



**“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).**

## **Righteousness**

**Central Truth:** God imputes Jesus’ righteousness to the believer.

**L415. Date:** November 1989. **Text:** II Corinthians 5:10, 11, 14-21.

**Topic:** Righteousness: Of Believers.

On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest and best, how righteous are you before God? You are a “ten”! If you answered anything less, you were not thinking of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ.

We tend to think of righteousness in terms of conduct. If you are well disciplined before God today, you may think of yourself as an “eight” or a “nine” or even a “ten.” But if you slipped in temptation today, you may consider yourself a “four.” Not so. Your true righteousness is not a reflection of your behavior.

The Bible says you are “*made the righteousness of God*” in Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:21). Note that it is not righteousness based on your conduct. It is the righteousness “*of God.*” God’s righteousness is never less than perfect. It is always a “ten plus.” Therefore, the righteousness of God which is imputed to you in Jesus Christ is always a “ten.”

Righteous conduct is the outworking of a righteous nature. We become “*partakers of the divine nature*” when we are saved (II Peter 1:4). We have the Lord God himself living His totally righteous life in us. That is why we seek to discipline the flesh to make our conduct agree with our new nature. To be righteous means to be “right.” God is right, and those who live in Him are right.

### **I. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS**

**A. God is righteous in His person.** His nature is always pure, upright,

ethical, blameless. and holy. He never does anything which is wrong because His very nature is untainted. His name is revealed in Scripture as *"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"* (Jeremiah 23:6). Ancient saints of God testified, *"O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous"* (Ezra 9:15). Notice that the emphasis is not on His doing righteous deeds but upon His being righteous in His essential being. He is so right that righteousness and judgment are said to be the habitation of His throne (Psalm 97:2).

**B. God is righteous in His works.** All that He does is upright, stainless, virtuous, good, and honorable. He can never be accused of doing wrong. The Bible testifies, *"The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works"* (Psalm 145:17). He who is identified by the name *"Faithful and True"* is said to be righteous even when He judges sin and makes war against it (Revelation 19:11). When the saints of God get together, *"there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD"* (Judges 5:11).

What makes the Christian righteous? It is not his conduct, even though that is essential to an effective testimony. His nature is not determined by his conduct, but his conduct reflects his nature. The Christian is righteous because he has received the righteous nature of God.

## II. MAN IS UNRIGHTEOUS

The whole human race is included in the divine decree, *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10). Man's lack of innate righteousness is the result of his birth to parents who have a human nature warped and weakened toward sin. It is the result of his inherent total depravity.

**A. Man is unrighteous in his inmost being.** *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* (Jeremiah 17:10). His heart is so vile by nature that what comes out of it defiles him (Mark 7:20-23).

Remember that *"heart"* is used in the Bible to refer to man's inmost being and center of personality — the mind, emotions, and the will. There is the residence of the *"carnal mind"* which is enmity against God and can never be subject to the law of God (Romans 8:7). No person can be truly righteous before God without a drastic miraculous change in his heart.

**B. Man is unrighteous in his relationship with his peers.** God describes the life of the natural man as *"foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another"* (Titus 3:3). No wonder there are beatings, robberies,

wars, and general conflict in human society. Mankind is at war with itself. The individual is miserable and makes people about him miserable. When people do not do right toward one another, how can society be at peace? An unrighteous nature produces an unrighteous lifestyle.

**C. Man is unrighteous in his relationship with God.** Here is the great mistake of the human race: *“They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God”* (Romans 10:3). In man's attempt to establish his own system of right, he has rejected God's system. That has increased his sin. A generation which is wise in its own eyes grows worse and worse. Look at the degeneration of society around you as evidenced by the content of many popular novels, movies, magazines, and television programs.

How serious is man's failure to meet God's standards? Isaiah laments, *“We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities”* (Isaiah 64:6, 7). That is how serious man's unrighteous nature and conduct are before God. Man is ruined because of his sin.

### III. MAN IS MADE RIGHTEOUS IN JESUS CHRIST

Two types of righteousness are recognized in Holy Scripture. The one is called self-righteousness; the other is imputed righteousness. Self-righteousness is the good that a person can do by sheer discipline of his will and control of his body. It is good in human relationships but not sufficient to get one accepted before God. Imputed righteousness is the righteous nature of God himself which is placed in the believer when he trusts Jesus. It is a perfect, righteous nature from which all good motives and deeds arise in the Christian. Look at that imputed righteousness in closer detail.

