

1 John - Commentaries by Charles Henry Mackintosh

The Mackintosh Treasury: Vol. 1, All-Sufficiency of Christ: Part 3

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From what has already passed before us, we learn that the grand result of the work of Christ in the past is to give us a divinely perfect standing before God. "He has perfected forever them that are sanctified." He has introduced us into the Divine Presence, in all His own perfect acceptability, in the full credit and virtue of His name, of His Person, and of His work; so that, as the Apostle John declares, "As he is, so are we in this world." 1 John 4:17.

Such is the settled standing of the very feeblest lamb in all the blood-bought flock of Christ. Nor could it possibly be otherwise. It must be either this or eternal perdition. There is not the breadth of a hair between this standing of absolute perfectness before God and a condition of guilt and ruin. We are either in our sins, or in a risen Christ. There is no middle ground. We are either covered with guilt, or complete in Christ. But the believer is declared, by the authoritative voice of the Holy Ghost in scripture, to be "complete in Christ"—"Perfect, as pertaining to his conscience"—"Perfected in perpetuity"—"Clean every whit"—"Accepted in the beloved"—"Made [or become] the righteousness of God in Christ.

And all this through the sacrifice of the cross. That precious atoning death of Christ forms the solid and irrefragable foundation of the Christian's standing. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down on the right hand of God." A seated Christ is the glorious proof and the perfect definition of the believer's place in the presence of God. Our Lord Christ, having glorified God about our sins, and borne His judgment on our entire condition as sinners, has conducted us, in living association with Himself, into a place, not only of forgiveness, acceptance, and peace, but of complete deliverance from the dominion of sin—a place of assured victory over everything that could possibly be against us, whether indwelling sin, the fear of Satan, the law, or this present evil world.

Such, we repeat, is the absolutely settled standing of the believer, if we are to be taught by holy scripture. And we earnestly entreat the christian reader not to be satisfied with anything less than this. Let him not any longer accept the muddled teachings of Christendom's creeds, and its liturgical services, which only drive the soul back into the darkness, distance, and bondage of Judaism—that system which God found fault with, and which He has forever abolished, because it did not meet His holy mind, or satisfy His loving heart, in giving the worshipper perfect peace, perfect liberty, perfect nearness to Himself, and that forever.

We solemnly call upon all the Lord's people, throughout the various sections of the professing church, to consider where they are, and to see how far they understand and enjoy the true christian position, as set forth in the various passages of scripture which we have quoted, and which might easily be multiplied a hundredfold. Let them diligently and faithfully compare the teachings of Christendom with the word of God, and see how far they agree. In this way they will find how completely the professing Christianity of the present day stands in contrast with the lining teachings of the New Testament; and, as a consequence, souls are robbed of the precious privileges which belong to them as Christians, and they are kept in the moral distance which characterized the Mosaic economy.

All this is most deplorable. It grieves the Holy Spirit, wounds the heart of Christ, dishonors the grace of God, and contradicts the plainest statements of holy scripture. We are most thoroughly persuaded that the condition of thousands of precious souls at this moment is enough to make the heart bleed; and all this, to a large extent, is traceable to Christendom's teachings, its creeds and its formularies. Where will you find, amid the ordinary ranks of christian profession, a person in the enjoyment of a perfectly purged conscience, of peace with God, of the Spirit of adoption? Is it not true that people are publicly and systematically taught that it is the height of presumption for anyone to say that his sins are all forgiven—that he has eternal life—that he is justified from all things—that he is accepted in the Beloved—that he is sealed with the Holy Ghost—that he cannot be lost, because he is actually united to Christ by the indwelling Spirit? Are not all these christian privileges practically denied and ignored in Christendom? Are not people taught that it is dangerous to be too confident—that it is morally safer to live in doubt and fear—that the very utmost we can look for is the hope of getting to heaven when we die? Where are souls taught the glorious truths connected with the new creation? Where are they rooted and grounded in the knowledge of their standing in a risen and glorified Head in the heavens? Where are they led into the enjoyment of those things which are freely given of God to His beloved people?

