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**B0544 – November 6, 2005 – Major Bible Themes**  
**Chapter 29 – Four Aspects Of Righteousness**

**I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**

The Bible declares that God is “righteous”.

**Exodus 9:27** Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time; the LORD is the *righteous* one, and I and my people are the wicked ones.

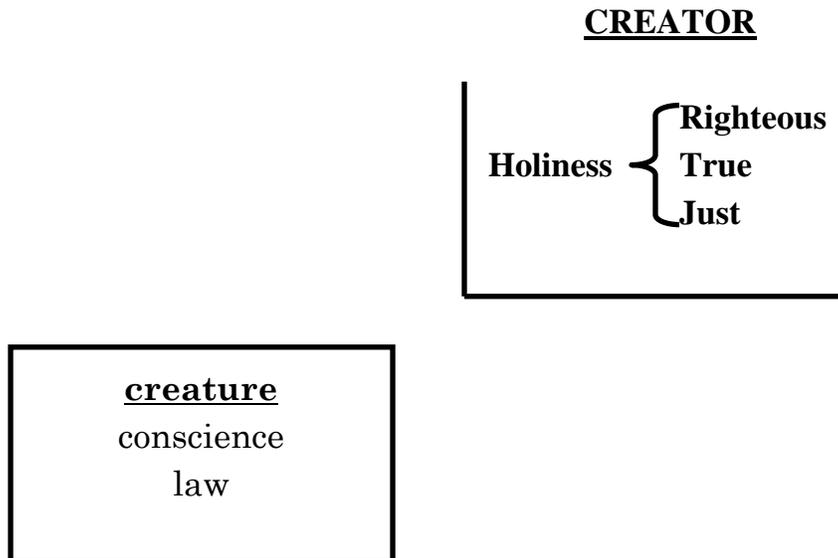
**Jeremiah 12:1** *Righteous* are You, O LORD, that I would plead *my* case with You; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You:

**Revelation 16:5-7** "*Righteous* are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; <sup>6</sup> for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." <sup>7</sup> And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and *righteous* are Your judgments."

Unfortunately, the word “righteous” has taken on a religious connotation. The proper connotation is in relation to a law or standard by which to measure traits or behavior in order to make judgments. When the Bible says that “God is righteous” it means that His moral character is the standard for right and wrong everywhere in the cosmos (see above references). God’s own character is the standard. He never demands something because it is "right" in and of itself; instead, something is "right" because it reflects God’s nature.

Three other attributes are closely associated with righteousness in these verses. Can anyone tell me what they are? 1) Just (Jer 12:1), 2) Holy (Rev 16:5), and 3) True (Rev 16:7). God is just, holy, and true and these three attributes are closely connected to God’s moral character and righteousness. Holiness encompasses all three because it is what “sets God

apart” from His creatures. Yet we, as His creatures, because we are made in His image, have finite replicas of His attribute of holiness.



God made all humans with a conscience. The conscience serves as an internal witness. The conscience is not the standard itself but always judges according to the standard it has received. If it received a wrong standard then it will judge wrongly. But it always urges us to do what we believe to be right and not to do what we believe to be wrong. Since God’s moral character is the standard for right and wrong everywhere in the cosmos then the human conscience judges righteously only when the standard it has received comes from the word of God.

God also placed in all humans a need for law. This need for law is something like God’s justice. People of all places and times have erected laws to live by to maintain some kind of order. These laws dictate what is right or wrong but are only accurate insofar as the laws are based on or come from the word of God. The closer a set of laws conforms to Scripture the more freedom a society enjoys. Historically, the legal systems of societies have tended toward one of two opposite poles, either totalitarian dictatorships where one man determines and enforces his law or anarchy where every man does what is right in his own eyes. The systems of law that men erect are different from God’s righteousness in two ways.

1. God’s law is eternal (it always exists)
2. God’s law is immutable (it is not subject to change or revision)
3. God’s law is universal (it applies to all people of all times without distinction)

1. Man's laws are temporal (they apply only for a period of time)
2. Man's laws are mutable (they are subject to change or revision)
3. Man's laws are provincial (they apply to one nation or people group)

The human conscience and the need for law is something like His attribute of holiness.

Two important things to keep in mind; first, God's own moral character is the standard for what is right and wrong everywhere, all the time, in the cosmos. There is no abstract moral standard to which God must adhere. He is the standard. This fact is reflected in the NT when a rich young ruler came to Jesus and said,

**Luke 18:18-19** *Good Teacher*, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me *good*? No one is good except God alone.

Jesus was reflecting the truth that the only righteous standard for making any moral judgment is God alone. Jesus was quick to challenge the presuppositions of His questioners and He never granted the arbitrary standards of people for the sake of argument. Rather, He pointed them to the only standard upon which one can make a meaningful judgment.

