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The Meaning of...

RIGHTEOUSNESS

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you to read the references given. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

Read: Psalm 9:7-10

Only God is perfectly righteous. There can be no righteousness apart from God and His word. Righteousness is one attribute or mark of God's very being or nature. God's righteousness is expressed in the fact that He is morally straight, true, just, upright and pure. The truth that God is righteous is declared many times in the Psalms.

"O righteous God who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure" (Psalm 7:9). "For the Lord is righteous but the wicked and those who love violence His soul hates" (Psalm 11:5&7).

We say that "*God is righteous*," then we speak about God's righteousness. 'Righteous' is an adjective (a word that describes something), whereas 'righteousness' is a noun (a word that names something).

GOD DEMANDS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Romans 1:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Matthew tells us to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33AV). Jesus Christ, the perfectly righteous Son and Redeemer brought this Kingdom to fulfillment (Matthew 5:17-20; 21:32).

God demands righteousness of His subjects. He will not have any unrighteousness or evil thing in heaven (Rev 21:27).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) lived in Germany. He was a monk and was desperate to know God and feel His presence. But Luther felt sinful and unclean. He beat his body without mercy to try to save his soul, but nothing helped him shake the guilty feelings that plagued his spirit.

Paul wrote, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith'." (Romans 1:17). That is the problem, Martin said to himself. "I am condemned by God's righteousness. It is my judge and I am guilty, condemned to die for my sins."

God requires righteousness from us, but we don't have any righteousness to give, Luther concluded. So we are guilty and condemned and perishing, cut off from God and without any hope. So what is the good news of the gospel? The good news is that the righteousness that God demands from us, He gives to us. He gives it to us freely; we don't have to do anything to earn it. Because Christ died for us, He supplies all the righteousness, day by day, that God demands from us. Hallelujah!

MAN WAS CREATED RIGHTEOUS

Read: Ephesians 4:22-32

God created everything perfect in its own way. Man and women were "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they lost the righteousness which they had by creation. Now God declares, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is... no one who seeks God.... There is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-11).

So we see that God's righteousness is associated with His justice. Abraham pleaded with God "not to destroy the righteous with the wicked" when God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But in the end Abraham was faced with the great truth that, "the judge of all the earth" would do what was right (Genesis 18:25).

God hears the cry of the oppressed and the poor. He heard the cry of the slaves in Egypt as they toiled to make brick and build the store cities of the Nile (Exodus 3:7)

So God's righteousness is linked to His acts of mercy. We see this very clearly when we read the Psalms and the Prophets: "The Lord has made His salvation known and revealed His righteousness to the nations" (Psalm 98:2). "Let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it" (Isaiah 45:8).

MAN LOST HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Genesis 3:1-10

Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. At the moment they took the fruit and ate it, they sinned against God (Genesis 3:1-6). Their eyes were open and they saw that they were naked and they felt shame.

And so they tried to deal with this problem themselves in their own way, Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover them both. But still Adam and Eve felt shame, so they hid themselves in the garden. Their right relationship with God had been broken. Nothing they could do could change this. They had lost their God-given righteousness and they could do nothing to restore it.

The coverings that Adam and Eve made of fig leaves did not work. So to cover their shame God made them garments of skin. Adam and Eve did not deserve this kindness from God. It was an act of God's grace!

God Himself took the initiative to clothe Adam and Eve with garments of skin. This speaks of God's desire to restore men and women to a right relationship with Himself. The cost to provide the garments of skin was the lives of innocent animals. This gracious act of God looked ahead to the need for blood sacrifice to cover sin (as required in the Old Covenant or Old Testament). But it also looks further ahead to the costly sacrifice of the life of Jesus to cover our sins forever (as expressed in the New Covenant or New Testament).

GOD'S HOLINESS

God is pure in His thought life, perfect in His character, just in all that He does and loving toward the persons He created. He alone is holy (Psalm 99:9). Holiness is His nature. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" sang the angels (Isaiah 6:3).

God's presence made the very ground where Moses was standing holy. God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, and said, "Do not come any closer... Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5).

Holiness relates to the sacredness of God. No man could draw near to God and not perish. At Mount Sinai, God told Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow... and be ready on the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death'..."

"On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast.

"Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God and they stood at the foot of the mountain" (Exodus 19:16-17).

He is "...majestic in holiness" (Exodus 15:11). "...dwelling in the light which no man can approach" (1 Timothy 6:16 AV). "Worship the Lord in holy array; tremble before Him,

all the earth" (Psalm 96:9 RSV). Those things and persons separated for God's use and service were also declared holy.

Moses told the people of Israel, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Genesis 6:9-14

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

Noah had no virtue in and of himself. He had no righteousness of his own which he could boast about. He was declared righteous by God because he believed what God told him and obeyed. Noah walked with God and pleased Him in all that he did.

The people of Noah's time were the most wicked and violent of any people from the beginning of creation. "And the Lord (God) was grieved that He had made man on the earth...." (Genesis 6:6)

LAW RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 24-25

After God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel were commanded to obey the Law. The Law addressed every part of their lives, health, personal relationships, business, war and worship.

Moses told them, "The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive.... And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us, that will be our righteousness" (Deuteronomy 6:24-25).

No man could keep the law perfectly (James 2:10). And from time to time, the people strayed far from God. They worshipped the idols and followed the ways of their heathen neighbors. This brought God's wrath upon them (Jer 7:30-34).

Men of faith (prophets) called God's people back to the covenant He had made with them. While they obeyed the Lord, He fought their battles and blessed their land.

FAITH RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Genesis 15:4-6

Very early in the history of God's people, God called Abram to leave the heathen city of Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land He would show him (Gen 12:1). Abram, with his father Terah, his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot went up out of Ur. At that time it is said that "Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6).

