

# The Righteousness of God

**The “Righteousness of God”** is an expression that occurs in three senses in scripture; the Kingdom sense, the Gospel sense, and the Promise sense. In all cases, righteousness means “equity of character” and has the thought of *consistency*. The Righteousness of God is God’s total and absolute consistency in His actions with who He is in His own character. Here is a clearer definition of each case:

- **The Kingdom Sense.** “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). The Lord is exhorting the disciples to recognize God’s supreme power and authority, and to *practically live in consistency with Himself*.
- **The Promise Sense.** “... Obtaining faith by the righteousness of their God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:1). This is God’s righteousness which causes Him to give what is necessary to fulfill His own promises! In this case, faith to unbelieving Jews.<sup>1</sup> This sense is peculiar to the faithful remnant which God ever has in Israel, to whom pertain the promises.
- **The Gospel Sense.** “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25). In Romans we have a righteousness that justifies the sinner through the faith of Christ. The gospel sense seems to be the primary sense in which this phrase occurs.

## The Perfect Righteousness of God

by Albert Midlane

The perfect righteousness of God  
Is witnessed in the Saviour’s blood;  
’Tis in the cross of Christ we trace  
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.

God could not pass the sinner by,  
Justice demands that he should die;  
But in the cross of Christ we see  
How God can save, yet righteous be.

**What is Righteousness?** Righteousness means “equity of character” and has the thought of consistency. It is a little different than holiness, and goodness. Holiness has more to do with moral cleanness. Goodness has to do with kindness of nature.

- ***The Righteousness of God*** is God’s total and absolute consistency in His actions with who He is in His own character. It is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:17) “[therein is the righteousness of God revealed](#)”; i.e. the Gospel explains how God can be “[just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus](#)”. It is also displayed in God’s dealings with Israel during the Times of the Gentiles, and in their future restoration (Romans 9, 10, and 11).
- ***The Righteousness of Christ*** is His consistency with His own character (displayed in His life as a man). Without this there is no Savior.

“How commonly this [the term “righteousness of God”] is quoted from such scriptures as Romans 3: 21-26, as if it meant the righteousness of Christ. Is not this serious confusion? 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. What is the righteousness of Christ? and then what is the redemption that He has wrought? There is not exactly such an expression in Scripture as the righteousness of Christ; 2 Peter 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.”<sup>2</sup>

- ***The Righteousness of Man*** is man’s consistency in all of his relationships and responsibility before the eye of a Holy God – all men are unrighteous as far as God is concerned, “[as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.](#)” Romans 3:10.

**God, the Only Source of Divine Righteousness (Rom. 3:21).** In a sense, God’s righteousness is *for* us, although not in the sense of imputed righteousness. This is brought

out first in Romans 3, before other aspects. Righteousness could not be found in man. But [“now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, etc.”](#) [Romans 3:21].

“When man’s mouth is closed in guilt, God can open His in grace; and so He does. He was entitled to ask for righteousness. Man is all wrong; there is no righteousness in him. That has been proved already. The only righteousness, therefore, is God’s. What it fully means, what its basis is, and how it avails for the blessing of man, are other questions.”<sup>3</sup> \_

**God’s Righteousness as a Garment or Covering (Rom. 3:21).** To me, the most beautiful thing is that now the Righteousness of God is given to the justified sinner as a covering - clothed with the Righteousness of God. The same quality of God’s character that kept me from heaven, assigned me to Hell, and judged the Lord Jesus on the cross *“is now on my side, and shelters me, a justified sinner, forever in the presence of God.”*<sup>4</sup> \_ God would have to be unrighteous in order to send me to Hell.<sup>5</sup> \_

**The Righteousness of God for Justification (Rom. 3:25).** In virtue of the blood of Christ, the righteousness of God is revealed for the justification of the one who believes in Jesus and His blood. The basis and motive for justification here is the shed blood of Christ. The Righteousness of God caused God to do certain things as a “necessity”, reverently speaking.

- Refuse a sinner entrance to heaven.
- Send a guilty sinner to the Lake of Fire.
- Require a propitiatory sacrifice to vindicate the throne of God.
- Administer the fatal stroke of judgment to the Savior hanging on the cross.