Alas! alas! we grieve to think of the only true answer which can be given to such inquiries. The flock of Christ is scattered upon the dark mountains and desolate moors. The souls of God's people are left in the dim distance which characterized the Jewish system. They know not the meaning of the rent veil, of nearness to God, of conscious acceptance in the Beloved. The very table of the Lord is shrouded with the dark and chilling mists of superstition, and surrounded by the repulsive barriers of a dark and depressing legality. Accomplished redemption, full remission of sins, perfect justification before God, acceptance in a risen Christ, the Spirit of adoption, the bright and blessed hope of the coming of the Bridegroom—all these grand and glorious realities—these chartered privileges of the church of God—are practically set aside by Christendom's teachings and religious machinery.

Some, perhaps, may think we have drawn too gloomy a picture. We can only say—and we say it with all sincerity—would to God it were so! We fear the picture is far too true; yea, the reality is far more appalling than the picture. We are deeply and painfully impressed with the fact, that the condition, not merely of the professing church, but of thousands of the true sheep of the flock of Christ, is such, that if we only realized it as God sees it, it would break our hearts.

However, we must pursue our subject, and by so doing furnish the very best remedy that can possibly be suggested for the deplorable condition of so many of the Lord's people.

We have dwelt upon that precious work which our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, in the putting away of all our sins, and in the condemnation of sin, securing for us perfect remission of the former, and entire deliverance from the latter, as “a ruling power. The Christian is one who is not only forgiven but delivered. Christ has died for him, and he has died in Christ. Hence he is free, as one who is raised from the dead, and alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is a new creation. He has passed from death unto life. Death and judgment are behind him, and nothing but glory before him. He possesses an unblotted title and an unclouded prospect.

Now, if all this be indeed true of every child of God—and scripture says it is—what more do we want? Nothing, as to title; nothing, as to standing; nothing, as to hope. As to all these, we have absolute, divine perfection. But then our state is not perfect, our walk is not perfect. We are still in the body, compassed about with manifold infirmities, exposed to manifold temptations, liable to stumble, to fall, and to wander. We are unable of ourselves to think aright thought, or to keep ourselves for one moment in the blessed position into which grace has introduced us. True it is, we have everlasting life, and we are linked to the living Head in heaven, by the Holy Ghost sent down to earth, so that we are eternally secure. Nothing can ever touch our life, inasmuch as it is “hid with Christ in God.”

But while nothing can touch our life, or interfere with our standing, yet, seeing that our state is imperfect, and our walk imperfect, our communion is liable to be interrupted, and hence it is that we need

the present work of Christ for us.

Jesus lives at the right hand of God for us. His active intervention on our behalf never ceases for a single moment. He has passed through the heavens, in virtue of accomplished atonement, and there He ever carries on His perfect advocacy for us before our God. He is there as our subsisting righteousness, to maintain us ever in the divine integrity of the position and relationship into which His atoning death has introduced us. Thus we read, in Rom. 5:10, “If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” So also, in Heb. 4, we read, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest that has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted, in like manner, without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Again, in chapter vii.: “But this man, because he continueth forever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” And in chapter ix.: “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Then, in the first epistle of John, we have the same great subject presented under a somewhat different aspect. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any one sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not our sins only, but also for the whole world.”

How precious is all this to the true-hearted Christian who is ever conscious—deeply and painfully conscious—of his weakness, need, infirmity, and failure! How, we may lawfully inquire, is it possible for any one, with his eye resting on such passages as we have just quoted, to say nothing of his own self-consciousness, the sense of his own imperfect state and walk, to call in question the Christian's need of the unceasing ministry of Christ on his behalf? Is it not marvelous that any reader of the Epistle to the Hebrews, any observer of the state and walk of the most advanced believer, should be found denying the application of Christ's priesthood and advocacy to Christians now?

For whom, let us ask, is Christ now living and acting at the right hand of God? Is it for the world? Clearly not, for He says, in John 17, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” And who are these? Are they the Jewish remnant? Nay; that remnant is yet to appear on the scene. Who are they then? Believers, children of God, Christians, who are now passing through this sinful world, liable to fail and to contract defilement every step of the way. These are the subjects of Christ's priestly ministry. He died to make them clean. He lives to keep them clean. By His death He expiated our guilt, and by His life He cleanses us, through the action of the word by the power of the Holy Ghost. “This is he that came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood.” We have expiation and cleansing through a crucified Savior. The double stream emanated from the pierced side of Christ, dead for us. All praise to His name!

