

The Absolute Righteousness of God

by Major Ian Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the absolute righteousness of God and how it is fulfilled in us through faith in Christ, who died to change the principle of human behaviour and radically transform our conduct.

Duration: 52:14

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:19-20, Romans 3:23-24, Romans 10:1-3, 2 Corinthians 5:21

Topics: "Righteousness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of Jesus being perfect in order to fulfill his role as a redeemer. The sinlessness of Jesus' life allowed him to condense and morally represent the life he lived. Through his vicarious atoning substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus redeemed humanity. The speaker also highlights how God, in sending his son Jesus, condemned sin in two ways - morally and vicariously. The sermon concludes with the reminder that believers can only be like Jesus in the measure that they allow him to work in and through them by their obedience and faith.

Transcript

Happy to welcome you all again tonight. Just a brief word of recapitulation to gather together some of the threads of the services in which we have taken part over the past weekend, in that these services have taken place in different churches. We haven't all been present, and yet, as I have announced on each occasion, I have thought that each should be part of the overall theme that we are following throughout this week.

On Sunday morning, some of us had the opportunity of examining a few words from the fifth chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians. And there, we read these words. I'd like to read them again to you.

The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. And we drew certain conclusions.

If Christ died for all, then all that man by nature is, and all that man by nature does, can be worth no more than the sentence of death that was imposed upon the Lord Jesus Christ as man's substitute and saviour. Personified in him under sentence of death was the worth of man in all that he was and all that he could do in his natural condition. And we discovered too that in the fifteenth verse of this chapter, implicitly, is the principle that governed human behaviour that made all that man was and all that man does worthless in

the sight of God, worthy only of the death that was imposed upon the Lord Jesus.

And this principle of human behaviour is stated by Paul in these terms, living to and for himself. That is the principle that governs the human behaviour of the natural man, alienated from the life of God, living to and for himself. But equally explicit that he died for all that they which live should not live henceforth unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again.

That there might be introduced, in other words, an entirely new principle of human conduct. No longer to and for himself, but to and for Jesus Christ. These are the two principles that govern human behaviour.

To live to and for yourself is to walk after the flesh. To live to and for Christ is to walk after the Spirit. And Christ died to change the principle that governs human behaviour.

That he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again. And it is of tremendous importance that we should recognize this, reiterated again and again throughout the whole of the Scriptures and particularly in the epistles and the New Testament, that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ is designed not simply to enable man to escape the punitive consequence of his sin, but that Jesus Christ died upon the cross, that the principle that governs human behaviour might be radically transformed. No longer to and for himself, but to and for Christ.

We discussed this on Saturday evening, that the nature of true discipleship, the committal that is involved in a walk with God, is a committal to Christ and to all that to which Christ is committed in us. I live to him and for him. This of course we discover to be the ultimate estimate of a man's worth in the sight of God, ultimately of course his worth to his fellow man.

The measure in which the redemptive purpose of God through Christ has been brought to fruition and the measure in which the redemptive purpose of God in Christ has been brought to fruition in you and me is simply the measure in which the principle that governs our behaviour has been transformed. How far I operate under the new principle as opposed to the old principle. How much was the Lord Jesus Christ as man worth to his father? The father could look down from heaven and say this is my beloved son, in him I am well pleased.

Because the Lord Jesus was committed to the father, exclusively, and to all that to which the father was committed in him. I do only, always, those things that please him. I'm committed to Christ and to all that to which Christ is committed to me.

He, Christ, is committed to his father and to all that to which his father is committed in him. So I am committed to all that to which the father is committed through the Son in me. That would be the measure in which I have entered into the full purpose for which Christ died and rose again from the dead.

Now we're going to turn to the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Because quite obviously a change of principle will produce a change of walk. And it is with this that the eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans is primarily concerned.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. And this is the definition that is given of a man in Christ Jesus. He may be defined, he may be recognized by a change of walk.

It isn't simply that he gives mental consent to a certain evangelical creed. He may be identified by his change of walk. They that are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

If therefore I seek and wish to identify a true child of God, then I examine his walk. And if it is manifest that he is led by the Spirit of God, then I can recognize him by this legitimate hallmark of his sonship as a child of God. In other words, the only thing that gives any validity to my claim to be in Christ is that it is manifestly obvious to everybody that Christ is in me.

