

# John Bunyan

## • Mental Conflict •

“My righteousness was  
Jesus Christ Himself.”



(1628-1688)

*John Bunyan was a man who lived for a period of years in a state of mental conflict. Under a constant barrage of accusations from the devil, he often coped with intense feelings of desperation, guilt, and fear. But his life was greatly changed one day when the Holy Spirit quickened to him a verse from the Bible in which he saw that Jesus Christ Himself was his righteousness. After this experience Bunyan began to preach Christ in Bedford, England, and as a result was imprisoned intermittently from 1660 to 1672. While in prison he wrote the well-known classic, Pilgrim's Progress. The following is a portion from his autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, in which he describes how he found Christ as his righteousness.*

THE TEMPTER BEGAN afresh to mock my soul, saying that “Christ indeed did pity my case, and was sorry for my loss; but forasmuch as I had sinned and transgressed as I had done, He could by no means help me, nor save me from what I feared; for my sin was not of the nature of theirs for whom He bled and died; neither was it counted with those that were laid to His charge when He hanged on a tree. Therefore, unless He should come down from heaven and die anew for this sin, though indeed He did greatly pity me, yet I could have no benefit of Him.”

These things may seem ridiculous to others, even as ridiculous as they were in themselves, but to me they were most tormenting cogitations; every one of them increased my misery, that Jesus Christ should have so much love as to pity me, when yet He could not help me; nor did I think that the reason why He could not help me was because His merits were weak, or His grace and salvation spent on others already, but because His faithfulness to His threatenings would not let Him extend His mercy to me. Besides, I thought, as I have already hinted, that my sin was not within the bounds of that pardon that was wrapped up in a promise; and if not, then I knew surely that it was more easy for heaven and earth to pass away than for me to have eternal life....

Thus, by the strange and unusual assaults of the tempter, my soul was like a broken vessel, driven as with

the winds, and tossed sometimes headlong into despair; sometimes upon the covenant of works, and sometimes to wish that the new covenant, and its conditions, might, so far forth as I thought myself concerned, be turned another way and changed. “But in all these I was as those that jostle against the rocks; more broken, scattered, and rent.” Oh! the unthought-of imaginations, frights, fears, and terrors that are affected by a thorough application of guilt yielding to desperation! “This is the man that has his dwelling among the tombs with the dead; that is always crying out and cutting himself with stones” (Mark 5:2-5). But I say, all in vain; desperation will not comfort him, the old covenant will not save him; nay, heaven and earth shall pass away before one jot or tittle of the Word and law of grace will fail or be removed.

This I saw, this I felt, and under this I groaned; yet this advantage I got thereby, namely, a further confirmation of the certainty of the way of salvation, and that the Scriptures were the Word of God. Oh! I cannot now express what I then saw and felt of the steadiness of Jesus Christ, the rock of man’s salvation; what was done could not be undone, added to, nor altered. I saw, indeed, that sin might drive the soul beyond Christ, even the sin which is unpardonable; but woe to him that was so driven, for the Word would shut him out.

Thus was I always sinking, whatever I did think or do. So one day I walked to a neighboring town, and sat

down upon a bench in the street, and fell into a very deep pause about the most fearful state my sin had brought me to; and, after long musing, I lifted up my head, but methought I saw as if the sun that shines in the heavens did grudge to give light; and as if the stones in the streets, and the tiles upon the houses, did bend themselves against me. Methought that they all combined together to banish me out of the world. I was abhorred of them, and unfit to dwell among them, or be partaker of their benefits, because I had sinned against the Savior. O how happy now was every creature over what I was! For they stood fast and kept their station, but I was gone and lost.

Then breaking out in the bitterness of my soul, I said to my soul, with a grievous sigh, “How can God comfort such a wretch as I am?” I had no sooner said it, but this returned upon me, as an echo does answer a voice, “This sin is not unto death.” At which I was, as if I had been raised out of the grave, and cried out again, “Lord, how could You find out such a word as this?” For I was filled with admiration at the fitness, and at the unexpectedness of the sentence; the fitness of the Word, the rightness of the timing of it, the power, and sweetness, and light, and glory, that came with it also, was marvelous to me to find; I was now, for the time, not doubting as to that about which I so much was in doubt before; my fears before were that my sin was not pardonable, and so that I had no right to pray, to repent, and so forth, or that if I did, it

would be of no advantage or profit to me.

But now, thought I, if this sin is not unto death, then it is pardonable; therefore from this I have encouragement to come to God by Christ for mercy, to consider the promise of forgiveness, as that which stands with open arms to receive me as well as others. This, therefore, was a great easement to my mind, that is to say, that my sin was pardonable, that it was not the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). None but those that know what my trouble (by their own experience) was, can tell what relief came to my soul by this consideration; it was a release to me from my former bonds, and a shelter from my former storms. I seemed now to stand upon the same ground with other sinners, and to have as good right to the Word and prayer as any of them....

