

Relations of Christ to the Believer

by Charles Finney

Christ becomes our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption by uniting himself with us and working in us by the influence of his Spirit through his truth.

Scripture: John 15:5, Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 4:13

Topics: "Salvation", "Union with Christ"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the profound relationship between Christ and the believer, explaining that Christ embodies our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He outlines the necessity of recognizing our own helplessness and the perfection of Christ's provisions for our salvation. Finney stresses that true faith involves a complete renunciation of self and a heartfelt acceptance of Christ in all His fullness. He warns against the dangers of self-reliance and the misconception of salvation as merely imputed righteousness, urging believers to embrace a living union with Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a ministry that preaches the true gospel, which is Christ living within us, transforming our lives.

Transcript

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30

In speaking from this text, I shall,

I. DEFINE BRIEFLY THE TERMS USED;

II. SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN CHRIST'S BEING MADE UNTO US WISDOM, RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION AND REDEMPTION;

III. SHOW HOW HE BECOMES OUR WISDOM &C. &,

IV. THE CONDITIONS ON OUR PART OF HIS ASSUMING THESE RELATIONS TO US.

I. Define briefly the terms used.

1. Wisdom is a comprehensive term often used in the scriptures to denote true religion. Perhaps no other more strictly philosophical definition of true religion can be given than this--it is wisdom;--acting wisely, in view of all known truth which is important to our welfare. All who are truly wise will of course reverence and

obey God.

Some commentators have supposed that wisdom is here put first in order, that it may cover the whole ground, being a comprehensive term which may include all that pertains to human salvation. Such would read the next word, "and," even; thus--Christ is made unto us wisdom, yea, even righteousness, sanctification and redemption. All these are comprehended in his being our wisdom. Or the meaning may be according to the common interpretation--Christ imparts to us each moment the wisdom we need in daily life. As his own words--"If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally."

"Righteousness" denotes justification, acceptance with God. This is the meaning of the term as often used in the scriptures.

"Sanctification" means holiness; the being made pure from sin, and becoming holy as God is holy.

"Redemption," as a part of the scheme of salvation stands intimately connected with our being justified and sanctified. Its figure supposes us to have been slaves of sin, and to be bought off from this state of slavery by Jesus. Henceforth, we are no longer held under either the curse of the law, or the control of sin.

Thus these various terms when all employed as in our text, denote salvation from sin itself and from all its penal consequences.

We are next to consider,

II. What is implied in Christ's being made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

1. It implies our own fallen and helpless state. Christ would not become our wisdom if we were wise enough of ourselves. He never would become our righteousness if we could be righteous before God without him. Nor would he be our sanctification if we were not so wholly polluted as to need divine cleansing; so hopelessly unclean that no efforts of our own either would be made, or could if made avail to transform us from utter pollution to intrinsic purity of heart. He would not have given himself for our redemption if we had not been fearfully enslaved, past the power of self-effected emancipation. Thus all just views of Christ's work serve to abase man, for they show that Christ becomes all in all to us because we are nothing and meaner than nothing in ourselves.

2. It is also implied that we have in him a perfect wisdom, a perfect righteousness, sanctification and redemption. If God presents us his own eternal Son as a supply for some specific want of ours, we may rest assured that the supply is perfect. The source is exhaustless. It is both adapted to meet the existing want and is amply adequate. If God should raise up to any one of us a Solon or a Solomon to be our wisdom, the supply might be valuable to the extent of their ability to teach us--but no further. If God gives us Christ, the supply must be just as perfect as Christ's own ability. So also, if Christ should give us some heavenly-minded saint, say from the upper world, to stand by us, and come into the closest relation to us which is possible for a heavenly and an earthly saint to sustain, in order that this saint might be our sanctification--then he would be worth just as much to us as he could do. His ability to effect our sanctification, would be the measure of his value to us. So of Christ. He is a perfect sanctifier, because he is able to "keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy;" because, "he gave himself for the church that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it might be holy and without blemish." This last passage shows that this cleansing is effected by means of "the washing of

water by the word;" agencies which pertain to the present state. Of course the present is the state in which the sanctifying work takes place; unless it be already effected, none can see God in heaven. So also is Christ a perfect Redeemer. All that redemption can do for enslaved and accursed man--all that is need to do, if fully done by Christ.