And not only that Christ is in me but that by my consent to his re-established centrality he may behave in me. For as we shall discover increasingly tonight, the Christian life involves Christ behaving in the humanity of a forgiven sinner. There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. To what end? That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. That's why God sent his Son to condemn sin in the flesh. That there might be righteousness displayed in terms of human behavior.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, the old principle, but who walk after the Spirit, the new principle. In other words, the forgiven sinner accepted in the Beloved, redeemed by the matchless grace of God, is not thereby relieved of the moral responsibility that the law imposes upon man. It simply means that the forgiven sinner receives an entirely new spiritual capacity that enables the righteousness of the law to be fulfilled in him.

And it was to this end that the Lord Jesus died and rose again from the dead. What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh. I'm going to read the third verse from the Amplified New Testament.

For God has done what the law could not do. A categorical statement of fact. Its power being weakened by the flesh.

That is the entire nature of man without the Holy Spirit. Sending his own Son in the guise of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, God condemns sin in the flesh so that the righteousness and just requirement of the law might be fully met in us who live and move not in the ways of the flesh but in the ways of the Spirit. Our lives govern not by the standards and according to the dictates of the flesh but controlled by the Holy Spirit.

God has done what the law could not do. What could not the law do? The seventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us simply what the law could not do. Hebrews 7 and verse 19.

For the law made nothing perfect. The law made nothing perfect. But God has done what the law could not do.

The law makes nothing perfect through the weakness of the flesh because ever since man fell into sin man has been born into this world uninhabited by God inhabited only by this sin principle of satanic origin at once hostile to God not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be. Inherent in you and in me as those who are the fallen seed of the fallen Adam the naturally depraved human race there is this hostile

agency within us which repudiates the claims of the law repudiates all the demands that the law may make upon us in righteousness. The good that I would not the good that I would that I do not and the evil that I would not that I do.

This is the evil bias with which all of us are all too familiar within the human heart. But what the law could not do God did sending his Son. But I want you to notice that God in sending his Son, the Lord Jesus has condemned sin in a two-fold way.

What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. In the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. In those two ways God condemns sin morally and vicariously.

Not as sinful flesh but God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh he condemned sin morally. And sending his Son for sin he condemned sin vicariously.

And we're going to examine that just for a moment. How does God condemn sin morally in the person of the Lord Jesus? In the tenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans Paul is speaking of his Jewish brethren. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

I bear them record that they have a zeal of God but not according to knowledge. Deeply religious, they practiced religion with considerable sincerity. It wasn't every Jew, in other words, that was a hypocrite.

But their practice of religion was not according to knowledge. It wasn't an instructed faith. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

The Jews were ignorant of the total absolute righteousness of God. God is righteousness. And because they were ignorant of the nature of God's righteousness in its absoluteness they sought to establish their own righteousness which is, of course, self-righteousness as opposed to God's righteousness.

Only a person ignorant of the nature of God's righteousness would ever be so stupid as to seek to establish their own righteousness. But it was in their ignorance they sought to do this. If we are at once cognizant of the absoluteness of the righteousness of God we have to admit at once the total inadequacy of self-righteousness.

And we recognize then the need of what is described in this chapter as faith righteousness. The righteousness, verse 6, which is of faith which is further enlarged upon in the tenth verse for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness. In other words, because of the inadequacy of self-righteousness that can never satisfy the demands of God's righteousness there has been made available to man faith righteousness and imputed righteousness.

And you know that the imputed righteousness that is available to man is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin. That we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

That we might be made, in other words, God's righteousness in Christ. Of course, this is the basis of our justification. That on Calvary's cross there was imputed to him our guilt that there might now be imputed to us his righteousness.

That is faith righteousness. But what was the nature of his righteousness? Verse 4 Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. In other words, the righteousness that was displayed by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ a righteousness that may be now imputed to you and to me and by virtue of which righteousness we may be accepted in thee beloved and made acceptable before God in spite of the absoluteness of his righteousness this righteousness satisfies completely the demands of the law.