We have all, in virtue of the precious death of Christ. Is it a question of our guilt? It is canceled by the blood of atonement. Is it a question of our daily shortcomings? We have an Advocate with the Father—a great High Priest with God. “If any man sin.” He does not say, “If any man repent.” No doubt there is, and must be, repentance and self-judgment. But how are they produced? Whence do they proceed? Here it is: “We have an advocate with the Father.” It is His all-prevailing intercession that procures for the sinning one the grace of repentance, self-judgment, and confession.

It is of the very utmost importance for the christian reader to be thoroughly clear as to this great cardinal truth of the advocacy or priesthood of Christ. We sometimes erroneously think that when we fail in our work something has to be done on our part to set matters straight between our souls and God. We forget that, ere we are even conscious of the failure—before our conscience becomes really cognizant of the fact—our blessed Advocate has been to the Father about it; and it is to His intercession we are indebted for the grace of repentance, confession, and restoration. “If any man sin, we have”—what? The blood to return to? No; mark carefully what the Holy Ghost declares. “We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Why does He say, “the righteous?” Why not the gracious, the merciful, the sympathizing? Is He not all this? Most surely; but not any one of these attributes would be in place here, inasmuch as the blessed apostle is putting before us the consolatory truth, that in all our errors, our sins, and our failures, we have “a righteous” representative ever before the righteous God, the holy Father, so that our affairs can never fall through. “He ever liveth to make intercession for us;” and because He ever liveth, “He is able to save to the uttermost”—right through to the very end—“them that come unto God by him.”

What solid comfort is here for the people of God! And how needful for our souls to be established in the knowledge and sense of it. Some there are who have an imperfect sense of the true standing of a Christian, because they do not see what Christ has done for them in the past. Others, on the contrary, have such an entirely one-sided view of the state of the Christian, that they do not see our need of what Christ is doing for us now. Both must be corrected. The former are ignorant of the extent and value of the atonement; the latter are ignorant of the place and application of the advocacy. Such is the perfection of our standing, that the apostle can say, “As he is, so are we in this world.” If this were all, we should certainly have no need of priesthood or advocacy. But then, such is our state, that the apostle has to say, “If any man

sin." This proves our continual need of the Advocate. And, blessed be God, we have Him continually; we have Him ever living for us. He lives and serves on high.

He is our subsisting righteousness before our God. He lives to keep us always right in heaven, and to set us right when we go wrong upon earth. He is the divine and indissoluble link between our souls and God.

Answers to Correspondents: From Things New and Old 1858-1863, 28. Cleansing by the Word

We have received a communication from "Two interested Readers," dated, "Montrose, February 15th." In reply, we beg to refer our dear friends to two passages of Scripture, which we think will meet their difficulty. The first is Psalm 119:9, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word." The second is Ephesians 5:26: "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." It is not correct to speak of "sin being taken away by the word." Nothing could take away sins but the blood of Christ. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). In John 19:34, we read, that "One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water." So also in 1 John 5:6, "This is He that came by water and blood [Jesus Christ]; not by water only, but by water and blood."

From all these passages we learn, that while expiation or atonement can only be effected by blood, yet there is a cleansing or purifying virtue in the word, when applied to the heart in the power of the Holy Spirit; but, inasmuch as both the water and the blood came out of a crucified Christ, so expiation and cleansing are founded upon the death of Christ for us.

The red heifer in Numbers 19 furnishes a striking and instructive type of the death of Christ, in its application to one who has become defiled in any way. When an Israelite had become defiled by contact with a dead body, the ashes of the red heifer, with running water, were sprinkled upon him to cleanse him. It was not needful to offer a fresh sacrifice, but merely to apply the memorial of a sacrifice which had been offered. Thus it is with a believer, who has failed and contracted defilement. The Spirit of God, by the Word, brings, in fresh power to his remembrance, the value—the power—the cleansing efficacy of that precious sacrifice that was once offered. It does not need to be repeated, but only to be remembered in the power of the Holy Spirit. What a divine provision for those who, while passing through this wilderness, are exposed to various defiling influences! May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with profound thankfulness.

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