

Comfort for Believers in Christ

by John Archer

{Comfort for Believers, 1645}

Faith shows things with more certainty than anything else can; for reason and sense may be deceived, because grounded on man, and Satan oft deceives them both; he deceived Eve's reason in innocency {for she is said, "to be beguiled,"} because she fled not to Faith; but Faith is grounded on God, and so is as sure as God is; wherefore nothing can give such strong grounds of comfort as Faith, and no Faith like Faith in Jesus Christ; and that for these reasons. First, because it gives boldness towards God. "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." {Eph.3:12} The word translated 'boldness' signifies an appearing in glorious liberty, lifting up the face, receiving liberty of speech, and an undaunted or open and uncovered face; not only as opposite to Moses under the Law, whose face was covered to show obscurity and hiddenness of his ministry; or opposite to persons under conviction of sin, whose faces are covered for shame, but also it is opposite to that abasement which is in holy angels, expressed by the covering of their faces, {Is.6:2,3,} and all this because they have access or a manifestation by Christ, as he leads them by the hand to God, and therefore they come with all boldness; whereas Adam was shut out of paradise, and Israel at Sinai stood afar off and trembled; but believers by Christ come nigh with boldness; and Faith in Christ gives this boldness upon these grounds: Faith in Christ presents God nearer to them, for it shows them God in their own nature; God whom they may see, hear and handle. {I Jn.1:1-3} And so they may be more acquainted and bold, for it is a likeness or nearness of nature which makes boldness and confidence. By Faith in Christ there is hold laid on God's Justice, as well as on his Mercy; God in Christ is just and a justifier of the believer. "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." {Rom.3:26} That is, he doth not only declare his mercy in a free pardon of sin, but he also declares his justice in the full satisfaction for sin. Wherefore as by Christ, believers may plead with his mercy, and so they may also with his justice, in that there is not only a way opened unto mercy, but Christ hath merited and of justice purchased Divine favor, for he hath satisfied the Law, both in suffering what was due for its transgression, and also in fulfilling of its Righteousness; and all this on their behalf, and for their use and benefit, who believe in Him; so that whatever boldness an Angel can have, or Adam could have had, {if he had stood in innocency,} by virtue of God's justice, all that boldness through Christ a believer hath, because the Law is in Christ kept by him; and so the Law's Righteousness is fulfilled in us through Christ, who believe and manifest our faith, by walking after the Spirit, and not after the flesh. {Rom.8:4} Inasmuch that believers in Christ may appeal to God's justice, as well as to his mercy, and hold God by both hands, having as clear a title to him in justice as in and by mercy in the Person of Christ, who hath undertaken for them, to satisfy justice and merit mercy which cannot but

give great boldness. By Faith in Christ there is an access with boldness to God's Holiness. Holiness is the brightness and beauty of God which dazzles the eyes of all creation; therefore he is thrice called holy, not only to show forth his tri-unity, {Is.6:2,3,} but complete gloriousness of Holiness. "Who is like unto thee, O LORD...glorious in holiness." {Ex.15:11} Now in Christ; we as partaking of Christ's Righteousness, which is God's, and so doth fully reach and answer his Holiness, as well as his Justice, we come into his presence with faces uncovered or undaunted. "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." {Eph.3:12} "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." {Eph.2:18} By Faith in Christ there are raised unlimited expectations from God; for whilst that God is set before us, married to our nature, and in our nature, working Righteousness, making atonement for sin, meriting blessedness for us, what may we not expect? What sins are too great to be pardoned? What blessedness or love so high as may not be conveyed to us? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" {Rom.8:32} In Christ there is set up for us a middle one, or Mediator between God and us, who equally partakes of God's nature and our nature, and so is equally interested in both; from whence cannot but arise much boldness, for between God and us there is such infinite distance as that, although there were no breach, yet there could not be such boldness and free access, as now is by this One, who is a middle Person between both; therefore it is not a marvel that popish faith yields so little settling and comfort, since they make so little of Christ. Thus in these respects, Christ and faith in Christ gives great boldness towards God, and so the stronger grounds of comfort.

