation. And we have contracted such devilish pride, by our fall from God, that we would, if not wholly, yet in part at least, glory in being the cause of our own salvation. We cry out against popery, and that very justly; but we are all Papists, at least, I am sure, we are all Arminians by nature; and therefore no wonder so many natural men embrace that scheme. It is true, we disclaim the doctrine of merit, are ashamed directly to say we deserve any good at the hands of God; therefore, as the Apostle excellently well observes, "we go about," we fetch a circuit, "to establish a righteousness of our own, and," like the Pharisees of old, "will not wholly submit to that righteousness which is of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This is the sorest, though, alas! the most common evil that was ever yet seen under the sun. An evil, that in any age, especially in these dregs of time wherein we live, cannot sufficiently be inveighed against. For as it is with the people, so it is with the priests; and it is to be feared, even in those places, where once the truth as it is in Jesus was eminently preached, many ministers are so sadly degenerated from their pious ancestors, that the doctrines of grace, especially the personal, ALL-SUFFICIENT RIGHTEOUSNESS of Jesus, is but too seldom, too slightly mentioned. Hence the love of many waxeth cold; and I have often thought, was it possible, that this single consideration would be sufficient to raise our venerable forefathers again from their graves; who would thunder in their ears their fatal error.

The righteousness of Jesus Christ is one of those great mysteries, which the angels desire to look into, and seems to be one of the first lessons that God taught men after the fall. For, what were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the application of the merits of righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers hearts? We are told, that those coats were made of skins of beasts; and, as beasts were not then food for men, we may fairly infer, that those beasts were slain in sacrifice, in commemoration of the great sacrifice, Jesus Christ, thereafter to be offered. And the skins of the beasts thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were hereby taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the Lamb of God.

This is it which is meant, when we are told, "Abraham believed on the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." In short, this is it of which both the law and the prophets have spoken, especially Jeremiah in the words of the text, "The Lord our righteousness."

I propose, through divine grace,

I. To consider who we are to understand by the word Lord.

II. How the Lord is man's righteousness.

III. I will consider some of the chief objections that are generally urged against this doctrine.

IV. I shall show some very ill consequences that flow naturally from denying this doctrine.

V Shall conclude with an exhortation to all to come to Christ by faith, that they may be enabled to say with the prophet in the text, "The Lord our righteousness."

I. I am to consider who we are to understand by the word Lord. The Lord our righteousness.

If any Arians or Socinians are drawn by curiosity to hear what the babler has to say, let them be ashamed of denying the divinity of that Lord, who has bought poor sinners with his precious blood. For the person mentioned in the text, under the character of the Lord, is Jesus Christ. Ver. 5, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days (ver. 6) Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." By the righteous branch, all agree, that we are to understand Jesus Christ. He it is that is called the Lord in our text. If so, if there were no other text in the Bible to prove the divinity of Christ, this is sufficient: for if the word Lord may properly belong to Jesus Christ, he must be God. And, as you have it in the margin of your Bibles, the word Lord is in the original Jehovah, which is the essential title of God himself. Come then, ye Arians, kiss the son of God, bow down before him, and honor him, even as ye honor the Father. Learn of the angels, those morning-stars, and worship him as truly God: for otherwise you are as much idolaters, as those that worship the Virgin Mary. And as for you Socinians, who say Christ was a mere man, and yet profess that he was your Savior, according to your own principles you are accursed: for, if Christ be a mere man, then he is only an arm of flesh: and it is written, "Cursed is he that trusteth on an arm of flesh." But I would hope, there are no such monsters here; at least, that, after these considerations, they would be ashamed of broaching such monstrous absurdities any more. For it is plain, that, by the word Lord, we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who here takes to himself the title Jehovah, and therefore must be very God of very God; or, as the Apostle devoutly expresses it, "God blessed for evermore."

