

A PEACEFUL CONSCIENCE

*Is your conscience at peace? Only Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
can bring peace to our guilty and sin-defiled consciences.*

By J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

CHRIST, in one word, has lived for the true Christian. Christ has died for him. Christ has gone to the grave for him. Christ has risen again for him. Christ has ascended on high for him and gone into heaven to intercede for his soul. Christ has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful for his redemption. Hence arises the true Christian's justification—hence his peace. In himself, there is nothing; but in Christ he has all things that his soul can require (Col 2:3; 3:11).

Who can tell the blessedness of the exchange that takes place between the true Christian and the Lord Jesus Christ! Christ's righteousness is placed upon him, and his sins are placed upon Christ. Christ has been reckoned a sinner for his sake, and now he is reckoned innocent for Christ's sake. Christ has been condemned for his sake though there was no fault in Him, and now he is acquitted for Christ's sake, though he is covered with sins, faults, and shortcomings. Here is wisdom indeed! God can now be just and yet pardon the ungodly. Man can feel that he is a sinner, and yet have a good hope of heaven and feel peace within. Who among men could have imagined such a thing? Who ought not to admire it when he hears it? (2Co 5:21).

We read in gospel history of a display of love...We read of Jesus, the Son of God, coming down to a world of sinners, who neither cared for Him before He came nor honored Him when He appeared. We read of Him going down to the prison house and submitting to be bound, that we the poor prisoners might be able to go free. We read of Him becoming obedient to death—and that the death of the cross—that we the unworthy children of Adam might have a door opened to life everlasting. We read of Him being content to bear our sins and carry our transgressions that we might wear His righteousness and walk in the light and liberty of the sons of God (Phi 2:8, 15).

This may well be called a love that “passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:19)! In no way could free grace ever have shone so brightly as in the way of *justification by Christ* (Eph 3:19).

This is *the old way* by which alone the children of Adam who have been justified from the beginning of the world have found their peace. From Abel downwards, no person has ever had one drop of mercy except through Christ. To Him every altar that was raised before the time of Moses was intended to point. To Him every sacrifice and ordinance of the Jewish law was meant to direct the children of Israel. Of Him all the prophets testified. In a word, if you lose sight of justification by Christ, a large part of the Old Testament Scripture will become an unmeaning, tangled maze.

This is the way of justification that exactly *meets the wants and requirements of human nature*. There is a conscience left in man, although he is a fallen being. There is a dim sense of his own need, which in his better moments will make itself heard, and which nothing but Christ can satisfy. So long as his conscience is not hungry, any religious toy will satisfy a man’s soul and keep him quiet. But once let his conscience become hungry, and nothing will quiet him but spiritual food—and no food but Christ.

There is something within a man when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, **“There must be a price paid for my soul, or no peace.”** At once, the gospel meets him with Christ. Christ has already paid a ransom for his redemption. Christ has given Himself for him. Christ has redeemed him from the curse of the law, being made a curse for him (Gal 2:20; 3:13).

There is something within a man when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, **“I must have some righteousness or title to heaven, or no peace.”** At once, the gospel meets him with Christ. He has brought in an “everlasting righteousness” (Dan 9:24). He “is the end of the law for righteousness” (Rom 10:4). His name is called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6). God has “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21).

There is something within a man when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, **“There must be punishment and suffering because of my sins, or no peace.”** At once, the gospel meets him with Christ. Christ hath suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, to bring him to God (1Pe 3:18). He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. By His stripes we are healed (1Pe 2:24).

There is something within a man when his conscience is really awake, which whispers, **“I must have a priest for my soul, or no peace.”** At once, the gospel meets him with Christ. Christ is sealed and appointed by God the Father to be the Mediator between Himself and man. He is the ordained Advocate for sinners. He is the accredited Counsel-

lor and Physician of sick souls. He is the great High Priest, the Almighty Absolver, the Gracious Confessor of heavy-laden sinners (1Ti 2:5; Heb 8:1).

I know there are thousands of professing Christians who see no peculiar beauty in this doctrine of justification by Christ. Their hearts are buried in the things of the world. Their consciences are paralyzed, benumbed, and speechless. But whenever a man's conscience begins really to feel and speak, he will see something in Christ's atonement and priestly office that he never saw before. Light does not suit the eye nor music the ear more perfectly than Christ suits the real wants of a sinful soul. Hundreds can testify that the experience of a converted heathen in a certain island in the South Pacific Ocean has been exactly their own. "I saw," he said, "an immense mountain, with precipitous sides, up which I endeavored to climb, but when I had attained a considerable height, I lost my hold and fell to the bottom. Exhausted with perplexity and fatigue, I went to a distance and sat down to weep; and while weeping, I saw a drop of blood fall upon that mountain, and in a moment, it was dissolved." He was asked to explain what all this meant. "That mountain," he said, "was my sins; and that drop which fell upon it was one drop of the precious blood of Jesus, by which the mountain of my guilt was melted away."

This is the one true way of peace: ***justification by Christ***. Beware lest any turn you out of this way and lead you into any of the false doctrines of the Church of Rome. Alas, it is astonishing to see how that [tradition] has built a house of error so close to the house of truth! Hold fast the truth of God about justification and be not deceived. Listen not to anything you may hear about other mediators and helpers to peace. Remember there is no *mediator* but one—Jesus Christ; no *purgatory* for sinners but one—the blood of Christ; no *sacrifice* for sin but one—the sacrifice once made on the cross; no *works* that can merit anything but the work of Christ; no *priest* that can truly absolve but Christ. Stand fast here and be on your guard. Give not the glory due to Christ to another.

What do you know of Christ? I doubt not you have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear...You are acquainted perhaps with the story of His life and death. But what experiential knowledge do you have of Him? What practical use do you make of Him? What dealings and transactions have there been between your soul and Him?

Oh, believe me, *there is no peace with God except through Christ*! Peace is His peculiar gift. Peace is the legacy that He alone had power to leave behind Him when He left the world. All other peace beside this is a mockery and a delusion. When hunger can be relieved without food, thirst quenched without drink, and weariness removed without rest, then, and not until then, will men find peace without Christ.

Now, is this peace your own? Bought by Christ with His own blood, offered by Christ freely to all who are willing to receive it—is this peace your own? Oh, rest not! Rest not until you can give a satisfactory answer to my question: *HAVE YOU PEACE?*

Extracted from J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Old Paths*.

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