Second, systems of law that men erect (e.g. Code of Hammurabi, US Constitution, Bill of Rights, etc...) can be judged as good or evil by comparing them with God's moral character. This is why Christians are so concerned about Roe v Wade and Proposition 2. They are concerned that our law does not and/or will not reflect God's moral character. In other words, many Christians seek a standard of law that reaches beyond our founding fathers, the legislature, and the Supreme Court. We want our law to reflect God's wise counsel. What do we do if we live under a system of law that is contrary to God's laws for the Church? We must obey God's laws. This is why Peter and the apostles refused to obey the provincial laws of the Jewish council when it conflicted with God's law.

**Acts 5:28-29** "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Now, since God's own character is the standard for right and wrong in the cosmos then His judgment of man is true. He has judged man to be a sinner. We are sinners by nature, we are sinners by imputation, and we are sinners by our actions. Thus, the Bible claims that all men are born under sin and under the just condemnation of God. This creates a

predicament. Since God is righteous and His character cannot bend or flex since He is just how can a man be right with God? If God will not relax His standards so men can meet them then what solution is there? “The triumph of the Gospel is...that all those judgments which infinite righteousness must of necessity impose upon the sinner have been borne in substitution by God’s provided Lamb, and that this is a plan of God’s own devising which according to His own standards of righteousness is sufficient for all who believe.”<sup>i</sup> Why?

**Romans 3:26** so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Thus, boasting is excluded and God gets all the glory. The only requirement on the human side to be justified is “faith”. While men can imagine that God is righteous (ontological argument) what they often fail to perceive or grasp is that if God is going to save sinful beings He must do so in a way that does not compromise His righteousness. Christianity is the only system that does not compromise the standards of the god or gods and thus it is the only system that is not works based. Rather it is faith based. We are placing our confidence in God’s own Son who was sent to meet the righteous demands of His character. When we do so we are justified before God.

## **II. THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MAN**

According to God’s word the righteousness of man can never make a man right with God.

**Romans 10:3** For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Man is always trying to establish his own righteousness. Even from the first pages of Scripture man finds a way to rationalize his sin in order to justify himself. Did Adam accept the blame? No, he shifted it to Eve. Did Eve accept the blame? No, she shifted it to the serpent. Men do not face their own sin squarely. We rationalize our sin, we hide our sin, we change the subject, we create problems just so we can solve them and feel good about ourselves! The carnal nature goes to great lengths to establish its own righteousness. When are we going to come face to face with ourselves and admit our sins and that we are hopelessly sinners in need of God’s grace? I’m not talking only of non-Christians here, I’m talking about Christians too. Christians have a remarkable way of rationalizing sin away because they know they are not supposed to sin. The intellect of some Christians devoted to rationalizing sin has created some of the most elaborate schemes of justifying self. Have you ever made any of the following remarks?

1. "I'm better than he is..."
2. "At least I haven't done that..."
3. "Well, you did that..."

Do you still use these common forms of avoiding responsibility? I'm convinced this is a universal truth: humans are "dodgers of responsibility". It's never their fault. The Bible says,

**2 Corinthians 10:12** For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding.

To compare yourself to someone else is to show lack of understanding. The wise man compares himself with the Almighty God and none else!

A second thing humans do is wrongly assume that their righteous acts are righteous. The Bible says otherwise...

**Isaiah 64:6** But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags;

Even our righteous acts are sinful in the sight of a holy God. Explicit declarations of our utter lack of righteousness abound.

**Romans 3:10-18** as it is written, "there is none righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for god; <sup>12</sup> all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." <sup>13</sup> "their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving," "the poison of asps is under their lips"; <sup>14</sup> "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; <sup>15</sup> "their feet are swift to shed blood, <sup>16</sup> destruction and misery are in their paths, <sup>17</sup> and the path of peace they have not known." <sup>18</sup> "there is no fear of god before their eyes."

Since this is the case then if there is to be any hope for any individual it must come through the provisions of God's grace for none can enter heaven who are not as acceptable to God

as Christ is. And this need of man has been abundantly supplied by God Himself in His Son.

### III. AN IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS *FROM* GOD<sup>ii</sup>

Because we are unable to bring anything to God that has merit God graciously provided the necessary righteousness we need.