II. How the Lord is to be man's righteousness, comes next to be considered.

And that is, in one word, by IMPUTATION. For it pleased God, after he had made all things by the word of his power, to create man after his own image. And so infinite was the condescension of the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, that, although he might have insisted on the everlasting obedience of him and his posterity; yet he was pleased to oblige himself, by a covenant or agreement made with his own creatures, upon condition of an unsinning obedience, to give them immortality and eternal life. For when it is said, "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" we may fairly infer, so long as he continued obedient, and did not eat thereof, he should surely live. The 3rd of Genesis gives us a full, but mournful account, how our first parents broke this covenant, and thereby stood in need of a better righteousness than their own, in order to procure their future acceptance with God. For what must they do? They were as much under a covenant of works as ever. And though, after their disobedience, they were without strength; yet they were obliged not only to do, but continue to do all things, and that too in the most perfect manner, which the Lord had required of them: and not only so, but to make satisfaction to God's infinitely offended justice, for the breach they had already been guilty of. Here then opens the amazing scene of DIVINE PHILANTHROPY; I mean, God's love to man. For behold, what man could not do, Jesus Christ, the son of his Father's love, undertakes to do for him. And that God might be just in justifying the ungodly, though "he was in the form of God, and therefore thought it no robbery to be equal with God; yet he took upon him the form of a servant," even human nature. In that nature he obeyed, and thereby fulfilled the whole moral law in our stead; and also died a painful death upon the cross, and thereby became a curse for, or instead of, those whom the Father had given to him. As God, he satisfied, at the same time that he obeyed and suffered as man; and, being God and man in one person, he wrought out a full, perfect, and sufficient righteousness for all to whom it was to be imputed.

Here then we see the meaning of the word righteousness. It implies the active as well as passive obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. We generally, when talking of the merits of Christ, only mention the latter, -- his death; whereas, the former, -- his life and active obedience, is equally necessary. Christ is not such a Savior as becomes us, unless we join both together. Christ not only died, but lived, not only suffered, but obeyed for, or instead of, poor sinners. And both these jointly make up that complete righteousness, which is to be imputed to us, as the disobedience of our first parents was made ours by imputation. In this sense, and no other, are we to understand that parallel which the apostle Paul draws, in the 5th of the Romans, between the first and second Adam. This is what he elsewhere terms, "our being made the righteousness of God in him." This is the sense wherein the Prophet would have us to understand the words of the text; therefore, Jer. 33:16, "She (i.e. the church itself) shall be called, (having this righteousness imputed to her) The Lord our righteousness." A passage, I think, worthy of the profoundest meditation of all the sons and daughters of Abraham.

Many are the objections which the proud hearts of fallen men are continually urging against this wholesome, this divine, this soul saving doctrine. I come now,

III. To answer some few of those which I think the most considerable.

And, FIRST, they say, because they would appear friends to morality, "That the doctrine of an imputed righteousness is "destructive of good works, and leads to licentiousness."

And who, pray, are the persons that generally urge this objection? Are they men full of faith, and men really concerned for good works? No; whatever few exceptions there may be, if there be any at all, it is notorious, they are generally men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. The best title I can give them is, that of PROFANE MORALISTS, or moralists false so called. For I appeal to the experience of the present as well as past ages, if iniquity did and does not most abound, where the doctrine of Christ's whole personal righteousness is most cried down, and most seldom mentioned. Arminian being antichristian principles, always did, and always will lead to antichristian practices. And never was there a reformation brought about in the church, but by the preaching the doctrine of an imputed righteousness. This, as the man of God, Luther, calls it, is "Artienlus statntis out cedentis Eichlesin," the article by which the Church stands or falls. And though the preachers of this doctrine are generally branded by those on the other side, with the opprobrious names of Antinomians, deceivers, and what not; yet, I believe, if the truth of the doctrine on both sides was to be judged of by the lives of the preachers of professors of it, on our side the question would have the advantage every way.

It is true, this, as well as every other doctrine of grace, may be abused. And perhaps the unchristian walk of some, who have talked of Christ's imputed righteousness, justification by faith, and the like, and yet never felt it imputed to their own souls, has given the enemies of the Lord thus cause to blaspheme. But this is a very unsafe, as well as a very unfair way of arguing. The only question should be, Whether or not this doctrine of an imputed righteousness, does in itself cut off the occasion of good works, or lean to licentiousness? To this we may boldly answer, In no wise. It excludes works, indeed, from being any cause of our justification in the sight of God; but it requires good works as a proof of our having this righteousness imputed to us, and as a declarative evidence of our justification in the sight of men. And then, how can the doctrine of an imputed righteousness be a doctrine leading to licentiousness?

It is all calumny. The apostle Paul introduceth an infidel making this objection, in his epistle to the Romans; and none but infidels, that never felt the power of Christ's resurrection upon their souls, will urge it over again. And therefore, notwithstanding this objection, with the Prophet in the text, we may boldly say, "The Lord is our righteousness."

