

# 1 Corinthians I. 30

by John Owen

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*Christ is made of God righteousness unto us by imputation, providing the ground, cause, and reason for our justification.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 23:6, Romans 3:27, Romans 4:6, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Sovereign Grace", "Imputed Righteousness"

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## Description

John Owen expounds on 1 Corinthians 1:30, emphasizing that Christ is made righteousness for us by God's sovereign grace, which excludes any basis for personal boasting. He argues against interpretations that diminish the significance of Christ's imputed righteousness, asserting that our righteousness before God is solely through Christ's merit. Owen refutes objections from Bellarmine and Socinus, clarifying that while Christ is our sanctification and redemption, His righteousness is uniquely imputed to us, establishing our justification. The sermon highlights the necessity of understanding Christ's role in our salvation as a gracious act of God, ensuring that all glory belongs to Him.

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## Transcript

1 Cor. i. 30. Christ, how of God made righteousness unto us -- Answer of Bellarmine unto this testimony removed -- That of Socinus disproved -- True sense of the words evinced

The next place I shall consider in the epistles of this apostle is, --

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

The design of the apostle in these words is to manifest, that whatever is wanting unto us on any account that we may please God, live unto him, and come to the enjoyment of him, that we have in and, by Jesus Christ; and this on the part of God from mere free and sovereign grace, as verses 26-29 do declare. And we have all these things by virtue of our insition or implantation in him: "from," "of," or "by him." He by his grace is the principal, efficient cause hereof.

And the effect is, that we are "in Christ Jesus," -- that is, ingrafted in him, or united unto him, as members of his mystical body; which is the constant sense of that expression in the Scripture. And the benefits which we receive hereby are enumerated in the following words. But, first, the way whereby we are made

partakers of them, or they are communicated unto us, is declared: "Who of God is made unto us." It is so ordained of God, that he himself shall be made or become all this unto us: &#8011;&#962; &#7952;&#947;&#949;&#957;&#942;&#952;&#951; &#7969;&#956;&#8150;&#957; &#7936;&#960;&#8056; &#920;&#949;&#959;&#8166;, where &#7936;&#960;&#972; denotes the efficient cause, as &#7952;&#958; did before.

But how is Christ thus made unto us of God, or what act of God is it that is intended thereby? Socinus says it is "a general act of the providence of God, whence it is come to pass, or is so fallen out, that one way or other the Lord Christ should be said to be all this unto us." But it is an especial ordinance and institution of God's sovereign grace and wisdom, designing Christ to be all this unto us and for us, with actual imputation thereon, and nothing else, that is intended.

Whatever interest, therefore, we have in Christ, and whatever benefit we have by him, it all depends on the sovereign grace and constitution of God, and not on any thing in ourselves. Whereas, then, we have no righteousness of our own, he is appointed of God to be our "righteousness," and is made so unto us: which can be no otherwise, but that his righteousness is made ours; for he is made it unto us (as he is likewise the other things mentioned) so as that all boasting, that is in ourselves, should be utterly excluded, and that "he that glorieth should glory in the Lord," verses 29-31.

Now, there is such a righteousness, or such a way of being righteous, whereon we may have somewhat to glory, Rom. iv. 2, and which does not exclude boasting, chap. iii. 27. 345And this cannot possibly be but when our righteousness is inherent in us; for that, however it may be procured, or purchased, or wrought in us, is yet our own, so far as any thing can be our own whilst we are creatures. This kind of righteousness, therefore, is here excluded. And the Lord Christ being so made righteousness unto us of God as that all boasting and glorying on our part, or in ourselves, may be excluded, -- yea, being made so for this very end, that so it should be, -- it can be no otherwise but by the imputation of his righteousness unto us; for thereby is the grace of God, the honour of his person and mediation exalted, and all occasion of glorying in ourselves utterly prescinded.

We desire no more from this testimony, but that whereas we are in ourselves destitute of all righteousness in the sight of God, Christ is, by a gracious act of divine imputation, made of God righteousness unto us, in such a way as that all our glorying ought to be in the grace of God, and the righteousness of Christ himself. Bellarmine attempts three answers unto this testimony, the two first whereof are coincident; and, in the third, being on the rack of light and truth, he confesses, and grants all that we plead for. 1.

He says, "That Christ is said to be our righteousness, because he is the efficient cause of it, as God is said to be our strength; and so there is in the words a metonymy of the effect for the cause." And I say it is true, that the Lord Christ by his Spirit is the efficient cause of our personal, inherent righteousness. By his grace it is effected and wrought in us; he renews our natures into the image of God, and without him we can do nothing: so that our habitual and actual righteousness is from him.