**Romans 3:21-22** But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Notice the two identical phrases in vv 21 and 22 “*the* righteousness of God”. *the* is in italics indicating that it is not in the original Greek text. If we think about this phrase in verse 22 it is saying that when we have faith in Christ we receive the attribute of God’s righteousness. *The* righteousness of God is a genitive of possession. What He possesses as righteousness we receive through faith in Jesus Christ. However, that cannot be the case. We never receive any attribute of God. We will always remain creatures. Even in eternity future we will not possess omniscience, omnipresence, or any other attribute of God. Rather, what this verse is saying is better translated in the NIV to say “a righteousness from God”. That changes the meaning significantly. Now we see that if we take this as a genitive of source then it is not God’s attribute of righteousness that is given to us but a righteousness that comes from God. The righteousness we know, from other passages is none other than the righteousness of Christ. Christ, in His humanity, had to “learn obedience” and be “made perfect” in the flesh. Just as Adam and Eve had to be sanctified before they sinned so the sinless Christ had to be sanctified. Sanctification is not defined in terms of stopping sin but of learning loyalty to God. The difference between Adam and Christ is that Adam did not learn obedience but disobedience. Thus, the obedience that Christ learned and generated in His humanity is the righteousness that comes from God and is imputed to all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Let’s talk a bit about that imputation because imputation can be a difficult thing to understand. Two Greek words relate to the English word “impute” which comes from the Latin *imputare*. The first is *evlloge,w* which is used only twice in the NT (Rom 5:13; Phlm 1:18). It is a late verb from *en* and *logos* meaning “to write in”. A.T. Robertson says impute means “to put down in the ledger to one’s account.” For example, Paul told Philemon “if he [Onesimus] has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my

account.” Paul was saying, write down in a ledger book under my name how much Onesimus owed you and I will pay it. I don’t owe it but charge it to my account.

The second word is *logizomai* which is used forty times in the NT in various senses; to charge, to credit, to reckon, to consider, to think, to suppose, et. al (Lk. 22:37; Jn. 11:50; Acts 19:27; Rom. 2:3, 26; 3:28; 4:3ff, 8ff, 22ff; 6:11; 8:18, 36; 9:8; 14:14; 1 Co. 4:1; 13:5, 11; 2 Co. 3:5; 5:19; 10:2, 7, 11; 11:5; 12:6; Gal. 3:6; Phil. 3:13; 4:8; 2 Tim. 4:16; Heb. 11:19; Jas. 2:23; 1 Pet. 5:12). For our contexts the word is an accounting term meaning “to charge or credit” to one’s account much like the verb *evlloge,w*. The Bible is teaching that everyone has an account with God and everyone’s account is either empty or full of Christ’s righteousness. If the account is empty then the person is condemned. If the account is full then the person is justified

**Romans 5:18** So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

Paul’s point is that because of the one transgression of Adam all men were condemned. The accounts of all men are empty of righteousness. But a much greater thing happened to remedy the situation, through one act of righteousness by Christ there resulted justification of life to all men. This means that justification was made available to all men through faith in Christ! If all men are sinners and all men have negative bank accounts with God how do we account for this situation? The Scriptures teach that the sin of Adam and Eve constituted all their posterity sinners (Rom 5:19)

**Romans 5:19** For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,

The sin of Adam was imputed, reckoned, or charged to every member of the race. But how is this fair? It seems outrageous to be held responsible for a sin we did not consciously commit! How can God justly charge Adam’s sin to our account? There are various theories as to how this actual imputation, reckoning, or charging took place that help answer the question. I will only mention observations that I think best answer the question. Let’s start with Romans 5:12

**Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, *because all sinned--*

The first thing to note is that sin entered the world through one man and that man was Adam. Adam was the gatekeeper and he, by sinning, let sin into the world. Second, death entered through sin. So, sin is the gatekeeper of death and through sin death always comes. Our world is too full of death to not be stunningly aware of death all around us. Four times a year the seasons change and with each of them death comes. J Vernon McGee used to say “look around, the whole earth is a graveyard”. The Bible accounts for all this death by attributing it to the effect of Adam’s sin. But lastly, notice the final clause “because all sinned”. This expression is in the active voice meaning that all men somehow participated in the sin of Adam. As I said, there are several theories to account for how *all sinned*: the Pelagian theory, the Arminian theory, the Mediate theory, the Realistic or Seminal theory, the Federal theory, and the Corporate Personality theory.

*First*, in a very real sense the entire human race was in Adam when he sinned.<sup>iii</sup> Therefore, in a very real way all men did participate in the sin of Adam, albeit in a different way than Adam. Thus, “All men are co-sinners with Adam.” Rom 5:12 supports this because “all sinned” indicates active participation and verse 14 shows that we did not sin in the same way Adam did. *Second*, it is also true that Adam is the representative of humanity. Therefore, “When Adam sinned, he acted as a representative of the human race.” Thus, the sin of our representative Adam was imputed to the entire human race. Rom 5:19 seems to support this because it says that “through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners”. Since the verb “made” is passive voice it seems that we were all affected involuntarily by Adam’s disobedience. *Third*, it is also true that there is a sense in which all humans are associated and we cannot separate ourselves from one another. When we speak of the brotherhood of humanity or say “no man is a lone island” we are reflecting the conscious idea that humanity is a corporate personality. One author says that Paul “was using the Hebrew concept of the solidarity of the race.” Whatever the means of imputation the fact remains that because of Adam’s disobedience we all have in our own ledger books an entry that designates us to be sinners and condemned.

