

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

by Charles Stanley

Stanley's exposition on the nature and significance of God's righteousness as revealed in Scripture, examining how divine righteousness relates to salvation and the believer's standing before God.

1 Chapters

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God has graciously given us a complete, divine revelation of Himself, in His Word. There is no further development. But how little have we studied and searched it! How little we understand of its fullness! The distinct object of the Spirit in each book of the Scriptures is very little understood by many, and hence what confusion! Passages are often quoted which, if examined, would be found to refer to totally different subjects.

Let us take one or two important illustrations: "The righteousness of God." How commonly this is quoted from such scriptures as Rom 3:21-26, as if it meant the righteousness of Christ. Is not this great and serious confusion? Is it not as clear as words can express, the righteousness of God in justifying the believer, whether before Christ came or after—the righteousness of God without law, or apart from law altogether? Not on the principle of law in any sense, but "being justified freely by His grace [by God's grace], through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His [God's] righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time, His [God's] righteousness: that He [God] might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." This great foundation truth, how God is righteous in justifying, is scarcely ever heard, even in evangelical preaching.

I have read carefully the preachings at Exeter Hall and elsewhere in defence of the gospel which is being attacked by hosts of infidel ministers, and I thank God for the zeal of many who spoke. Yet we are compelled to say on this most important truth, "the righteousness of God," the trumpet gave a most uncertain sound. No anxious inquirer could tell from those preachings what "the righteousness of God" means—it was so confused with the righteousness of Christ. Far be it from me to seek to oppose those learned and gifted men. I would only seek to help. I am sure nothing would help them and the whole Church of God more than a clearer understanding of this subject.

What then is the righteousness of God? and what is the righteousness of Christ? Righteousness is perfect consistency of character and actions, according to the relation of one being to others, or with himself. Thus the righteousness of God is the perfect harmony of His attributes in His dealings with all created beings—perfect consistency with Himself, and that in justifying the ungodly sinner. How could His perfect love to me, a sinner, and His infinite hatred of my sins, be in absolute harmony? The redemption work and infinite propitiation for my sins, and substitution on the cross, is God's only possible answer to this awful question. Blessed be God, He is righteous, and is my Justifier! Let a man place himself in honest truth before God as a guilty sinner, and then he will find in the gospel the only possible revelation of the righteousness of God in justifying him. Now the way God is righteous in justifying the sinner is "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The Scripture does not say through the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner to restore him before God, just as if he had kept the law, and never failed to keep it. It is quite a different gospel to seek to reinstate man as a fallen child of the first Adam; and there is no mistake we are so likely

to make as this.

Bearing in mind, then, that the righteousness of God is God's whole purpose of salvation for guilty man, from first to last, and that that purpose has been accomplished by Christ in redemption, let us then inquire, What is the righteousness of Christ? and then what is the redemption that He has wrought? The reader may not be aware that there is not exactly such an expression in Scripture as the righteousness of Christ; 2Pe 1:1 is the nearest to it. But there His Godhead is spoken of. We may say, however, the Gospels present the only perfect righteous Man that ever trod this earth: perfect, and in absolute harmony with the mind and will of God, consistent with every relationship in which He stood. But that obedience must go up to the death of the cross. He must die, or remain alone. That one obedience must meet all the sinner's need, in order that the many may be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19).

He must be a spotless victim, without sin, to do this, as it is written, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2Co 5:21).

Thus "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Every type and shadow, every sacrifice, the utmost demand and curse of the law on the guilty (and that is what we surely are) has found its very end in Christ. God is glorified above the heavens, in absolute righteousness in justifying the guilty. Yes, God's righteousness is exalted above the highest heavens, before the whole universe. Praise ye the Lord! But is this Christ keeping the law, and that placed to man's account to restore him, and make good his standing before God as a law-keeper? Does righteousness come in this way by law? If so, there is no meaning in redemption. And it is remarkable, that wherever this different gospel is preached, which is not another gospel, redemption is not understood and seldom referred to.

What is redemption? Now, before reading another line, take a sheet of paper, and write down what you understand by redemption, especially if you have held that Christ's keeping the law is one half of our salvation, and His atoning death the other half.