3. It is implied that this wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, provided for us in Christ are such as God can accept. If we become righteous through Christ's righteousness, God will accept us. If sanctified in this way, our sanctification will be acceptable to God. If redeemed, God endorses the redemption-act, and we are held slaves no longer. This must follow of course. The scheme of God's own providing, when legitimately received by us according to the true intent of the provision, God cannot disown and reject. God cannot accept our own righteousness, but will accept of Christ's. Our own self-made sanctification can never be worthy of his acceptance, but that wrought in us by an indwelling Christ, the Father can and will approve.

4. Let it not be forgotten, that God has made Christ our wisdom, righteousness and sanctification, and that Christ has accepted the office,--has undertaken the work. Of course nothing less than perfectly ample provisions are afforded for our being wise, righteous, sanctified and redeemed.

III. We next inquire how Christ is to become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

It is manifestly one thing for God to set him apart for these purposes; another thing for Christ to be willing to undertake; and yet another for him actually to become so to any individual of the race.

1. Not by imputation. Many have supposed, strangely enough, that Christ works out a perfect righteousness in himself, not in us, and then makes it over to us so that by imputation it becomes ours. He first becomes holy, wise and righteous himself, and then accounts this holiness, wisdom, and righteousness ours, by some process of transfer, which, however, makes it ours not by causing us to be holy, wise, or righteous, but only by causing us to be so regarded.

This seems to be exceedingly unlike the true gospel system. The gospel scheme of salvation manifestly contemplates a real change wrought in the soul from folly to wisdom, from sin to holiness, from unrighteousness to righteousness.

2. Christ does become our wisdom and righteousness by uniting himself with us. It is not merely by entering into a covenant relation as some have supposed, but by entering into an actual relation of the most intimate sort; as the Bible often expresses it, by entering into us and dwelling in us, so that we are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

3. Having really entered into us in this spiritual union, Christ works in us by the influence of his Spirit through his truth, thus enlightening our intelligence, molding our hearts, chastening our temper, and transforming us into his own image. In the language of the Bible, he "works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is not strange that by such a union, and by means of such influences exerted upon our souls, he should become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

4. Contemplating righteousness and redemption in their strictly technical meaning, Christ becomes our righteousness and redemption by presenting us to the Father as redeemed through his blood and thus made right in the eye of law, the punishment due for our sins being set aside in consideration of Christ's having suffered enough to answer all the ends of public justice under the government of God.

Consequently we appear before the great King of the universe, not as self-redeemed, but as redeemed by Christ--not as self-justified, but as justified only through the righteousness of Christ.

Again, in this spiritual union formed between Christ and the believer, Christ takes possession of our faculties and so controls them with his gracious influences that he rescues us from the power of temptation, and delivers us from the law of sin which is in our members. The Bible represents our very bodies as being emancipated from the thralldom of sin and [S]satan. We become temples of the Holy Ghost, and so united to Christ that he says "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."

Such being our relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, is it any wonder that we should be accepted of the Father? It being most evident that we are thus accepted not for our sakes, but for Christ's sake; not for our righteousness but for his; nor for any thing in us which is primarily ours, but for every thing in Him.

Now however curiously we may inquire about the philosophy of our union with Christ--however we may push our inquiries to learn how one mind can dwell in and thus control another, or how the vicarious death of one being may avail for the pardon and life of another; there may still remain points about the subject to us inexplicable, and yet there should not therefore attach to them a doubt of their reality. There may be realities in the spiritual world and in the vast government of God which our short vision cannot fathom. The strong presumption is that there should be more in the universe than we can fully know to-day.

IV. We are next to consider the conditions on which Christ becomes our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

1. A full renunciation of ourselves. While we are trying to gain access to God and acceptance by ourselves, we are of course rejecting Christ, and he will of course reject us. It is all vain to expect success in this way. Our works and our persons will be alike rejected while we disown Christ and cleave to our own merits and righteousness. Why should it not be so? Our own works, out of Christ, are worthless; they are never right in themselves except as Christ works in us to make us do right. And as to pardon, there is nothing that we can do which approximates towards making an atonement for our sin on the ground of which God can remit the penalty of death eternal.

Whether therefore we think to merit a pardon, or to make ourselves so holy without Christ as to be accepted of God, we shall utterly fail. We must become quite empty of ourselves if we would be filled with Christ, and surely we must be filled with Christ if we would be right with God.