Thus because of his faith in the living God, Abram had "righteous" written against his name in heaven.

TALK ABOUT 1. Was Abram righteous? Why did God credit him with righteousness (Gen 15:6)? **2.** Who went up out of Ur with Abram? **3.** Did Abram know where he was going?

GOD ACCEPTED THEM

Read: Hebrews 11:7-12

Abraham's faith was sorely tested. First God tested his faith when he had no heir to inherit the promises God had given him of a land and blessing which would reach around the world (Genesis 12:2-3).

Later, God tested Abraham sorely when He told him to take Isaac, the son of promise, and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. Abraham obeyed, but God stopped him before he laid his hand on the lad. And the angel of the Lord showed Abraham a ram, caught in the thicket. Abraham released Isaac and sacrificed the ram instead (Genesis 22:1-19).

God accepted all those persons who walked in the faith of Abraham. Paul wrote, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (the promise that God made to Abraham) (Galatians 3:29).

However, the New Testament makes it clear that the one God declares righteous by faith must continue to walk in righteousness and do the deeds of righteousness (Acts 10:35; Romans 6:12-18; 1 Timothy 6:11).

PRACTICAL HOLINESS

Read: 1 Peter 1:13-16

There is a huge difference between the righteousness – holiness God demands of His people and the way Christians live. We call this goal of the Christian life "practical holiness."

God said to Abraham, "Walk before Me and be blameless..." That is practical holiness and God demands nothing less of every believer.

Peter wrote to the believers, "Be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'." (1 Peter 1:13-16).

Even the demons knew that Jesus Christ was "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). He set the example for all His followers: "He committed no sin, and no deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

"It is a fatal mistake," says P. T. Forsyth "to think of holiness as a possession which we have distinct from our faith and conferred upon it; something we have separate to our faith."

TALK ABOUT 1. Are you holy? **2.** Is it possible for a person to be holy? **3.** Who recognized Jesus Christ and called Him Holy (Mark 1:24).

PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE

Read: Genesis 17:1-14

Circumcision may have been practiced by various tribes from many years before Abraham's time. However, God told Abraham to circumcise every male in his household. It was to be the sign of the covenant God had made with him and his descendants (Genesis 17:11).

"On that very day" Abraham obeyed God. When God told Moses that He wanted him to go back to Egypt and deliver the people of Israel from slavery, Moses made all kinds of excuses (Exodus 4:1-17). Not so Abraham. He obeyed God right away. That is the obedience of faith and complete trust in the kindness and goodness of our heavenly Father.

God gave Moses the plans for the Tabernacle. He gave Moses skilled tradesmen to make the Tent of Meeting where God would meet with His people.

Moses obeyed God's instructions and built the Tabernacle just as God has showed him. But only the priests were allowed to go into the Tabernacle. And only the High Priest of Israel could enter the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant rested, and then not without the blood of sacrifice on his right ear, the thumb of his right hand and the big toe of his right foot (Leviticus 8:23).

By faith in Jesus, we are accepted by God. No longer do we need a priest to represent us before God. "We do have such a High Priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven and serves... in the true Tabernacle, set up by the Lord, not by man" (Hebrew 8:1-2).

And we are bidden to "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrew 4:16).

CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:27-31 or Matthew 22:1-14

The apostle Paul wrote this to the church in Corinth: "No one may boast before Him (God). It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:29-30).

We have no righteousness of our own. We are all sinners and fall short of God's standard (Roman 3:23). So God gives us His righteousness – the righteousness of Christ. It is like a garment and clothes the believer.

Jesus told a parable about a man who went to a wedding banquet without a wedding garment (Matthew 22:1-14). The wedding garment is a free gift from God.

Jesus also spoke of the "false righteousness" of those who trust in themselves. They consider themselves **righteous** or **justified** because they live right lives and do good works (Matthew 23:28).

Paul teaches the same in his letters: No one who seeks to be righteous by keeping the law can succeed. God has declared that all are sinners and all have fallen short of God's righteous standard (Romans 3:9-10; Galatians 2:16).

God declares that person to be righteous who confesses their sins and receives Jesus Christ as their Savior. He forgives their sin, no matter how bad, on the basis of Christ's atoning death; so that God can be just in forgiving sin and the sinner is justified in God's sight and made clean (Romans 5:8-9; 1 John 1:9; 2:2). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When God looks at that person, He sees Christ and the blood that was shed on Calvary. Jesus is our Mediator and friend. He stands before the Father on our behalf and pleads our cause (1 Timothy 2:5).

TALK ABOUT 1. Has God asked you to do something for Him, and you have not obeyed? **2.** God said, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). What did He mean? **3.** Who is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)? What does He do for us?

MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Original Righteousness: God created man and woman morally upright and good (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Paul said man was, "created to be like God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). But man disobeyed God and fell into a quagmire of sin. Man was no longer righteous, but a sinner, cut off from a holy God.

Christ's Righteousness: Since Adam fell into sin, Christ is the only man who kept God's moral law perfectly (John 8:29; Heb 4:15). His righteousness is of infinite value, affording salvation to all who believe (1 Peter 2:24).

Imputed Righteousness or justification: This is when God declares the believer justified because of Christ's righteousness, which is imputed to the believer.

"So that no one may boast before Him...you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:29-30).

Renewed Righteousness: Having been declared righteous, the believer grows up (a process called sanctification) to be like Jesus Christ. That part of the image of God that was spoiled by the fall is restored in actual moral character. This is the holiness God requires when He says, "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16).

TALK ABOUT 1. Can the natural man boast that he is righteous? **2.** Was the first man and woman created righteous (Ephesians 4:24)? **3.** Are you righteous?

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