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. It simply means that he was the last word in righteousness. That there was no demand that the law could make upon him as man in righteousness that did not find its complete and absolute satisfaction.

There was no point at any time in thirty-three years on earth in which the law could accuse the Lord Jesus Christ and find him guilty. Of course, that is of necessity essential. For the righteousness demanded by the law is quite obviously the absolute righteousness that is the very nature of God's righteousness.

But what does it mean? It means this, that if the righteousness displayed by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ satisfies the demands that the law makes upon man then the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of his life are one and the same thing. The righteousness demanded by the law and the righteousness displayed by his life these were of complete equality. Both absolute.

What then can the life that the Lord Jesus Christ lived nineteen hundred years ago do for me and do for you now? If the righteousness of his life lived then is equal to the righteousness demanded by the law what can the life that the Lord Jesus Christ lived then do for you and for me now? The answer to that, of course, is very simple. If the righteousness of his life equals the righteousness demanded by the law all that his life that he lived then can do for me now is what the law can do for me now. And to discover what that is we need to turn to the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans.

Romans chapter three and verse nineteen. Now we know that what things soever the law saith it saith to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.

For by the law is the knowledge of sin. All that the law can do for you and for me is to condemn us. It stops our mouths, it proves us guilty and exposes our sin.

Any man may opt to be judged according to the law. There might be somebody sitting in the service tonight and you say I don't see any need for redemption. I don't see any need for what you call new birth, spiritual regeneration.

I'm perfectly prepared to take my chance. I'm perfectly prepared for God to judge me on the basis of the demands of his law. Well if you were foolish enough to be such a one you have the right so to opt.

Any man, woman or child may claim to be judged by God on the basis of the law and upon no other. And this is specially written for such. We know that what thinks whoever the law saith it saith to them who are under the law.

To this end. That if you opt to be judged by the law your mouth may be stopped, you may be proved guilty and your sin exposed. For by the law is the knowledge of sin.

So if you compare your life with the demands made upon you by the law you are proved guilty and condemned. But the righteousness of the life of Christ is equal to the righteousness demanded by the law.

Compare your life to the law, it proves you guilty.

Compare your life to the life of Christ and what happens? It proves you guilty. Whether it be the law or his life both condemn you. Stop your mouth and expose your guilt.

And if as some would have us believe all that God purposed in Christ was that he should live the beautiful life 1900 years ago just to present to you and to me a noble example that we would seek to emulate. If Christianity simply means that you and I imitate his wonderful example then this would be no gospel. It would be a message of despair and frustration.

For the same weakness of the flesh that makes it impossible for the law to fulfill its righteousness in me is the same weakness of the flesh that would make it utterly impossible for me to imitate his matchless life. If because of my fallen, depraved nature I cannot satisfy the demands of the law no more could I satisfy the demands of his life. All that the life of Jesus Christ that he lived on this earth 1900 years ago can do for me now is condemn me as the law condemns me.

For whether I compare my life to the law or my life to his life both law and life condemn me. But for 33 years the Lord Jesus Christ lived in sinlessness. That the life that he lived then might condemn sin morally as the law condemns sin morally.

Well that wouldn't offer us much hope. Why did he live that kind of life if the life that he lived then in sinlessness can only condemn me now in my sinfulness? The answer to that question is very simple. The life that he lived qualified him for the death that he died because his was an atoning vicarious substitutionary death.

The life that he lived qualified him for the death that he died. God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. He suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

In other words not only did he come in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin morally but he came in his sinlessness for sin to condemn sin vicariously. This the law could not do. You see truth came by Moses, the law.

Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. His vicarious atoning death makes it possible for the guilty sinner to be reconciled to a holy God. But is that all? When I've told you that Christ in his sinlessness died in the Roman stead of your sinfulness that your sins might be forgiven have I preached the gospel? Have I made known to you the whole counsel of God? Well of course not.

Because we've seen already that the purpose for which he died was not that you might be forgiven that you are forgiven because he died is a glorious and eternal fact. But that isn't the purpose for which he died. He died that you might no longer live unto yourself but unto him who died and rose again from the dead.