Another ground of comfort for believers may be gathered from the fact that; "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." {II Cor.1:20} All for the elect in Christ; whom God chose in him, and gave to him to be his offspring and spouse, and so through and from him to be endued with all the riches of the promises; though God loved them, and chose them all to enjoy the promises, yet in Christ, and through, by, and for him to inherit. {Eph.1:4} He did not choose us with him, but in him; wherefore as the Israelites must come to enjoy the promises not by laying hold first on them, but by being firstborn of Isaac, and having that Union of flesh with him; and as a woman hath right to the man's estate, not immediately, but by being first made one with him, even so must people be first of Christ, married to him, born of him, drawn out of his loins before they can lay hold of or claim title to those promises. This Christ, I say, is the only and immediate fountain of all joy, and that in two respects; first, because all the promises are in him only; he is that one Sea, out of which do issue all the springs of promises; wherefore in him must be all the springs of joy and comfort; as they are all said to be in the Church, because of his presence there. "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." {Is.12:3} Yea, and the promises are better in him, and much more strong to comfort than they are out of him; not only because he is the chief and best promise Himself, for his Person is better than all the promises, but also, because the promises in him are in their Root, in him they live, and so are best in him, as the sun beams in the sun, and the streams in the spring are better, and live more than in themselves, having indeed no being, but in and from him. Better because in him they are eternal and have been promises actually existing from everlasting, and so they are in no other respect,

and so cannot be disannulled by the Law and sin, which came in but in time, as the Apostle reasons. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." {Gal.3:17} Better, because in him is their efficacy towards us, they being his only, were not sure to us, till he had confirmed the bequeathment of them to us upon his death, for on that supposition were they bequeathed to us. Better, because in and from Christ they are exhibited, administered and performed to us, as he is their Owner and Testator, who by his death ratifies them unto us, and makes them truly ours; so he is the Executor and Administrator of them, who dispenses them to us. "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it." {Jn.14:14} He doth it and therefore he saith, "all power;" that is, of administration and of execution in heaven and earth is put into his hands, therefore the promises; and through him streams forth the most sweet comforts in which respects he is the immediate spring of all joy. Jesus Christ is the immediate spring of all joy as he is the seat and receptacle of that joy, which is communicable from God to the creature; whatever comfort or joy, God intended to make the creature a partaker of it, he put it all into Jesus Christ, {as the light of the world is in the sun,} as "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." {Col.2:9} So with it dwells in him all the fullness of joy and comfort; for it being all from God, it must be all in him, in whom dwells the Godhead's fullness, and thence comes to us; just as all our light is from the sun, who conveys his light to us through the air, therefore all the light that we have is in the air; and so likewise in Christ are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge; {Col.2:3;} so are all treasures of joy and comfort, as he is the light that enlightens. {Jn.1:4,9} So is he the comfort that comforts every man with any true comfort; for God is indeed the first original, and Christ is the immediate fountain in which is all joy. Our life is hid in God, but with Christ, {Col.3:3,} so that indeed, Christ is not only the root of all promises, but of a better comfort than the promises yield; for Christ is nearer to God than the promises are, for he is of his nature, and the offspring of his Person; whereas the promises are the issue of his mind and will. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." {Heb.1:3} Whereas the promises are but the expressions of his purpose; and the further setting forth of his glory.

This sight of Christ's glory and our union and communion with him is the heart of the Christian life; by faith to see the things that are invisible; to live by faith, {Heb.10:38,} which faith is described, as the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; {Heb.11:1;} which though it also reveal those things which once by reason might be seen, as the creation, {vs.3,} yet it also, {and that which it chiefly aims at,} reveals what which never was or could be seen in innocency or by reason; as God's electing love in Christ, Heaven's Glory, our participation of all Grace and glory from Christ by union with him, &c., and on these considerations to love, obey, be patient, &c. This is the life of a believer; seeing by Faith and Divine Revelation the glory of Christ, and being turned into it, and unto it, as the sum of all Christianity. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." {II Cor.3:18} Christ living in the believer, {by virtue of his Word and Spirit,} and thus he living by faith in him. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live