After the cross, where the Lord Jesus suffered the penalty of sin and shed His atoning blood on Calvary, God was given a righteous basis on which to do certain things - in fact, He was compelled by virtue of His own righteousness to:

- Raise the Lord Jesus from the dead.
- Bring Him back to heaven and seat Him at His own right hand.
- Give Him a Name which is above every name, etc.
- Justify the sinner that believes in Jesus. (This is what is emphasized in Romans.)

**Imputed Righteousness (Rom. 4:5).** Imputed Righteousness is what God gives to the sinner who has [“faith in His \[Christ’s\] blood”](#). It is given to us not like adding money to a bank account, but rather giving a persona righteous status before God. We, as men, could never win the quality of righteousness by works, with or without the Law. Now God reckons

it to us on the basis of faith. But this is different than the Righteousness of God.

“It is not the righteousness of God imputed, nor the righteousness of Christ; but it is the believer imputed, or reckoned, righteous by faith. It is not so much righteousness set over to the sinner’s account, but it is the believing sinner accounted righteous while he is not righteous.”<sup>6</sup>

Philippians 3:9 seems to fall into this category of righteousness imputed by the principle of faith.

[That I may be found in him, not having my righteousness, which \[would be\] on the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which \[is\] of God through faith.”](#) Philippians 3:9

**A Righteous Position “in Christ” by Resurrection (Rom.4:25).** In the end of Romans 4 we have a slightly different sense: more than having the shed blood and god’s righteousness as the basis for justification, we have a new position through the resurrection that we are brought into. Here there is not only death but resurrection. I have not only the blood of Christ before God as my full clearance from sins, but I have Christ Himself, risen and accepted “for us”... I am set in a place of full acceptance through His resurrection (Eph. 1:6, I John 4:17).

**A Righteous Life “In Christ” (Rom. 5:18).** This is a different aspect than the third or fourth chapter (actually a different word in the Greek). We are declared righteous; not by having it imputed to us, or put on us, but by being given the life of Christ which is righteous!.

“In this chapter [Romans 5] we have the two heads with their respective families – Adam and his family, Christ and His family. It is the disobedient one, and the obedient One; the one offense, and the one righteousness. Adam by one offense – one act of disobedience – involved his whole family in ruin. Christ by one righteousness-one unbroken act of obedience-secured a standing righteousness before God for all His family. By Adam’s one act, his whole family were constituted sinners; by Christ’s one act, His whole family were constituted righteous. This one act of Christ includes His whole work in life and in death.”<sup>7</sup>

**Christ Himself our Righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).** This is a higher character of righteousness than what we have through the work of Christ – it is the righteousness we have through His Person. He is our righteousness before God.

[“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and](#)

righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” 1 Cor. 1:30

This is the righteousness we have because of our standing “in Christ”. He (His Person) is whatever is needed for the one that shares His place before God. Is righteousness needed? Is sanctification needed? We have it because we are in Christ’s place before God.

**Made the Righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).** Christ seated on the throne of God is an expression of the righteousness of God (John 13:32). We are in Christ, and looked at as part of Him; thus we are made the expression of the righteousness of God in Him. God made Christ the expression of what we were (sin) and now He has made us (in Christ) the expression of what He is in His character of righteousness.

## Footnotes

1. Kelly, W. *The Righteousness of God: What Is It?* London, 1910.
2. Stanley, Charles. *“The Righteousness of God”*. G. Morrish.
3. Kelly, W. *The Righteousness of God: What Is It?* London, 1910.
4. “Substitution and Righteousness.” Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule: Taken from Tracts, Pamphlets, Periodicals, and Letters, by A. H. Rule, vol. 1, Bible Truth Publishers, 1953.
5. *If I have Christ, God is equally righteous in justifying me, as He would be in condemning me if I had Him not. The righteousness of God that would condemn the sinner is the very thing that in Christ justifies the sinner...* - Kelly, W. Lectures on the Epistle to the Galatians.
6. “Substitution and Righteousness.” Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule: Taken from Tracts, Pamphlets, Periodicals, and Letters, by A. H. Rule, vol. 1, Bible Truth Publishers, 1953.
7. “Substitution and Righteousness.” Selected Ministry of A.H. Rule: Taken from Tracts, Pamphlets, Periodicals, and Letters, by A. H. Rule, vol. 1, Bible Truth Publishers, 1953.