As God sent his son to condemn sin in his son morally and vicariously it was to this end that the righteousness demanded by the law might be fulfilled in you. That when he was incarnate and lived his sinless life and died his atoning death and rose again in all the mighty victory of his resurrection it was that the principle of human conduct might be radically changed. That there might be an exchange of principle which would involve a radical change of walk.

As you admit yourself a guilty sinner and humbly in repentance toward God put your faith in Jesus Christ and receive him as your savior does that in itself the knowledge that your sins are forgiven? Does that in itself give you the power to live a different kind of life? Of course it doesn't. The fact that you know that your sins are forgiven because Christ died historically for you 1,900 years ago as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world this fact in itself and the knowledge of this fact may create within you the desire to live a different kind of life. It may create within you the incentive to be holy but it doesn't give you the power to be holy.

The knowledge that your sins are forgiven doesn't give you any new spiritual or moral capacity to live a quality of life anything different from the quality of life that you lived before you were redeemed. And if I were to tell you any other I would be deceiving. Or I would be encouraging you to be as foolish as the Galatians.

Try to be made perfect in the flesh. The fact that the life that he lived in his sinlessness qualified him for the death that he died as a vicarious atoning sacrifice is half the story. There's something infinitely more wonderful.

That's only the door into your salvation. That's only the way into life. The life that he lived qualifies him for the death that he died.

But the death that he died qualifies you to receive the life that he lived. That's the gospel. The life that he lived qualified him for the death that he died but the death that he died qualifies you for the life that he lived.

That God's purpose in redemption that your sins might be forgiven through his shed blood simply qualifies you to be re-inhabited by God for God that as a forgiven sinner the Holy Spirit might come again to indwell and inhabit your human spirit and presence the living Christ within you that your body might become the temple of the living God that you might become a habitation of God through the Spirit that Jesus Christ once more resident within you might begin to behave in the power and energy of his Holy Spirit once more exercising the Christ rule within the area of your human personality. So the life that Christ lived 1900 years ago condemns you. But you see the Christian life is the life that Christ lived 1900 years ago lived now by him in you and that's the life that saves you.

The life that he lived then could only condemn you. It's the life that he lives now in you that saves you and that's the Christian life. That's why Romans chapter 5 verse 10 says so plainly if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son much more being reconciled by the death of his Son we shall be saved by his life.

If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life. By what life? The life that he lived then lived now by him in us. He's the eternal present.

And the wonderful thing is this that the life that he was capable of living then in his own humanity 1900 years ago is precisely the life that he is capable of living now clothed with your humanity and mine. And as by faith we appropriate the atoning adequacy of his death so by faith we may appropriate the saving efficacy of his life and we may say and know that it's true to me to live life itself for me is Christ. So here is a very simple panoramic statement of the matter.

In four sentences. Here's the first sentence. He had to be what he was perfect to do what he did redeem.

That was the first thing. He had to be what he was perfect to do what he did redeem. In the sinlessness of his life he had to condemn sin morally by his perfection the life that he lived in order to do what he did by his vicarious atoning substitutionary sacrifice redeem.

That's why as some of us discovered on Sunday evening the miraculous nature of his conception is an absolute imperative for man's spiritual regeneration for had Jesus Christ been born as you and I were born he would have been born by nature a sinner and would have been a sinner by practice because he was a sinner by nature for he too with us would have been a fallen member of the fallen seed of a fallen Adam but because God intervened and miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary this little child that there might be presented to him a body uncontaminated inhabited only by God and uninhabited by sin he could be what he was in order to do what he did he had to be what he was perfect in order to do what he did redeem.

That's the first thing.