Let us take God's own type for illustration: the redemption of Israel from Egypt. It would require quite a different story to illustrate the different or false gospel. Take just one point in Exo 5:1-23. They are in bitter bondage as slaves; they have no straw, and they cannot make the count of bricks. They are in sore distress. Does Moses, as a figure of Christ, make up the count of bricks for them? Are the bricks that Moses made imputed to them, so as to make up the full legal count? There is no such thought in a single figure of the old Testament, or a verse in the New. Redemption is not the amelioration or improvement of man as the slave of sin and Satan; but, as in Egypt, it is the bringing man out of the place of slavery altogether into an entirely new place and condition. And this could only be by the blood of the Lamb. Is it not so whether we speak of the present redemption of our souls by His precious blood, or the still future redemption of our bodies at the resurrection? It is the bringing of that which is ransomed from one state to another. Redemption is not the improvement or making good the old man. When Israel had passed through the water, figure of death, they were dead to the law of brick-making in Egypt. They passed out of that state altogether. Is not this the very secret of the believer's power for a holy, righteous life even here? Being dead to sin (Rom 6:11), is he not to reckon this to be so? Is he not also as dead to law? "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring

forth fruit unto God" (Rom 7:4). This is God's way. Man's way is just the opposite. He would say, "If you are born of God, now, you must be married to the law to bring forth fruit by keeping it; and where you fail, the law-keeping of Christ will be imputed to you to make up." Can any soul have peace or deliverance in that way? Read the whole of this chapter before us (Rom 7:1-25). Here is the very case: a man born again, but still under law, trying to find some good in the flesh, in the utmost distress as we have all found he cannot make his count of bricks. It is not something to make up a deficiency, or a helper he needs. He finds there is not a bit of good in the flesh. As born of God he delights in the law of God; but, oh, that other law in his members! He needs, and in Christ he finds, full deliverance.

Well, you may say, I have, through the grace of God, believed the free forgiveness of sins, through the atoning death of Christ. Is there not something more? I do not seem satisfied. Well, it is blessed to hear and believe, that "through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38). And even as to this part of the gospel, it is well to know the sure witness God has given. Not only has Jesus been delivered for our offences, but God raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, and for this very purpose: our justification. "And was raised again for our justification." Believing this we are reckoned righteous. "Therefore, being ["having been" - aorist passive - ed.] justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 4:24-25; Rom 5:1). Yes, we are justified from all our sins; accounted righteous through what Christ has done for us on the cross. But then Paul not only preached that free forgiveness through Jesus, but he also said, "And in Him every one that believes is justified from all things" (Acts 13:39, literal translation). If we are believers, what have we not in Christ? Do you say, I want to be sure I have righteousness? In Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1Co 1:30). Do you want to be assured that there is no condemnation to you? "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). Do you say, I want this old sinful nature to be improved, and made fit for heaven? Ah, there is no such thought in Scripture. No, on the cross the Holy One of God was sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3; 2Co 5:21). No, the righteousness of God is seen condemning our sinful nature on the cross, as well as in Jesus bearing our sins; and thus, by the cross, He set aside forever the old man with his deeds, and gives the believer a new place in Christ, the second [man] or last [Adam].

Oh, think what it is to be in Christ. This was the purpose of God before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him...; but all this "in Him" (Read Eph 1:3-7). And mark what God has given us in Him, according to His eternal purpose. No, it is not the lost man restored and made a good Jew under law. Mark these words: No, we do not know Christ after the flesh. It is not Moses making up the bricks under law, but, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God" (2Co 5:16-18).

What can the believer need or even desire more, except grace to walk worthy of this high calling in Christ Jesus. He is thus our righteousness, but not to make good the old man under law. It is what He is now, made unto us, as risen from the dead. "As He is, so are we [in this world]—1Jn 4:17], and all of God. Oh what a difference is felt and enjoyed, when we come to the end of all hope of the flesh under law, and find all in Christ in resurrection! Not I, but Christ. O God, our Father, bless these few remarks to the deliverance of many souls; and to Thy name be all praise!

C. S.

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