

# Christ Revealed as God's Provision

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*Christ is God's provision for our righteousness and our standing with Him, and He is the only one who can transform us into His image.*

**Scripture:** John 14:26, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:9, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 John 3:4

**Topics:** "Righteousness in Christ", "Sufficiency of Grace"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that Christ is revealed as God's provision for righteousness and acceptance, highlighting the transformative power of seeing Christ's face. He discusses how Paul's encounter with Jesus dismantled his self-righteousness and led him to understand that true righteousness comes from faith in Christ, not from personal merit. Sparks reassures believers that despite their struggles and failures, their standing with God is secure through Christ's righteousness, and that the Holy Spirit is actively working to transform them. He encourages the congregation to recognize the sufficiency of God's grace in their trials and to maintain faith in Christ as their source of strength and righteousness.

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## Transcript

Now as we come to the close of this time together in which the Lord has been bringing anew into view the great end for which we, with all the saved, have been called - the great end of our salvation in the purpose of God, a very wonderful end - nothing other than union with Christ in His Throne in the government of this universe. I'm sure that you have, as we've proceeded, become conscious of great need. Perhaps at times your hearts have trembled in the presence of the tremendous demands that all this makes. The question may have been with you: is it possible, can we ever reach that? The demands, requirements are so great in various ways if we are to attain unto that high and holy calling. It all perhaps seems too much for us. We might fear that we should fail, that we should come short, that we should not be able to go through. And our fear would probably have certain factors in it, for it is not just an abstract kind of feeling. There's certain things that we feel that we need, we know something of what those things are.

Now, today we have been with Paul in his words in 2 Corinthians 4:6 "...it is God that said light shall shine out of darkness who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We have been looking to see what it was that Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. And firstly it was Christ as the Purpose of God and then secondly Christ as the Pattern of God.

Now for a little while, in the third place, Paul saw in the third place Christ as the Provision of God. Christ as the Provision of God; that he saw that provision in various ways. The one thing that I'm quite sure happened to Saul of Tarsus when the Lord met him on that road on that day and he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, I am perfectly certain that that was the final blow to all his own self-righteousness. I am certain that that day the bottom was knocked out of all his self-assurance. Whatever he had thought of himself - and he tells it, what he thought of himself - he tells us in his letter to the Philippians what he thought of himself; he included the whole sum of his former assets with "concerning the righteousness which was of the law: blameless" the bottom was knocked out of that on the Damascus road. He'd had a very great sense of his own righteousness and the righteousness which was of the law. And from that moment when he saw the face of Jesus, there was no man on this earth more uncertain about his righteousness. And from that time onward this whole question of righteousness to commune took on a new tone for him. What a lot he writes about it! Have you ever tried to gather up all that Paul wrote about this matter of righteousness, justification? One big question with him, one big matter; it seemed in a sense to overshadow everything else... If ever he, as Saul of Tarsus and as a traditional Jew had thought that he had a standing with God that was quite acceptable and quite good and quite unquestioned; all THAT went on the Damascus road. Why, right at the end, right at the end of his life, when he's writing his last letters before going to be with the Lord he said that "my aim, my one aim is that I may be found in Him, not having a righteousness that is of mine own but the righteousness which is of God by faith".

It is a TREMENDOUS thing this matter of standing with God, acceptance with God, being able to have fellowship with a holy God. What an undoing of the past, an emptying out of everything upon which he had rested. A starting all over again with one big question, one big issue, one big quest - how shall a simple man dwell with a holy God? But the answer he found in the face of Jesus. Yes, looking into the face of Jesus he saw that all the righteousness that he needed, all the righteousness that ever God needed for him and in him - Jesus was, for Paul, the Righteousness of God.