But Satan (and no wonder that his servants imitate him) often transforms himself into an angel of light; and therefore, (such perverse things will infidelity and Arminianism make men speak) in order to dress their objections in the best colors, some urge, "That our Savior preached no such doctrine; that in his sermon on the mount, he mentions only morality:" and consequently the doctrine of an imputed righteousness falls wholly to the ground.

But surely the men, who urge this objection, either never read, or never understood, our Lord's blessed discourse, wherein the doctrine of an imputed righteousness is so plainly taught, that he who runs, If he has eyes that see, may read.

Indeed our Lord does recommend morality and good works, (as all faithful ministers will do) and clears the moral law from many corrupt glosses put upon it by the letter-learned Pharisees. But then, before he comes to this, 'tis remarkable, he talks of inward piety, such as poverty of spirit, meekness, holy mourning, purity of heart, especially hungering and thirsting after righteousness; and then recommends good works, as an evidence of our having his righteousness imputed to us, and these graces and divine tempers wrought in our hearts. "Let your light (that is, the divine light I before have been mentioning) shine before men, in a holy life; that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your father which is in heaven." And then he immediately adds, "Think not that I am come to destroy the moral law: I came not to destroy, (to take away the force of it as a rule of life) but to fulfill, (to obey it in its whole latitude, and give the complete sense of it.*)" And then he goes on to show how exceeding broad the moral law is. So that our Lord, instead of setting aside an imputed righteousness in his sermon upon the mount, not only confirms it, but also answers the foregoing objection urged against it, by making good works a proof and evidence of its being imputed to our souls. He, therefore, that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Prophet says in the words of the text, "The Lord our righteousness."

But as Satan not only quoted scripture, but backed one temptation after another with it, when he attacked Christ in the wilderness; so his children generally take the same method in treating his doctrine. And, therefore, they urge another objection against the doctrine of an imputed righteousness, from the example of the young man in the gospel.

We may state it thus: "The Evangelist Mark, say they, chapter 10, mentions a young man that came to Christ, running, and asking him what he should do to inherit eternal life? Christ referred him to the commandments, to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. It is plain, therefore, works were to be, partly at least, the cause of his justification; and consequently the doctrine of an imputed righteousness is unscriptural." This is the objection in its full strength: and little strength in all its fullness. For, was I to prove the necessity of an imputed righteousness, I scarce know how I could bring a better instance to make it good.

Let us take a nearer view of this young man, and of our Lord's behavior towards him, Mark 10:17, the Evangelist tells us, "That when Christ was gone forth into the way, there came one running (it should seem it was some nobleman; a rarity indeed to see such a one running to Christ!) and not only so, but he kneeled to him, (perhaps many of his rank now, scarce know the time when they kneeled to Christ) and asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Then Jesus, to see whether or not he believed him to be what he really was, truly and properly God, said unto him, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." And, that he might directly answer his question, says he, "Thou knowest the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honor thy father and thy mother." This was a direct answer to his question; namely, That eternal life was not to be attained by his doings. For our Lord, by referring him to the commandments, did not (as the objectors insinuate) in the least hint, that his morality would recommend him to the favor and mercy of God; but he intended thereby, to make the law his schoolmaster to bring him to himself; that the young man, seeing how he had broken every one of these commandments, might thereby be convinced of the insufficiency of his own, and

consequently of the absolute necessity of looking out for a better righteousness, whereon he might depend for eternal life.

This was what our Lord designed. The young man being self-righteous, and willing to justify himself, said, "All these have I observed from my youth;" but had he known himself, he would have confessed, all these have I broken from my youth. For, supposing he had not actually committed adultery, had he never lusted after a woman in his heart? What, if he had not really killed another, had he never been angry without a cause, or spoken unadvisedly with his lips? If so, by breaking one of the least commandments in the least degree, he became liable to the curse of God: for "cursed is he (saith the law) that continueth not to do all things that are written in this book." And therefore, as observed before, our Lord was so far from speaking against, that he treated the young man in that manner, on purpose to convince him of the necessity of an imputed righteousness.

