The Lord our Righteousness
by George Whitefield (1714-1770)
Jer. 23:6

1. The Text Opened
   A. Jeremiah 23:6

   a) Self-righteousness is the most common evil that was ever yet seen under the sun.
      (1) An evil, that in any age, especially in these dregs of time in which we live, cannot sufficiently be inveighed against.
      (2) The doctrines of grace, especially the personal, ALL-SUFFICIENT RIGHTEOUSNESS of Jesus, is but too seldom, too slightly mentioned.

2. 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.
   a) 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?
      (1) 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.
      (2) And the skins of the beasts thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were by this taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the Lamb of God.

3. This is it which is meant, when we are told, ‘Abraham believed on the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”
   a) 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.’

4. Consider who we are to understand by the word Lord.
   a) The Lord our righteousness.
   b) For the person mentioned in the text, under the character of the Lord, is Jesus Christ.
   c) 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.
      (1) 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.”
      (2) By the righteous branch, all agree, that we are to understand Jesus Christ.
         (a) He it is that is called the Lord in our text.
         (b) 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.
      (3) 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.
      (4) 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. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: The righteousness of Jesus Christ is given to penitent sinners through imputation.

1. For it pleased God, after he had made all things by the word of his power, to create man after his own image.
   a) And so infinite was the condescension of the high and lofty One, who inhabits 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, on condition of an unsinning obedience, to give them immortality and eternal life.
   b) 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 of it, he should surely live.
   c) The 3rd chapter of Genesis gives us a full, but mournful account, how our first parents broke this covenant, and by this stood in need of a better righteousness than their own, in order to procure their future acceptance with God.
      (1) For what must they do?
      (2) They were as much under a covenant of works as ever.
         (a) 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.
   d) Here then opens the amazing scene of DIVINE PHILANTHROPY; I mean, God's love to man.
      (1) For behold, what man could not do, Jesus Christ, the Son of his Father's love, undertakes to do for him.
      (2) 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.
      (3) In that nature he obeyed, and by this fulfilled the whole moral law in our stead; and also died a painful death upon the cross, and by this became a curse for, or instead of, those whom the Father had given to him.
      (4) As God, he satisfied, at the same time that he obeyed and suffered as man; and, being God and man in one person, he worked out a full, perfect, and sufficient righteousness for all to whom it was to be imputed.

2. Here then we see the meaning of the word righteousness.
   a) It implies the active as well as passive obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ.
   b) 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.
   c) Christ is not such a Savior as becomes us, unless we join both together.
   d) Christ not only died, but lived, not only suffered, but obeyed for, or instead of, poor sinners.
      (1) 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.
e) 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.
f) This is what he elsewhere terms, 'our being made the righteousness of God in him.'
g) 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.

B. The next thing proposed is to show the absurdity of denying this.

1. 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.

2. 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 glories, must glory only in the Lord.

a) 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 an in inducing, impulsive cause of acquitting my soul from guilt, then I have somewhat whereof I may glory in myself.

b) 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.

c) It would be endless to enumerate how many texts of scripture must be false, if this doctrine be not true.

d) 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.

(1) We must either disbelieve that, or believe what the prophet has spoken in the text, 'that the Lord is our righteousness.'

(2) We are all Arminians and Papists by nature; for as one says, 'Arminianism is the back way to popery.'

(3) 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.

(a) Sirs, what think you?

(b) 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?

(c) I suppose you would.

(d) And why?

(e) 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.

(4) 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.

(a) 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?

III. The Text Applied

A. 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?"

1. "Where is the reasoning infidel of this generation?
   a) Can any thing appear more reasonable, even according to your own way of arguing, than the doctrine here laid down?
   b) Have you not felt a convincing power go along with the word?
      (1) Why then will you not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that so he may become the Lord your righteousness?

2. But it is time for me to come a little closer to your consciences.
   a) 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.
      (1) But give me leave to ask you one question; Can you say, the Lord our righteousness?
      (2) I say, the Lord OUR righteousness.
      (3) 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.
   b) As I have often told you, so I tell you again, an unapplied Christ is no Christ at all.
      (1) Can you then, with believing Thomas, cry out, 'My Lord and my God?'
         (a) Is Christ your sanctification, as well as your outward righteousness?
         (b) For the word righteousness, in the text, not only implies Christ's personal righteousness imputed to us, but also holiness worked in us.
         (c) These two, God has joined together.
         (d) He never did, he never dies, he never will put them asunder.

3. If you are justified by the blood, you are also sanctified by the Spirit of our Lord.
   a) Can you then in this sense say, The Lord our righteousness?
   b) 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?'
   c) 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?
   d) Could you ever say, my soul is athirst for Christ, yea, even for the righteousness of Christ?
e) 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 you forever.

(1) Was this ever the language of your hearts?

4. 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?’

a) If so, fear not, whoever you are.
b) Hail, all hail, you happy souls! The Lord, the Lord Christ, the everlasting God, is your righteousness.
c) Christ has justified you, who is he that condemns you?

(1) Christ has died for you, no, rather is risen again, and ever lives to make intercession for you.
(2) 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.
(3) For there is no condemnation to those that are really in Christ Jesus.
(4) ‘Whether Paul or Apollos, or life or death, all is yours if you are Christ’s, for Christ is God’s.’

5. My brethren, my heart is enlarged towards you! O think of the love of Christ in dying for you!

a) If the Lord is your righteousness, let the righteousness of your Lord be continually in your mouth.
b) 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!

(1) Think of the greatness of the gift, as well as the giver!
(2) Show to all the world, in whom you have believed!
(3) Let all by your fruits know, that the Lord is your righteousness, and that you are waiting for your Lord from heaven!
(4) O study to be holy, even as he who has called you, and washed you in his own blood, is holy!
(5) Do not let the righteousness of the Lord be evil spoken of through you.
(6) Do not let 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.

(a) O think of his dying love!
(b) Let that love constrain you to obedience!
(c) Having much forgiven, love much.
c) Be always asking, What shall I do, to express my gratitude to the Lord, for giving me his righteousness?

(1) Let that self-abasing, God-exalting question be always in your mouths; ‘Why me, Lord? Why me?’ why am I taken, and others left?

(a) Why is the Lord my righteousness?
(b) Why is he become my salvation, who have so often deserved damnation at his hands?

6. 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.

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