Now here's the second thing he had to do what he did redeem that you and I might have what he is life because the life that he lived qualified him for the death that he died but the death that he died qualifies us to receive the life that he lived that's why the Lord Jesus said I am come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundant his life for in him was life this life is the light of men he had to be what he was perfect to do what he did redeem he had to do what he did redeem that you might have what he is life now here's the third thing you must have what he is life to be what he was perfect and that completes the circle because it's only what he is in you that can be what he was perfect you don't have any perfection you don't have any righteousness of God is he

made unto you righteousness wisdom redemption sanctification the only spiritual content in man that finds approval with the father is the son that's why Paul tells us that we are to reckon ourselves to be dead indeed and to sin all that we are apart from what Christ is and we are to reckon ourselves to be alive under God alone exclusively in Jesus Christ in other words all that the father sees in us us that is alive to him is Jesus Christ so far as God is concerned the only part of us that is alive to him is the Christ who lives within imparted by his Holy Spirit and we've got to have what he is Christ present in if ever we are to be what he was perfect now does that mean that just as soon as you are born again and Christ comes to dwell within you in all his perfection does that mean that

you are sinlessly perfect oh no there's a fourth statement let me refresh your memory he had to be what he was perfect in order to do what he did redeem he had to do what he did redeem that you might have what he is life you must have what he is life to be what he was perfect but you will be what he was perfect only precisely and only in the measure that by your obedience step by step in faith you allow him to be now in you what he is you will be what he was only in the measure that you allow him by your obedience to be what he is and that involves every step you take that involves every decision that you make that involves every breath you breathe and every day that dawn this is the new walk that is precipitated by the exchange of principle I no longer now live to and for myself I live

to and for him for which purpose he died for the death he died qualifies me to receive the life he lived and now he has become central in the area of my human personality and I know that only as in every step that I take and for every new situation into which every new step takes me I relate the situation to him and cast myself upon him in total and absolute dependence will he vindicate himself in me and that's called in the

bible walking after the spirit as opposed to walking after the flesh I reckon with Christ for every step I take and for every breath I breathe and for every day that dawn but that's how you reign in life by one Christ Jesus that's how you become more than conqueror you simply reckon with Christ is that how you've lived your life today since you got up this morning in

the various situations that have confronted you at home in the domestic scene or at the office or at the workshop or factory in the letters that you may have received or the business that you may have been called upon to do did you reckon with Christ did you just expose it to him and say Lord Jesus you're my life for this you're my wisdom for this, you're my patience for this you're all that I need for this situation I'm just reckoning with thee that's what's called being spiritually minded doesn't mean that you go around with a pious look on your face you simply reckon with Christ and to be spiritually minded is life and peace this eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans to be carnally minded is death to be spiritually minded simply means that you're walking after the spirit that

means to say you're living to and for Christ to be carnally minded simply means that you're walking after the flesh that means you're living to and for yourself you may have been redeemed but your principle of action has not been changed that's how of course a redeemed sinner can live a carnal life to be carnally minded is death simply because you don't reckon with Christ but in him is life and this life is the light of man and if you don't reckon with Christ you don't reckon with life and if you don't reckon with life you reckon only with what is left when there is no life, what's that?

Death and that's to be carnally minded and these are the two possibilities that are open to us but the purpose for which Christ shed his precious blood that you might become a redeemed sinner reconciled to God by his death is that moment by moment you might be saved by his life living to and for Christ and taking every step in that childlike attitude of total dependence upon the Holy Spirit by whose gracious presence Christ presences himself within you occupying your humanity that he might have the right to behave through you the Christian life is the life that he lived then lived now by him in you and he will live that life in you and through you just precisely in the measure of your availability as demonstrated by the obedience of faith in every step you take walking in the spirit well that's where we're finishing tonight and we shall pick up the threads again tomorrow and continue to explore but remember this that when tomorrow dawns you step out into a new day if you are a Christian with none other than Christ himself living within within his heart one sole desire that he might be in you tomorrow in all his glorious fullness all that he ever was 1900 years ago when he was clothed with his own sinless humanity and it's for you and for me to give him the right to be himself in action and Christ in action in you and me is the only authentic source of righteousness now we'll bow our heads in prayer our God we thank thee for the lavish provision that thou hast made for us in thy dear son we thank thee for his complete obedience we thank thee for his perfection we thank thee for the precious blood that he shed that cleanses our hearts from sin the death he died that gives us the right though we never deserved it to possess the life he lived Lord some of us have learned to say thank you for his death some of us haven't yet learned to say thank you for his life some of us have been made fit for heaven by what he did some of us haven't yet been made fit for earth by what he is and we pray that if never before we may learn what is the true spiritual content of our faith Christ in us the hope of glory and we ask it for his name's sake Amen

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