But yet the tempter left me not, for it could not be so little as a hundred times, that he that day did labor to break my peace. Oh! the combats and conflicts that I did then meet with; as I strove to hold by this word, the word about Esau would fly in my face like lightning; I would be sometimes up and down twenty times in an hour; yet God did bear me out, and keep my heart upon this word; from which I had also, for several days together, very much sweetness, and comfortable hopes of pardon; for thus it was made out unto me, "I loved you while you were committing this sin, I loved you before, I love you still, and I will love you forever."...

For many there are, who in the day of grace and mercy, despise those things which are indeed the birth-right to heaven, who yet, when the declining days appear, will cry as loud as Esau, “Lord, Lord, open to us”; but then, as Isaac would not repent, no more will God the Father, but will say, “I have blessed these, yea, and they shall be blessed”; but as for you, “depart, you are workers of iniquity” (Gen. 27:33; Luke 13:25-27).

When I had thus considered these Scriptures, and found that thus to understand them was not against, but according to, other Scriptures, this still added further to my encouragement and comfort, and also gave a great blow to that objection, that is, “that the Scriptures could not agree in the salvation of my soul.” And now remained only the hinder part of the tempest, for the thunder was gone beyond me. Only some drops did still remain, that now and then would fall upon me. But because my former frights and anguish were very sore and deep, therefore it often befell me still, as it befalls those that have been scared with the fire. I thought every voice was Fire! Fire! Every little touch would hurt my tender conscience.

But one day, as I was passing into the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, “Your righteousness is in heaven”; and methought with it all, I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ

at God's right hand; there, I say, as my righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say to me that He wants my righteousness, for that was just before Him. I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Now did my chains fall off my legs indeed. I was loosed from my afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away; so that, from that time, those dreadful Scriptures of God left off to trouble me; now went I also home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God. So when I came home, I looked to see if I could find that sentence, "Your righteousness is in heaven," but could not find such a saying; wherefore my heart began to sink again, only that was brought to my remembrance, "He is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). By this word I saw the other sentence true.

For by this Scripture I saw that the man Christ Jesus, as He is distinct from us, as touching His bodily presence, so He is our righteousness and sanctification before God. Here therefore I lived, for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. Oh! methought, Christ! Christ! there was nothing but Christ that was before my eyes: I was not now only for looking upon this

and the other benefits of Christ apart, as of His blood, burial, or His resurrection, but considering Him as a whole Christ! as He in whom all these, and all other virtues, relations, offices, and operations met together, and that He sat on the right hand of God in heaven.

'Twas glorious to me to see His exaltation, and the worth and prevalency of all His benefits, and that because now I could look from myself to Him, and would reckon that all those graces of God that now were green in me, were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence-half-pennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in their trunks at home! Oh! I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ, my Lord and Savior. Now Christ was all; all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.

Further, the Lord did also lead me into the mystery of the union with the Son of God, that I was joined to Him, and that I was flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone, and now was that a sweet word unto me in Ephesians 5:30. By this also was my faith in Him, as my righteousness, the more confirmed in me; for if He and I were one, then His righteousness was mine, His merits mine, His victory also mine. Now I could see myself in heaven and earth at once; in heaven by my Christ, by my Head, by my righteousness and life, though on earth by my body or person.

Now I saw Christ Jesus was looked upon of God, and should also be looked upon by us, as that common or public person, in whom the whole Body of His elect are always to be considered and reckoned; that we fulfilled the law by Him, died by Him, rose from the dead by Him, got the victory over sin, death, and hell, by Him; when He died, we died; and so of His resurrection. “Your dead men shall live together, with my dead body shall they arise,” he says (Isa. 26:19). And again, “After two days He will revive us, and the third day we shall live in His sight” (Hos. 6:2); which is now fulfilled by the sitting down of the Son of Man on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, according to that of the Ephesians, “He has raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6).

Ah! these blessed considerations and Scriptures, with many others of like nature, were in those days made to glitter in my eye, so that I have cause to say, “Praise the Lord God in His sanctuary, praise Him in the firmament of His power: Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness” (Psa. 150:1-2).<sup>1</sup>



Like John Bunyan, you may find yourself in a state of severe mental conflict over your sinful condition

before God. What you need to see is what Bunyan saw in 1 Corinthians 1:30: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — that is, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Consider now that God has made Christ *your* righteousness. Do not seek to establish your own righteousness and to justify yourself before God, but accept Christ as the righteousness of God (Rom.10:3-4).

Isaiah 64:6 declares, “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.” Thus, what you need to do is simply follow the Word of God in Romans, which says,<sup>9</sup> “That if you *confess* with your mouth the Lord Jesus and *believe* in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, *you will be saved*.

<sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation....

<sup>13</sup> For whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved” (10:9-10, 13). By receiving Christ now and confessing His name, you will know that *your* righteousness is Jesus Christ Himself.