2. It is essential that we apprehend Christ as being our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and understand what is meant by these precious words. We must know in some good degree what is meant by the oft-recurring language of the Bible which represents Christ as being our Life,--Christ our Light,--Christ our All; which affirms that Christ is in us--dwells in us and is our sanctification. Until we understand these passages intellectually, we cannot believe in Christ and receive him in these relations. Faith begins with the intelligence; hence the idea must be in some measure developed in our minds before we can put forth moral efforts to realize this state in our own experience.

3. There must be a hungering and thirsting after Christ--a state of mind ripe for giving up every thing that stands in the way of receiving Christ. We must be ready to renounce self altogether and put the Lord Jesus Christ on the vacant throne. Christ must take the place so long held by self.

During my ministry I have seen striking cases of persons who have groped a long time after Christ as if they were ready to embrace him if they might find him, but yet when the idea of embracing Christ came to be fully developed, and they saw what it really was, they drew suddenly back and would not embrace such a Savior on such conditions. Before, they thought themselves quite ready and anxious to get such a Savior as they supposed Christ to be; but when they saw how much self-denial and self-renunciation were implied in receiving Christ, they turned away like the young man in the gospel history--"sorrowful--for he had great possessions." How could he make up his mind to give them all away?

Thus many are very often deceived. They think themselves quite ready to receive Christ. They suppose themselves really to thirst for gospel salvation, and think that surely if they could see it and find it they are of course ready to embrace it;--but let me tell you, my own experience testifies that this does not follow of course. I know that some may be greatly anxious for relief and apparently most ready to receive it; and yet when they come to see how much self renunciation it demands, they draw back. Hence a positive readiness to welcome Christ though at the utter sacrifice of self and of all that is dear to self is an indispensable condition of receiving him.

4. If Christ is received at all by us in all these relations, it must be as a whole--a whole Savior, one who delivers us from all sin, one who demands absolute and universal self-renunciation. It must be understood that every sinful indulgence must be crucified, and Christ become all in all to our life and happiness.

5. The great, comprehensive condition is faith--that act of the mind which receives Christ for all that he is offered--as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is faith on our part which consummates this blessed union between our soul and Christ. Christ has of a long time been ready to enter into this relation to us; and now the moment the soul commits itself to him and truly yields up to receive Christ in all his relations, the thing is done: Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It is impossible that this union of our soul with Christ should take place without faith on our part. Christ may be at hand--may reveal himself to the soul and show us what he stands ready to do for us; yet if we do not voluntarily receive him, he does not become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

6. In order that Christ may become our wisdom, we must receive him for all that he is. We must really cease to trust in our own wisdom and practically rely entirely upon his. So we must receive him as our righteousness, sanctification and redemption, taking him alone for the full supply of every want in all these respects, and utterly renouncing ourselves as at all sufficient to do of ourselves what Christ is provided to do for us.

Remarks.

1. It may be proper to present in few words the true idea of salvation through Christ: namely, Christ living and reigning in the soul; a vital union between a living God and the very soul of the believer. This is the very thing which Christ so beautifully and forcibly illustrated by the figure of the vine and its branches. As the branch is in the vine and cannot live and be fruitful unless it be, so no more can we except we abide in Christ.

2. It is remarkable to see to what an extent the Church has lost the true idea of faith and union with Christ, and how nearly they have lost sight of that which is the very soul of the whole gospel. The Old School hold that Christ's salvation is something imputed to us; not a living union, effected by Christ's dwelling within us, but a something made and done by Christ, and reckoned ours by imputation, that is, by being so regarded.

The New School hold no such ideas, but hold simply that we are forgiven through the atonement of Christ, and then as to salvation from sin, we must work that out ourselves. Yes, some of their great leaders say, if you want to become free from sin, you must work for it. This is the very language of Dr. Chalmers in his commentary on Romans. After arguing forcibly and at length the doctrine of imputed holiness and righteousness, he asks; "How shall we get personal holiness and righteousness?" He answers, "I tell you, you must work for it."

Precisely the same answer was given by the Synod of New York and New Jersey. They maintained strenuously, that personal sanctification must be got simply by working for it; they use the very language of Dr. Chalmers.