But this personal righteousness is our sanctification, and nothing else. And although the same internal habit of inherent grace, with operations suitable thereunto, be sometimes called our sanctification, and sometimes our righteousness, with respect unto those operations, yet is it never distinguished into our sanctification and our righteousness. But his being made righteousness unto us in this place is absolutely distinct from his being made sanctification unto us; which is that inherent righteousness which is wrought in us by the Spirit and grace of Christ.

And his working personal righteousness in us, which is our sanctification, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us, whereby we are made righteous before God, are not only consistent, but the one of them cannot be without the other.

2. He pleads, "That Christ is said to be made righteousness unto us, as he is made redemption. Now, he is our redemption, because he has redeemed us. So is he said to be made righteousness unto us, because by him we become righteous;" or, as another speaks, "because by him alone we are justified." This is the same plea with the former, -- namely, that there is a metonymy of the effect for the cause in all these expressions; yet what cause they intend it to be who expound the words, "By him alone we are justified," I do not understand. But Bellarmine is approaching yet nearer the truth: for as Christ is said to be made of God redemption unto us, because by his blood we are redeemed, or freed from sin, death, and hell, by the ransom he paid for us, or have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; so he is said to be made righteousness unto us, because through his righteousness granted unto us of God (as God's making him to be righteousness unto us, and our becoming the righteousness of God in him, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us, that we may be righteous before God, are the same), we are justified.

His third answer, as was before observed, grants the whole of what we plead; for it is the same which he gives unto Jer. xxiii. 6: which place he conjoins with this, as of the same sense and importance, giving up his whole cause in satisfaction unto them, in the words before described, lib. ii. cap. 10.

Socinus prefaces his answer unto this testimony with an admiration that any should make use of it, or plead it in this cause, it is so impertinent unto the purpose. And, indeed, a pretended contempt of the arguments of his adversaries is the principal artifice he makes use of in all his replies and evasions; wherein I am sorry to see that he is followed by most of them who, together with him, do oppose the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. And so of late the use of this testimony, which reduced Bellarmine to so great a strait, is admired at on the only ground and reason wherewith it is opposed by Socinus.

Yet are his exceptions unto it such as that I cannot also but a little, on the other hand, wonder that any learned man should be troubled with them, or seduced by them; for he only pleads, "That if Christ be said to be made righteousness unto us because his righteousness is imputed unto us, then is he said to be made wisdom unto us because his wisdom is so imputed, and so of his sanctification; which none will allow: yea, he must be redeemed for us, and his redemption be imputed unto us."

But there is nothing of force nor truth in this pretence: for it is built only on this supposition, that Christ must be made unto us of God all these things in the same way and manner; whereas they are of such different natures that it is utterly impossible he should so be. For instance, he is made sanctification unto us, in that by his Spirit and grace we are freely sanctified; but he cannot be said to be made redemption unto us, in that by his Spirit and grace we are freely redeemed.

And if he is said to be made righteousness unto us, because by his Spirit and grace he works inherent righteousness in us, then is it plainly the same with his being made sanctification unto us. Neither does he himself believe that Christ is made all these things unto us in the same way and manner; and therefore does he not assign any special way whereby he is so made them all, but clouds it in an ambiguous expression, that he becomes all these things unto us in the providence of God.

But ask him in particular, how Christ is made sanctification unto us, and he will tell you that it was by his doctrine and example alone, with some such general assistance of the Spirit of God as he will allow. But now, this is no way at all whereby Christ was made redemption unto us; which being a thing external, and not wrought in us, Christ can be no otherwise made redemption unto us than by the imputation unto us of what he did that we might be redeemed, or reckoning it on our account; -- not that he was redeemed for us, as he childishly cavils, but that he did that whereby we are redeemed.

Wherefore, Christ is made of God righteousness unto us in such a way and manner as the nature of the thing does require. Say some, "It is because by him we are justified." Howbeit the text says not that by him we are justified, but that he is of God made righteousness unto us; which is not our justification, but the ground, cause, and reason whereon we are justified. Righteousness is one thing, and justification is another. Wherefore we must inquire how we come to have that righteousness whereby we are justified; and this the same apostle tells us plainly is by imputation: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth righteousness," Rom. iv. 6. It follows, then, that Christ being made unto us of God righteousness, can have no other sense but that his righteousness is imputed unto us, which is what this text does undeniably confirm.

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