But perhaps they will reply, it is said, "Jesus beholding him, loved him." And what then? This he might do with a human love, and at the same time this young man have no interest in his blood. Thus Christ is said to wonder, to weep over Jerusalem, and say, "O that thou hadst known, Me." But such like passages are to be referred only to his human nature. And there is a great deal of difference between the love wherewith Christ loved this young man, and that wherewith he loved Mary, Lazarus, and their sister Martha. To illustrate this by comparison: A minister of the Lord Jesus Christ seeing many amiable dispositions, such as a readiness to hear the word, a decent behavior at public worship, and a life outwardly spotless in many, cannot but so far love them; but then there is much difference betwixt the love which a minister feels for such, and that divine love, that union and sympathy of soul, which he feels for those that he is satisfied are really born again of God. Apply this to our Lord's case, as a faint illustration of it. Consider what has been said upon the young man's case in general, and then, if before you were fond of this objection, instead of triumphing, like him you will go sorrowful away. Our Savior's reply to him more and more convinces us of the truth of the prophet's assertion in the text, that "the Lord is our righteousness."

But there is a fourth, and a grand objection yet behind, which is taken from the 25th chapter of Matthew, "where our Lord is described as rewarding people with eternal life, because they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and such-like. Their works therefore were a cause of their justification, consequently the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not agreeable to scripture."

This, I confess, is the most plausible objection that is brought against the doctrine insisted on from the text; and that we may answer it in as clear and brief a manner as may be, we confess, with the Article of the Church of England, "That albeit good works do not justify us, yet they will follow after justification, as fruits of it; and though they spring from faith in Christ, and a renewed soul, they shall receive a reward of grace, though not of debt; and consequently the more we abound in such good works, the greater will be our reward when Jesus Christ shall come to judgment."

Take these consideration along with us, and they will help us much to answer the objection now before us. For thus saith Matthew, "Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. I will therefore reward you, because you have done these things out of love to me, and hereby have evidenced yourselves to be my true disciples." And that the people did not depend on these good actions for their justification in the sight of God, is evident. "For when saw we thee an hungered, say they, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in, or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" Language, and questions, quite improper for persons relying on their own righteousness, for acceptance and acquittance in the sight of God.

But then they reply against thee: "In the latter part of the chapter, it is plain that Jesus Christ rejects and damns the others for not doing these things. And therefore, if he damns these for not doing, he saves those for doing; and consequently the doctrine of an imputed righteousness is good for nothing."

But that is no consequence at all; for God may justly damn any man for omitting the least duty of the moral law, and yet in himself is not obliged to give to any one any reward, supposing he has done all that he can. We are unprofitable servants; we have not done near so much as it was our duty to do, must be the language of the most holy souls living; and therefore, from or in ourselves, cannot be justified in the sight of God. This was the frame of the devout souls just now referred to. Sensible of this, they were so far from depending on their works for justification in the sight of God, that they were filled, as it were, with a holy blushing, to think our Lord should condescend to mention, much more to reward them for, their poor works of faith and labors of love. I am persuaded their hearts would rise with a holy indignation against those who urge this passage, as an objection to the assertion of the prophet, that "the Lord is our righteousness."

Thus, I think, we have fairly answered these grand objections, which are generally urged against the doctrine of an IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS. Was I to stop here, I think I may say, "We are made more than conquerors through him that loved us." But there is a way of arguing which I have always admired, because I have thought it always very convincing, by showing the ABSURDITIES that will follow from denying any particular proposition in dispute.

IV. This is the next thing that was proposed. And never did greater or more absurdities flow from the denying any doctrine, than will flow from denying the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness.

And FIRST, if we deny this doctrine, we turn the truth, I mean the word of God, as much as we can, into a lie, and utterly subvert all those places of scripture which say that we are saved by grace; that it is not of works, lest any man should boast, that salvation is God's free gift, and that he who glorieth, must glory only in the Lord. For, if the whole personal righteousness of Jesus Christ be not the sole cause of my acceptance with God, if any work done by or foreseen in me, was in the least to be joined with it, or looked upon by God as inducing, impulsive cause of acquitting my soul from guilt, then I have somewhat whereof I may glory in myself. Not boasting is excluded in the great work of our redemption; but that cannot be, if we are enemies to the doctrine of an imputed righteousness. It would be endless to enumerate how many texts of scripture must be false, if this doctrine be not true. Let it suffice to affirm in the general, that if we deny an imputed righteousness, we may as well deny a divine revelation all at once; for it is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end of the book of God. We must either disbelieve that, or believe what the prophet has spoken in the text, "that the Lord is our righteousness."