**A. Righteousness is based on Jesus' death and resurrection.** It is not the improving of a natural goodness in mankind. God provided redemption from sin in the sacrifice of Jesus. He became the covering and satisfaction for our sin debt. Through His atoning deed the righteousness of God is revealed as coming through Him and being received by faith. Read Romans 3:21-26 and rejoice. We are justified by His blood and made righteous in Him when we trust Him as our own Savior.

**B. Righteousness is received by faith in Jesus.** Say it again to make it

clear: A person receives the righteous nature of God when he trusts Jesus as personal Savior. God is just, and He justifies the one who believes in Jesus, whether that believer is circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile (Romans 3:26, 30). God looks for faith in the heart, not a certain racial blood in the veins, in receiving sinners to make them saints.

**C Righteousness is the very righteousness of God himself.** It sounds almost too good to be true, but the statement is true: We are made the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:21). It is not that we are made righteous; rather, we are made the righteousness *“of God.”* Amazing, isn't it! As a believer I am *“found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (Philippians 3:9). We are always a “ten” on the scale of righteousness because we have His righteousness instead of our own.

**D. Righteousness is by imputation.** It is accredited to our account, written down on our record, attributed as being our own. Impute is a bookkeeping word which means “to write down on one's record as being his own.” That is how we are made righteous in our Lord. That is why our righteousness is totally apart from our works of merit.

Three great acts of imputation are recorded in the Bible. (1) Adam's sin was imputed to us (Romans 5:12-21). (2) Our sins were imputed to Jesus (Hebrews 9:28 and Isaiah 53:4-6). (3) Christ's righteousness is imputed to us when we trust Him (Romans 4:1-25). We have His righteousness implanted in us and written to our account. On that basis we are called to live righteous lives.

#### **IV. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS RECEIVED BY FAITH**

Faith is transferring all confidence from every other person or thing and placing it in Jesus alone. He said He would forgive our sins and make us righteous with the very righteousness of God. We believe Him and trust Him to do it.

Therefore, righteousness comes as a totally free gift. We do not work for it. We do not merit it in any way. God makes us righteous with His own infinite righteousness because we trust Jesus. It sounds too simple, but that is God's way.

God promised Abraham that He would protect him, give him a great posterity, settle them in the land of Palestine, and then bless all the world through one of them (Genesis 15). At that time Abraham was a very old man and had no child through whom God's promise could be fulfilled. Yet, he

believed the Lord. On the basis of Abraham's faith, God imputed righteousness to him (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3).

That is how God makes us righteous today. He did not report on Abraham just for our historical interest. He showed us how we are justified, saved, and made righteous today when we trust Jesus. Righteousness is by grace on God's part and faith on man's part. Believe and receive.

## **V. RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST BE MANIFESTED IN CONDUCT**

Doing righteously is the proof of being righteous. James 2:14-16 has an extended discussion on the uselessness of just believing if faith has no power to change conduct. Paul says, *"Faith alone saves."* James says, *"Yes, but only the faith which produces works saves."* And both are right.

That is one reason the devil is so busy trying to get Christians to live unworthy lives. Faith justifies before God. Works justify before other people. God looks on our faith and calls us His people. Others look on our works to determine whether our profession is true.

*"Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil"* (I John 3:7,8). *"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him"* (I John 2:29).

The continuing challenge to each Christian is to live so that his conduct will prove the truth of his profession that he is a new creation in Jesus Christ. All the world should see the righteousness of God through the lifestyle of His people. Seeing our good works, they will glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

### **Questions**

1. What does righteous mean?
2. In what sense have we been made "the righteousness of God"?
3. How does I Peter 1:4 relate to a study of righteousness?
4. What proof can you give that God is righteous?
5. What proves that man needs the imputed righteousness of God?
6. How is one made righteous in Jesus Christ?
7. How is God's righteousness imputed to us?
8. Why must God's righteousness be received by faith?
9. How does God's righteousness show itself in our conduct?
10. How can you apply this study to your life this week?