Now, dear friends, I know that is very elementary Christian teaching but you know what I have been repeatedly emphasizing during these days, that it is NOT sufficient for us to have our Christian doctrine. When it comes to the end, the theories of Christianity, the doctrines and the teachings and the interpretations and all the systems of Christian truth are not going to get us through. They are not going to get us through. It is only as these matters in Christ really are rock under our feet in the day of the tempest that we'll get through and this is such a matter. It's always arising. This evil one in this universe called the Accuser of the brethren, is ever and always on our track to undercut this whole matter of our standing with God, our position with a holy God. And we perhaps find this one of the biggest battlegrounds in our Christian experience. Let me put it like this - perhaps I'm only suggesting things to you that you've never thought of, but whether you have put it in this way or not, and I'm only putting into language perhaps what has troubled your hearts without defining the trouble - let me put it like this: if we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, if He atoned for our sin, if we are no longer seen by God in ourselves by nature but in Christ, if we have received by faith in Him remission of our sins; then why are we dealt with by the Lord as though we were sinful creatures? Why do we suffer for our wrongdoing, our mistakes, our faults, our errors, our breakdowns? Why do we suffer if He suffered for it all? Why does it seem that WE have to atone for the things that we do wrong if He atoned for it all? Now I'm perhaps suggesting to you something you've never thought of, but isn't it just like that? That when we're in suffering, in adversity, in affliction, there sometimes comes a cloud between us and the Lord and immediately there's an accusation: "THIS is judgment on you, this is punishment, this is because, because of this or that". Have you never met that? It's like that

always. There's always present this voice of accusation in the presence of adversity and suffering and difficulty, laying at our door because of, well you see, we were wrong in this and in that... Isn't that a problem? We have got to get VERY clear on this matter of our standing and of the provision of righteousness in Christ to undercut the work and the power of Satan and for our own salvation in the day of adversity.

If trouble is coming, if suffering is coming, if we are going to have difficulties and adversities; there's going to be plenty of room for accusations and condemnation, plenty of ground for the enemy to work on. But we have got to be absolutely clear on this matter of the provision of righteousness in Christ in order to get through. There are two things to say about this. One is we must understand the meaning of righteousness. What is righteousness and what is unrighteousness? It's an important thing for us to understand that. And the other thing is we have got to be able to cut clean in between the matter of our training and discipline and transformation; and the judgment of God. There's a great difference. Those are two different realms altogether. Let's look for a moment at this matter of righteousness.

What is righteousness? Or, what is unrighteousness? Our translation of the word is rather unfortunate; especially the Authorized Version is very misleading. In 1 John 3 in the old version it is stated "sin is the transgression of the law", well of course the transgression of the law is sin, but it doesn't say that and it doesn't mean that. If you look at a better translation (the Revised will help you) a more correct, accurate translation is "Sin is lawlessness". Lawlessness! That is unrighteousness. Now we can take an illustration from the Old Testament because John takes this illustration there in that very chapter. He brings in, he introduces Cain and Abel. And he says Cain was of that lawless one. Now if you look back in the Old Testament to Genesis 4 you find this: "Now, now in the process of time, Cain brought his offering..." and then you have the story of what happened: brought his offering, built his altar, presented it to the Lord and got no acceptance whatever. No standing with God. God absolutely ignored the whole thing. And then that tremendous controversy between Cain and the Lord. But Abel brought his offering, built his altar, presented it, and the Lord signaled his acceptance by the fire. Abel got through. John says he was of that lawless one, Cain. "In the process of time..." and the context will show you that there had been plenty of time for light to be given and the light was that standing before God, acceptance with God, was on the basis of another life given to God. Symbolized in the blood. That was the light, the light had come. But here is a man who is a lawless one of the evil one, you see?

The evil one is called by Paul "that lawless one". That lawless one would NOT accept the light, be obedient to the light; refused to come under the law of any kind, especially the law of the blood of the Lamb. No standing; that's unrighteousness. And the very essence and core of unrighteousness is not that you are an imperfect or sinful man or woman, it is a matter of your will in the presence of Light. Now that's what Paul teaches, it's the reaction of our will when light has been given! Unrighteousness is lawlessness; refusing light. Don't you see that with all their pretended, assumed, claimed, proclaimed righteousness; the whole nation of Israel was set aside and rejected. Why? Lawless! They refused the Light. "This is the condemnation, that Light is come, and man loved darkness rather than light." Because they are of that lawless one. That's unrighteousness.

Now, in the face of Jesus Christ what have you got? Ah, just the most perfect and utter opposite to the lawless one. The One yielding... it's the Lamb, you see, it's the Lamb - submissive and yielding and meek and lowly - amenable to the will of God. "Not My will but Thine". One who is wholly and utterly under the will of God. No lawlessness. No rebellion. No independence. No superiority. Nothing whatever that came across His submission to the will of God. He became obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross.