But further: I observed at the beginning of this discourse, that we are all Arminians and Papists by nature; for as one says, "Arminianism is the back way to popery." And here I venture further to affirming that if we deny the doctrine of an imputed righteousness, whatever we may stile ourselves, we are really Papists in our hearts; and deserve no other title from men.

Sirs, what think you? Suppose I was to come and tell you that you must intercede with saints, for them to intercede with God for you; would you not say, I was justly reputed a papist missionary by some, and deservedly thrust out of thy synagogues by others? I suppose you would. And why? Because, you would say, the intercession of Jesus Christ was sufficient of itself, without the intercession of saints, and that it was blasphemous to join theirs with his, as though he was sufficient.

Suppose I went a little more round about, and told you that the death of Christ was not sufficient, without our death being added to it; that you must die as well as Christ, join your death with his, and

then it would be sufficient. Might you not then, with a holy indignation, throw dust in the air, and justly call me a "setter forth of strange doctrines?" And how then, if it be not only absurd, but blasphemous to join the intercession of saints with the intercession of Christ, as though his intercession was not sufficient; or our death with the death of Christ, as though his death was not sufficient: judge ye, if it be not equally absurd, equally blasphemous, to join our obedience, either wholly or in part, with the obedience of Christ, as if that was not sufficient. And if so, what absurdities will follow the denying that the Lord, both as to his active and passive obedience, is our righteousness?

One more absurdity I shall mention, as following the denying this doctrine, and I have done.

I remember a story of a certain prelate, who, after many arguments in vain urged to convince the Earl of Rochester of the invisible realities of another world, took his leave of his lordship with some such words as these: "Well, my lord, if there be no hell, I am safe; but if there should be such a thing as hell, what will become of you?" I apply this so those that oppose the doctrine now insisted on. If there be no such thing as the doctrine of an imputed righteousness, those who hold it, and bring forth fruit unto holiness, are safe; but if there be such a thing (as there certainly is) what will become of you that deny it? It is no difficult matter to determine. Your portion must be in the lake of fire and brimstone for ever and ever. Since you will rely upon your works, by your works you shall be judged. They shall be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary; and they will be found wanting. By your works therefore shall you be condemned; and you, being out of Christ, shall find God, to your poor wretched souls, a consuming fire.

The great Stoddard or Northampton in New England, has therefore well entitled a book which he wrote (and which I would take this opportunity to recommend) "The Safety of appearing in the Righteousness of Christ." For why should I lean upon a broken reed, when I can have the rock of ages to stand upon, that never can be moved?

And now, before I come to a more particular application, give me leave, in the apostle's language, triumphantly to cry out, "Where is the scribe, where the disputer?" Where is the reasoning infidel of this generation? Can any thing appear more reasonable, even according to your own way of arguing, than the doctrine here laid down? Have you not felt a convincing power go along with the word? Why then will you not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that so he may become the Lord your righteousness?

But it is time for me to come a little closer to your consciences.

Brethren, though some may be offended at this doctrine, and may account it foolishness; yet, to many of you, I doubt not but it is precious, it being agreeable to the form of sound words, which from your infancy has been delivered to you; and, coming from a quarter, you would least have expected, may be received with more pleasure and satisfaction. But give me leave to ask you one question; Can you say, the Lord our righteousness? I say, the Lord OUR righteousness. For entertaining this doctrine in your heads, without receiving the Lord Jesus Christ savingly by a lively faith into your hearts, will but increase your damnation. As I have often told you, so I tell you again, an unapplied Christ is no Christ at all. Can you then, with believing Thomas, cry our, "My Lord and my God?" Is Christ your sanctification, as well as your outward righteousness? For the word righteousness, in the text, not only implies Christ's personal righteousness imputed to us, but also holiness wrought in us. These two, God has joined together. He never did, he never dies, he never will put them asunder. If you are justified by the blood, you are also sanctified by the Spirit of our Lord. Can you then in this sense say, The Lord our righteousness? Were you ever made to abhor yourselves for your actual and original sins, and to loathe your own righteousness; for, as the prophet beautifully expresses it, "your righteousness is as filthy rags? Were you ever made to see and admire the all-sufficiency of Christ's righteousness, and excited by the Spirit of God to hunger and thirst

after it? Could you ever say, my soul is athirst for Christ, yea, even for the righteousness of Christ? O when shall I come to appear before the presence of my God in the righteousness of Christ! Nothing but Christ! Nothing but Christ! Give me Christ, O god, and I am satisfied! My soul shall praise thee for ever.