in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." {Gal.2:20} Increase of life is all put in the apprehensions by faith of the Revelation of Christ, and the glory thereof. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love; may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." {Eph.3:16-19} Now in this work, it is the Gospel which sets the objects, or the heavenly things before us. Then the Holy Ghost in convincing or persuading of the reality of those things to our understanding, is as the light which shines on those heavenly objects, and makes them visible; and faith, by Holy Spirit conviction or persuasion is as the prospective glass which enables our understanding to perceive the reality of them, which else it could not; wherefore with this light of the Holy Ghost, and this prospective glass of Faith, with our spirits and understandings, we view in the Gospel again and again the things of heaven and of Christ.

Furthermore consider that, though you use yourselves and put forth your own reason; yet that you trust not in yourselves and reason, but that in the whole work we expect nothing from our own work, but being emptied of all sufficiency or fitness in ourselves, ye do wholly and only expect the fruit from the Holy Ghost, as he is the Spirit of Christ, pertaining to us, as united to Christ. Wherefore be careful not to lean on your own spirit, memory, wit; no, nor on grace itself; but know that you must have a fresh influence from the Spirit, and his assistance. As your Faith cannot act itself, for spiritual things cannot work without a fresh concurrence of God; "for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Wherefore his suspending and not assisting the fire, caused it not to burn the three children, though ye put no impediment in its way; and though Grace be stronger than nature, yet it cannot act, or move itself, without the concurrence and assistance of the Holy Ghost; for it comes from Christ, as light from the sun by an efflux; {Mal.4:2;} which ever supposes a fresh act to every shining. The Grace is in Christ, though it work in us, as the light is in the sun, though it shines on us. "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." {II Tim.2:1} Wherefore, Christ must, by a fresh act, put it forth, if it work in us. Wherefore all things are said to be done by Christ strengthening; {"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me;" Phil.4:13;} not only by strength which he had given, but which he is at the present in a continual giving; for every act of Faith requires the power of God afresh administered. "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." {II Thes.1:11} Fulfill the work of Faith with power; that is, God's power, for one act is to evidence things, which to do, he begs strengthening by might from the Spirit. "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." {Eph.3:16} And as the Holy Ghost must assist the Grace of Faith, before it can act; so must he do somewhat to the objects of Faith, before they can work upon Faith; as the light must shine on colors before they can move the eye; that is, the Spirit must show them to the soul, which is called a revealing of them; {"God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God;" I Cor.2:10;} not only at the first, but every time that they

draw forth Faith, he must reveal them, which is done by giving in convincingly his own testimony of those things, which presents them to the soul as light doth colors to the eye; wherefore he so prays, that by the Spirit, they may have revelation to know the things they believed, and hoped for. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know." {Eph.1:17,18} So that without the Spirit's aid, nothing can be done in believing, as in praying, it must be in the Holy Ghost; {"building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost;" Jude 20;} that is, in his strength and assistance; so also, must it be in believing, therefore he joins building up in Faith and praying, because without praying we cannot make advancement in our believing. Consider, that the Holy Ghost assists only as he is Christ's Spirit; that is, sent from him and merited by him, as he is God and Man, and the Head of the Church; for in no other way or respect doth the Holy Ghost assist. Wherefore all that he doth, is said to be of Christ's; {"He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you;" Jn.16:14;} and it is called Christ's strengthening. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." {Phil.4:13} "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." {vs.19} Whereas it is the Spirit which doth it; and if thus he be not considered, he is taken under a wrong notion, and Christ is wronged, for he is not glorified in accordance with the direct work of the Spirit. Ye must be careful to consider, that the Holy Ghost assists you as members of Christ, by virtue of your union with Christ; for how can the Spirit of the Head, come into one but by its union with the Head; and how comes the sap to flow from the root into the branch, but as it is joined to the root? {Eph.4:15,16} And, lastly, ye must be careful to look up unto the Holy Ghost to assist you; cast an eye on him as ye do on that whose help you expect; and in the expectation thus of him, must ye set upon the anticipation of Faith.