What a development this of the fallen doctrine of the church! Instead of receiving Christ for holiness, they put our own works in his place. Nothing is said, apparently nothing is believed concerning a living union between the soul and God, whereby a mighty transformation is wrought and fruit brought forth to God: this view seems to be entirely lost, or overlooked; imputed righteousness is made to answer for pardon, and then as for personal holiness, "you must work it out."

3. A full salvation is equally open to all, to all of every grade, of all ranks of society; a door is set wide open, and whoever will, may rise and enter. The whole of this salvation is open to each and all. When self is rejected and Christ received, you have the whole of it, nothing more remains. The rich, and the poor, the free and the bond, may have it all on these only conditions.

4. This great and full salvation may be received by any and by all, now, at this very moment. Let me ask the impenitent sinner in this house; Did you suppose when you came here this morning that it was possible for you to be as really saved and blessed to-day as the purest soul on earth is? Did you not suppose that the work was too difficult, and the time requisite for doing it so long that you must of course delay till some more convenient season; till some season less filled up with studies, business occupations, &c? Did you suppose it possible to be fully saved from sin and death at once?

But you say, must I not work? Must I not be convicted, and thus get ready for a work of grace? Oh, sinner; you do not understand the great simplicity of the gospel system. But you must understand it, or never come to Christ at all. You think you must work much and long; but no mistake can be greater. God wants not those works of yours; he will accept of Christ, but not of your works; you might go about till doomsday to get ready, and not even approach the subject. In this way you never begin, you make not the least advance. God does not ask of you any of those works; he can receive nothing but Christ, and he offers you Christ to-day. Christ on the cross, your pardon; Christ in your soul, your sanctification; this is all, and when you accept of him in all his relations, the work is done; until you do, nothing is done at all. God will no sooner accept you out of Christ, than he would accept the Devil. He will no sooner accept at your hands one thing than another; your prayers no sooner than your curses; your reading the Bible, no sooner than your reading Tom Thumb; your going to church, than your going to a brothel--all is odious, abominable, shocking to him, only as seen in Christ. Abandon then forever the idea that you must make these preparations. All are of no use, only that you may thus use up all your own efforts and learn that you must renounce them all, utterly, and forever. Will you push your prayers and your self-righteousness into the very face of God? will you set yourself up to merit his favor? Horrible!

"O my God, said a sister, who had long been fasting and praying and had worn herself all out; O Lord, said she, I give it all up, I leave it all; I cast it all away; Jesus is all my salvation; this is enough; I want nothing

more; I put away all things but Christ; let me have Christ only, and Christ forever."

But perhaps some sinner will say; "Must I not first be converted? You are urging Christ on me before I am converted."

Sinner, what is it to begin? What is it to be converted? Conversion is the very thing I am talking about. Paul did not say to the Jailer, go and pray--go and read the Bible--do penance; but go at once and believe on Christ--believe, believe now.

So sinner, Paul says to you, now; all the things you would do before you come to Christ are of no use. You might work hard, but like the boatman in the rapids of Niagara, despite of your hard rowing you would go over the falls.

5. From what has been said, it can be easily seen why so few embrace the gospel. If this entire self-renunciation is an indispensable condition of receiving Christ, then the reception of Christ has met with two obstacles; often this condition has not been thoroughly preached and insisted on; and again, when it has been, many have stumbled upon it, and could not receive Christ on such terms.

6. The true and glorious idea of the gospel being left out, men have of course been left in bondage to sin. How could they be saved when they were not told that they must receive Christ as of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption?

7. This view of the subject presents the most adequate remedy for our necessities; the only thing that can really save our souls. Let me inquire of those in this house who have made great efforts. Did not those efforts leave you in a yet more wretched state, except when Christ was with you, and led you to receive him alone? What did all your other efforts avail? Oh! some of you can say, I know what this fruitless toil means; I have tried it all, and got into the experience described in the 7th chapter of Romans, and there I groaned out, "O wretched man that I am;" and there I found nothing but wretchedness and fruitless struggles till I went forward and found peace, and no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

8. Hitherto the mass of the church have gone only into the 7th of Romans, and then have floundered along, plunging deep in the mire like Bunyan's pilgrim in the slough of despond, toiling, agonizing. O, what cases of agony you would find if you were to go about the churches. I can not tell you how much my soul has been agonized as I have found such multitudes, confused, confounded, agonized, crying out, "O wretched man;" and all this time supposing that this is the highest attainable state of experience in this present world, and the very state in which Paul was when he wrote the epistle. Alas, if God had really doomed the church to such a life till death comes for their relief! Alas, yet more if the Church dooms herself to such a living death, when God has provided so simple and immediate a deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord!