Was this ever the language of your hearts? And, after these inward conflicts, were you ever enabled to reach out the arm of faith, and embrace the blessed Jesus in your souls, so that you could say, "my beloved is mine, and I am his?" If so, fear not, whoever you are. Hail, all hail, you happy souls! The Lord, the Lord Christ, the everlasting God, is your righteousness. Christ has justified you, who is he that condemneth you? Christ has died for you, nay rather is risen again, and ever liveth to make intercession for you. Being now justified by his grace, you have peace with God, and shall, ere long, be with Jesus in glory, reaping everlasting and unspeakable fruits both in body and soul. For there is no condemnation to those that are really in Christ Jesus. "Whether Paul or Apollos, or life or death, all is yours if you are Christ's, for Christ is God's. My brethren, my heart is enlarged towards you! O think of the love of Christ in dying for you! If the Lord be your righteousness, let the righteousness of your Lord be continually in your mouth. Talk of, O talk of, and recommend the righteousness of Christ, when you lie down, and when you rise up, at your going out and coming in! Think of the greatness of the gift, as well as the giver! Show to all the world, in whom you have believed! Let all by your fruits know, that the Lord is your righteousness, and that you are waiting for your Lord from heaven! O study to be holy, even as he who has called you, and washed you in his own blood, is holy! Let not the righteousness of the Lord be evil spoken of through you. Let not Jesus be wounded in the house of his friends, but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, day by day. O think of his dying love! Let that love constrain you to obedience! Having much forgiven, love much. Be always asking, What shall I do, to express my gratitude to the Lord, for giving me his righteousness? Let that self-abasing, God-exalting question be always in your mouths; "Why me, Lord? Why me?" why am I taken, and others left? Why is the Lord my righteousness? Why is he become my salvation, who have so often deserved damnation at his hands?

My friends, I trust I feel somewhat of a sense of God's distinguishing love upon my heart; therefore I must divert a little from congratulating you, to invite poor Christless sinners to come to him, and accept of his righteousness, that they may have life.

Alas, my heart almost bleeds! What a multitude of precious souls are now before me! How shortly must all be ushered into eternity! And yet, O cutting thought! Was God now to require all your souls, how few, comparatively speaking, could really say, the Lord our righteousness!

And think you, O sinner, that you will be able to stand in the day of judgment, if Christ be not your righteousness? No, that alone is the wedding garment in which you must appear. O Christless sinners, I am distressed for you! The desires of my soul are enlarged. O that this may be an accepted time! That the Lord may be your righteousness! For whither would you flee, if death should find you naked? Indeed there is no hiding yourselves from his presence. The pitiful fig-leaves of your own righteousness will not cover your nakedness, when God shall call you to stand before him. Adam found them ineffectual, and so will you. O think of death! O think of judgment! Yet a little while, and time shall be no more; and then what will become of you, if the Lord be not your righteousness? Think you that Christ will spare you? No, he that formed you, will have no mercy on you. If you are not of Christ, if Christ be not your righteousness, Christ himself shall pronounce you damned. And can you bear to think of being damned by Christ? Can you bear to hear the Lord Jesus say to you, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Can you live, think you, in everlasting burnings? Is your flesh brass, and your bones iron? What if they are? Hell-fire, that fire prepared for the devil and his angels, will heat them through and through. And can you bear to depart from Christ? O that heart-piercing thought! Ask those holy souls, who are at any time bewailing an absent God, who walk in darkness, and see no light, though but a few days or hours; ask them, what it is to lose a light and presence of Christ? See how they seek him sorrowing,

and go mourning after him all the day long! And, if it is so dreadful to lose the sensible presence of Christ only for a day, what must it be to be banished from him to all eternity!