There is your great Abel. Now note: the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, as you well know, said "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain WHEREBY witness was borne unto him that he was righteous". The whole matter of righteousness for standing, dear friends, is not what we are as big or little sinners, for remember by nature Abel was no better man than Cain, no better man than Cain. He was of the sinful fallen race just as his brother. And it is not that we in ourselves are better, are good, are an improvement on someone else whom we would call Cain. No! We're all on the same ground. You know it as well as I do that there is just as much lawlessness in us by nature as there is in anybody by nature. But! Light is given. And we act toward the light with our wills and are submissive and surrendered to the will of God. And that is righteousness, that is righteousness. No lawlessness. That brings us into a standing with God because that is Christ. That is Christ! The whole matter of righteousness in the case of Christ in His acceptance with God as our representative was not that He was not made sin, for He was; it was that He so utterly and completely yielded Himself to the known will of God by faith in God, whatever that meant, whatever that meant; faith in God. He did the will of God and He stands.

You see, that is the meaning of baptism. In baptism, a figure of the Cross, where He, humbling Himself and being obedient unto death can... what does He say about it? "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness". How? Obedient unto death! Humbling ourselves, then the heavens are opened: "This is my beloved Son". See? Justified, accepted, standing with the Father. It's an attitude of will. If you are stubborn, rebellious - you will not, you just WILL not - then you are out of the running, you are out of court. For no matter what we may be as faulty, sinful creatures, in this matter of standing - mark you, I'm talking about standing now - we stand on the ground of a righteousness that is not our own at all. It's that righteousness perfected in Christ which God accepts for us. He is made unto us from God, Righteousness.

Now, let me say this in passing on. I doubt whether there will be a more fierce battleground for the Lord's people at the end than this one. It's an amazing thing; I recently read again the life of such men, two men, Dr A J Gordon, one of the most saintly men, certainly one of the men most greatly used in his time, one of a few men who walked with God in those days. And then the other, A T Pierson, another one, same kind, men who walked with God. And a third one, A B Simpson. Here you have three spiritual giants. Well, out of the three, at any rate two of them, right at the end of their course here on this earth, had the most terrible battle of all their lives on the question of their acceptance by God, their standing with God! They passed into a time of such awful darkness as though all the forces of evil gathered around them and quenched the light and raised this question of their acceptance. Thank God that in both cases before they went they got through and the light returned. But it's significant! It's significant that this is THE battleground. And dear friends, whether it comes like that to us or in any other form, and in any other way, you and I need to be absolutely assured of this matter: that our standing is not on the ground of what WE are but on the ground of what Christ is.

It is so easy for us to sing "Not what I am O Lord but what Thou art" but when it comes to the test we forget all about that and we go down under what we are. We know what we are. Now let me finish this bit for the moment by saying, that in the end, in the end we are just going to be forced back upon Christ without any alternative. The Church will be forced back on Christ. You and I will be forced back on Christ! We will have no other ground on which to stand. And if, if then, we are not sure about Him and what He is for us to God, it's going to be a sorry lookout for us. But Paul looked into the face of Jesus Christ when all his mighty structure of self-righteousness had collapsed, the bottom had fallen out of that whole system of righteousness by works, he looked into the face of Jesus and saw a Righteousness that would carry him

right through. He saw all the Righteousness that he needed and one that would never collapse. Yes, Christ is God's Provision in the matter of righteousness.

But then there's another phase and I know what you're all thinking about this, "Yes but what about this other phase of what we are after all and our failures and all this. We are that we ought not to be and are not that we ought to be... are we to ignore that?" Not a bit, not a bit. You see that was one of the charges that the Lord brought against two churches in Asia: "Thou hast there those that hath the doctrine of the Nicolaitans". And that doctrine was "Well, you're saved! You're saved, by grace... do as you like, live as you like, doesn't matter what you do, you'll be saved alright. Once in grace always in grace, doesn't matter what kind of life you live, you can be worldly, you can sin, do anything, you're saved alright, nothing can alter that. None will pluck you out of the Father's hand." And He said "Which thing I HATE!" Which thing I hate: condoning wrong, not reckoning with evil in your life. Oh yes, it doesn't mean that, but there's all the difference, dear friends, between judgment, condemnation as out of Christ, without His righteousness; and the work of God in what the writer calls 'chastening', that is child training... child training. Now here you have it: "But we all with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory as from the Lord the Spirit".