The second type of imputation the Scriptures speak of is the imputation of the sins of mankind to Christ. This imputation seems to be real in every respect. All the sins past, present and future were laid on Christ who bore them in His body on the tree.

**1 Peter 2:24** and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross,

**2 Corinthians 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

It is because He Himself did not know sin personally that he could substitutionally bear our sins in His body on the cross to satisfy the righteousness of God.

**Hebrews 7:26-27** For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

How exactly Christ bore our sins in His body is a mystery though we know that He Himself who knew no sin personally accomplished it.

Lastly, Christ's righteousness is imputed to all those who believe. Thiessen says, "We should observe that this is not God's attribute of righteousness, for our faith has nothing to do with that, but with the righteousness which God has provided for the one who believes in Christ. Thus, God restores us to favor by imputing to us Christ's righteousness." (276) The righteousness that is imputed to our account is Christ's righteousness that was generated in His humanity. It should be noted that this imputation is not real. God does not "make" us righteous in justification. God "makes" us righteous in sanctification. But the imputation of Christ's righteousness is a legal declaration as revealed by the forensic word "righteousness". Thus, justification is a legal declaration of God. What this means is that when a person believes in Jesus Christ God goes over to our account and writes in our ledger book that we are righteous and justified. That is, from the legal standpoint we are righteous even while in our present state we remain sinners. This declaration is completely legal because Christ has generated the righteousness and when appropriated by faith is declared to be true of the believer. This is a once for all declaration that forms the basis of and motivation for our sanctification which should follow.

#### **IV. ACTUAL OR IMPARTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

When a believer walks by the Spirit he will produce the fruit of the Spirit.

**Galatians 5:16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Although it is not actually the believer who is producing the Spirit's fruit but the Spirit through the believer manifests the righteousness of God. The Bible says that no one has seen God at any time (1 John 4:12). What the Bible means is that no one has ever seen God directly. However, there are numerous examples of men seeing God indirectly in the flesh, in the form of fire, in the fire, in a cloud, etc...when we love one another and when we abide in Him His life is manifest through us so that men do see God indirectly through us! And what they are seeing is the righteousness of God. God uses Christians to manifest Himself before men. In a very real sense then God is appearing today through Christians who walk by the Spirit, are filled by the Spirit, and abide in Him. We could never manifest God but God can manifest Himself through us.

## V. CONCLUSION

So, today we have looked at four aspects of righteousness. First, there is the righteousness of God which refers to His Creator attribute. That God is righteous means that His moral character is the standard for what is right and wrong everywhere all the time in the cosmos. Second, we studied the unrighteousness of men. Men make standards in order to live by but meeting any of these standards does not move us one inch toward God. Man is utterly incapable of producing the righteousness of God and is therefore in a great predicament. His account is empty of righteousness and he therefore stands as a condemned sinner. Third, we studied the imputed righteousness that comes from God to the one who believes. This righteousness is not the attribute of God but that which Christ generated in His humanity during His life. Christ's righteousness is credited to the believer's account so that he no longer stands as a condemned sinner but as a justified. Lastly, we looked at the actual or imparted righteousness which God the Spirit produces through the believer when the believer walks by the Spirit. At such times a very real manifestation of God takes place through the yielded believer. This serves as a visible witness to the world of the living God.

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<sup>i</sup> L.S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, 198.

<sup>ii</sup> See Tom Constable's outline of Romans. Interestingly, he labels 3:21-5:21 "The Imputation of God's Righteousness" and 6-8 "The Impartation of God's Righteousness".

<sup>iii</sup> Strong says, "we should not permit our use of the term 'imputation' to be hindered or prejudiced by the fact that certain schools of theology, notably the Federal school, have attached to it an arbitrary, external, and mechanical meaning—holding that God imputes sin to men, not because they are sinners, but upon the ground of a legal fiction whereby Adam, without their consent, was made their representative. We shall see, on the contrary, that (1) in the case of Adam's sin imputed to us, (2) in the case of our sins imputed to Christ, and (3) in the case of Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer, there is always a realistic basis for the imputation, namely, a real union, (1) between Adam and his descendants, (2) between Christ and the race, and (3) between believers and Christ, such as gives in each case community of life, and enables us to say that God imputed to no man what does not properly belong to him." Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology*, (1970), 594.

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