But thus it must be, if Christ be not your righteousness. For God's justice must be satisfied; and, unless Christ's righteousness is imputed and applied to you here, you must hereafter be satisfying the divine justice in hell-torments eternally; nay, Christ himself shall condemn you to that place of torment. And how cutting is that thought! Methinks I see poor, trembling, Christless wretches, standing before the bar of god, crying out, Lord, if we must be damned, let some angel, or some archangel, pronounce the damnatory sentence: but all in vain. Christ himself shall pronounce the irrevocable sentence. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, let me persuade you to close with Christ, and never rest till you can say, "the Lord our righteousness." Who knows but the Lord may have mercy on, may, abundantly pardon you? Beg of God to give you faith; and, if the Lord gives you that, you will by it receive Christ, with his righteousness, and his All. You need not fear the greatness or number of your sins. For are you sinners? So am I. Are you the chief of sinners? So am I. Are you backsliding sinners? So am I. And yet the Lord (for ever adored be his rich, free and sovereign grace) the Lord is my righteousness. Come then, O young man, who (as I acted once myself) are playing the prodigal, and wandering away afar off from your heavenly Father's house, come home, come home, and leave your swines trough. Feed no longer on the husks of sensual delights: for Christ's sake arise, and come home! Your heavenly Father now calls you. See yonder the best robe, even the righteousness of his dear Son, awaits you. See it, view it again and again. Consider at how dear a rate it was purchased, even by the blood of God. Consider what great need you have of it. You are lost, undone, damned for ever, without it. Come then, poor, guilty prodigals, come home: indeed, I will not, like the elder brother in the gospel, be angry; no, I will rejoice with the angels in heaven. And O that God would now bow the heavens, and come down! Descend, O Son of God, descend; and, as thou hast shown in me such mercy, O let thy blessed Spirit apply thy righteousness to some young prodigals now before thee, and clothe their naked souls with thy best robe!

But I must speak a word to you, young maidens, as well as young men. I see many of you adorned, as to your bodies, but are not your souls naked? Which of you can say, the Lord is my righteousness? Which of you was ever solicitous to be dressed in this robe of invaluable price, and without which you are no better than whited sepulchers in the sight of God? Let not then so many of you, young maidens, any longer forget your chief and only ornament. O seek for the Lord to be your righteousness, or otherwise burning will soon be upon you, instead of beauty!

And what shall I say to you of a middle age, you busy merchants, you cumbered Martha's, who, with all your gettings, have not yet gotten the Lord to be your righteousness? Alas! what profit will there be of all your labor under the sun, if you do not secure this pearl of invaluable price? This one thing, so absolutely needful, that it only can stand you in stead, when all other things shall be taken from you. Labor therefore no longer so anxiously for the meat which perisheth, but henceforward seek for the Lord to be your righteousness, a righteousness that will entitle you to life everlasting. I see also many hoary heads here, and perhaps the most of them cannot say, the Lord is my righteousness. O gray-headed sinner, I could weep over you! Your gray hairs, which ought to be your crown, and in which perhaps you glory, are now your shame. You know not that the Lord is your righteousness: O haste then, haste ye, aged sinners, and seek an interest in redeeming love! Alas, you have one foot already in the grave, your glass is just run out, your sun is just going down, and it will set and leave you in an eternal darkness, unless the Lord be your righteousness! Flee then, O flee for your lives! Be not afraid. All things are possible with God. If you come, though it be at the eleventh hour, Christ Jesus will in no wise cast you out. Seek then for the Lord to be your righteousness, and beseech him to let you know, how it is that a man may be born again when he is old! But I must not forget the lambs of the flock. To feed them was one of my Lord's last commands. I know he will be angry with me, if I do not tell them, that the Lord may be their righteousness; and that of such is the kingdom of heaven. Come then, ye little children, come to Christ; the Lord Christ shall be your righteousness.

Do not think, that you are too young to be converted. Perhaps many of you may be nine or ten years old, and yet cannot say, the Lord is our righteousness: which many have said, though younger than you. Come then, while you are young. Perhaps you may not live to be old. Do not stay for other people. If your fathers and mothers will not come to Christ, do you come without them. Let children lead them, and show them how the Lord may be their righteousness. Our Lord Jesus Christ loved little children. You are his lambs; he bids me feed you. I pray God make you willing betimes to take the Lord for your righteousness.

Here then I could conclude; but I must not forget the poor negroes; no, I must not. Jesus Christ had died for them, as well as for others. Nor do I mention you last, because I despise your souls; but because I would have what I shall say, make the deeper impression upon your hearts. O that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness! Who knows but he may be found of you? For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free; even you may be the children of God, if you believe in Jesus. Did you never read of the eunuch belonging to the queen of Candace? A negro like yourselves. He believed. The Lord was his righteousness. He was baptized. Do you also believe, and you shall be saved. Christ Jesus is the same now as he was yesterday, and will wash you in his own blood. Go home then, turn the words of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to be your righteousness. Even so, come Lord Jesus, come quickly, into all our souls! Amen, Lord Jesus, Amen and Amen!