9. It is infinitely dangerous to mistake the true idea of the gospel. The more I see the real state of the Church, the more I am perplexed to conceive how the Church can be saved in such a state of darkness and unbelief.

10. How infinitely important that a ministry be raised up to go out and preach this true, and whole gospel; O, how much good one such minister may do! Let him go where he will, he will find not a few who are crying out in agony, O wretched man! If he can only reveal to them a living, redeeming Savior, what a work he may achieve! O, is it not time, young men, to be awake to these things? Will you not get hold of this

glorious gospel yourselves, and then go out and tell the churches its glories, and its power to save? But, alas, there is a young student, yes, perhaps a theological student; he goes out and lectures; not on the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, but on Mesmerism and Phrenology! Horrible!! Instead of preaching to the churches a full salvation and leading forth her desponding sons and daughters into glorious liberty, he goes about manipulating heads and working upon the nerves of some pale invalid--Alas! I cannot tell you how much my soul has been agonized to think that there ever could be a Theological student here who could do this! O let him only be full of Christ, so full of Christ that he can think and talk about nothing else, and he will lecture on something very different from Mesmerism and Phrenology. Let all these young men be filled with Christ, and this Institution can shake the world! When every student is full of this one great idea, and every professor also; and every Christian in this church; then let it pour forth abroad like waves of light and glory over all the land. O, hast that day of salvation!

11. Many have put faith in the soul in the place of Christ in the soul. Now Christ is received by faith, but Christ in the soul, and faith in the soul, are very different things. We never should rest till our faith be such as really receives Christ into the soul; then we shall have Christ there and not faith only.

12. We may see the relation of faith to sanctification. Faith must take the lead in all truly gospel exercises. Faith receives Christ, and then Christ becomes our sanctification. Christ once received in the soul, then works in us to will and to do, develops every grace, and leads us along to the stature of perfect men.

Let no one stumble at the mystery of Christ in the soul, achieving there the work of salvation. I have often injured my own soul by philosophizing about the work of faith; but now I have learned that Christ is my all, that Christ received within us works in us and effects all that need be wrought.

13. It is easy to see why this doctrine is regarded by many in the Church as so mysterious. It is because they still hold on to the notion of self-sanctification; sanctification by faith or by works, without Christ. They are in great agony, they toil hard; and no wonder; they have not the true gospel. They are working out their salvation without Christ.

15. It is a present and universal duty to receive Christ thus. All who do not are living in sin. Whatever they may think of themselves, they are in bondage to the flesh and to Satan.

Beloved, if you live in sin, you will die in sin, and whither Christ goes, you cannot come. You are rejecting Christ, and you can have no salvation out of him. Verily there can be no salvation without receiving Christ into the soul as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

Now, if this be so, what is the state of many professors of religion here? Many of you have not received Christ by a living faith--you have no rest in Christ--no rest any where. Until you find Christ, you have not found the true gospel, nor its salvation. You are living, not in Christ, but in yourself. You are not conscious of having eternal life actually in your possession. You do not realize its vital, sin-subduing, soul-purifying power. And will you rest there? Can you?

I am afraid that very many of this congregation have not the power of the gospel in them. That young man who can go out and preach nothing better than Phrenology and Mesmerism; is his soul running over with the flood tides of the gospel? Do you think that young men, if their souls were filled with the love of Christ, could go about and lecture on politics? Nay, truly; Could they go out and tell people how to vote for President if their own souls were full of Christ, and they knew that many hundreds and thousands abroad in the land are stranger to the glorious gospel of a full salvation.

O, it does seem to me that we are crazy if we will not wake up to the fact that the Church knows not Christ, and that Christ must be held forth in his fullness before his gospel can become truly the power of God unto salvation to the souls of the Church.

O, I am constrained to believe that very many now here know not this glorious gospel yet! Their souls do not teem with the subject. O, how I want to see every student here, and every man and woman in this place in a blaze! Then might this Church begin to be the light of the world. Who will not pray God that his own mighty power may come down and abide upon our Zion.

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