When the Lord disciplines us - and He does - that does not mean that He has put us under judgment, under condemnation. It means that He is just going to make good IN us by this discipline, what is true ABOUT us in Christ. All His disciplines are transformatory. You may not think so, sometimes you think they're making you worse; it does seem like that but wait a bit, wait a bit... there's something gracious coming out of it, something beautiful. You meet more of Christ in those who have the hardest time. Saints I mean, real saints are the people who seem to have had the hardest handling by the Lord. It's like that. He is developing the character of Christ by what seems to be hard dealings; hard dealings. He's very faithful, very faithful. He knows... He knows what we perhaps would not believe, and His dealings with us are really going to be in the direction of transformation. This is what happens with TRUE believers. It doesn't happen with unbelievers, if they are dealt with hardly they go from bad to worse and Paul says here when we are dealt with hardly we go from glory to glory! And though it may not seem like it or appear like it, it is true, it is true.

We cannot speak very much about ourselves and our goodness and the grace of God in us, but we do know just a little, that something has happened to us through our sufferings and our afflictions to change us a bit from what we were. At any rate we say this: where would we be today, where would we be today if the Lord hadn't dealt with us very faithfully? Very faithfully. But, you see, you must keep this line between the two things, that of judgment and condemnation, and that of child training, discipline and transforming.

Now then, what is the provision here for the standing? He's made the provision in the face of Jesus Christ, of Righteousness. Do you notice the last clause of the verse just quoted: "as by the Lord the Spirit". Thank the Lord for that, the Spirit has got this thing in hand; the Holy Spirit is the Custodian of Glory! The Holy Spirit is the divine Provision to change us; He's at work upon it, it's in His hands. If we wonder however we are going to be reconstituted according to Christ, not only justified in Christ but reconstituted and conformed to His image; leave it with the Holy Spirit. He's taken it in hand and He's going to do it and He will do it. Don't get back onto the ground of rebellion. While you hold your ground of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit will do it alright; make no mistake about it. "As by the Lord the Spirit."

Now, I want to hurry to a close. The third question that arises, it arose for Paul and it arose very quickly for Paul... he was hardly off the Damascus road before the question of endurance began to be raised. Now,

well, you see to begin with he had been the official envoy of the Jewish rulers and their commissioned agent to persecute the church and blot out everything to do with Jesus of Nazareth. And he was about his business very thoroughly and he represented the attitude and the spirit of those in Jerusalem who had sent him on this business. He was the very embodiment of them. He turned right round; on the side of the Christians what does he meet? Well, of course he's got to meet what he'd been giving the others. He got to meet all that of which he'd been a part as now against him and that pursued him down the years wherever he went. Oh, the wickedness of it, the suffering those Jews caused him everywhere... and there were other kinds of suffering. The enemy, the great enemy, was ever on his track. He knew physical suffering, yes, very much physical suffering. He knew treachery, oh yes, every kind it's certain, he gives us the catalogue. Christians are very, very real on how shall we get through? In the presence of persecution, in the presence of affliction, suffering, and adversity, trial of every kind; how shall we get through? "And he said unto me: My grace is sufficient for thee and My strength is made perfect in weakness..." Jesus; the Provision of God to get through. "Christ in you the hope of glory..." He looked into the face of Jesus and was ever looking into the face of Jesus with this question: Can I go through? Shall I get through? Shall I fail? Shall I breakdown? And ever came back from that Face: "My grace is sufficient for thee". I remember how Mr Spurgeon put that, he said the little fish, the little fish in the mighty ocean... wondering how he's going to cope and the mighty ocean says: 'Little fish, my waters are enough for you'. Little, little fish... be he Paul the apostle or anyone else: "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in weakness". The answer of the face of Jesus to every need; Paul saw it all.

You see how I've had to hurry through it and merely skim the surface, but go away not with the exposition, not with the buildup of evidence, but just with the glorious fact: in each, in each case, each respect which proved, PROVED to be sufficient for that man, and if it could be sufficient for HIM, it can be sufficient for us. Righteousness? Yes, not our own but Christ's, that we may stand before God. And in the daily need of being changed, the Holy Spirit given to us and ever present with us to work through our difficulties and trials to change us into the same image and in our sufferings and afflictions the Holy Spirit ministering grace to us. The grace of the Lord Jesus, all sufficient grace.

May we see the face of Jesus, may we see the Answer that comes back to all our need as we look into that face. May the Lord make this time together really to prove to be a time of looking into His face and being changed.

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