

# Right with God

## Romans 3:21-22

September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Have you ever worked really hard in a hot and dirty environment over a long period of time? When you are driving home you can just feel the grime. You are looking forward to getting home and taking a shower. Upon arriving you suddenly find out from someone in the family that you immediately have to be somewhere else. You do not have time to jump in the shower so you go to the closet and pull out fresh, clean clothes and put them on over your hot, dirty, perspiring, grimy body. You just feel dirty. Fresh clean clothes over a dirty grimy body, just does not change the dirty grimy body. On the outside you look good, but on the inside you still feel really, really bad. As we open to Romans chapter 3, I believe that is how many people view salvation in Christ. They believe what happened to them at salvation was that God gave them some fresh, clean clothes, the clothes of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, but He put Christ's righteousness over their dirty, rotten, sinful self. They just really feel like God put new clothes on the old man they were. They believe that in reality when they got saved, they are still the same old person, just saved now. They know now that when God looks at them He sees the righteousness of Christ, but when they see themselves they still see a dirty, rotten sinner. We will learn from the book of Romans that is not true.

We will look afresh at verses 21 and 22 because while we have already looked at this paragraph in its entirety, I am not sure you realized how rich this paragraph is. It is like a really good dessert. You just cannot eat a really rich dessert really fast. You want to take your fork and dip a little bit off, and put it in your mouth and enjoy every moment of that dessert. That is what we are going to do. We are going to slow down a little bit, and

revisit all of these verses and look at the main thing they teach. We will look at the phrase "*the righteousness of God*".

## **Scripture**

*"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."*

If you remember in Romans 1:17, Paul talked about how he was "*not ashamed of the gospel, for it was the power of God unto salvation for every one who believes, the Jew first and also to the Greek*" (Gentile). He went on to say that in the preaching of the gospel, "*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'The righteous (just) shall live by faith'*". In that sermon we talked about how throughout Paul's writing, the righteousness of God can be interpreted one of three ways.

1. Attribute of God
2. Saving activity of God
3. Divine achievement or accomplishment of God

As we approach this paragraph, I want to submit the thought that I really do not believe we have to choose between one of these three meanings to which this phrase in verses 21 and 22 is referring. I believe they entail all three: God's righteousness as an attribute, a saving activity, and a divine accomplishment. So we will define this as first, the saving activity of God that reflects His attribute of righteousness. So in 21 when it says, "*For now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe*", this is talking about the saving activity of God that reflects, in its totality, the attributes of God's righteousness. This means the saving activity of God reflects that God is just, God is righteous. The second thing to note is, when we see the righteousness of God in this passage, it also means the saving activity of God that results in His divine accomplishment of righteousness. Then we could add a parenthesis that says; the transformation of a sinner into a

saint. So when we are talking about the righteousness of God being manifested in this passage, we are saying: the saving activity of God, whereby He transforms a sinner into a saint, and the process He goes through, reflects the attribute that God is a righteous God. That is how God is glorified in the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. That is why we are trophies of God's grace, because we are the workmanship of God in Christ. This is the only kind of righteousness that will stand the test of eternity. The only righteousness that will stand scrutiny on the Day of Judgment is the righteousness that is found in Christ Jesus. This is why Paul has labored to show Jews and Gentiles that by works of the law, whether it is in their conscience, heart, or on tablets of stone, they cannot ever be justified by the works of the law. Paul will come to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans and basically say that the Jews were ignorant of God's kind of righteousness. The Jews were zealous for God but they pursued a wrong kind of righteousness. They pursued righteousness by keeping the Law, thinking they could earn a right relationship with God. Paul will write to the Church at Corinth and say that this message of a crucified Messiah would be a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to the called it is the power of God. He will tell the Church in Philippians after reviewing his life as a Pharisee, that he was the best of the best when it came to the flesh. But he said that he laid aside everything he was doing under his own power, and counted it rubbish. He said this one thing he was pursuing, to be found in Christ. He knew as long as he lived under the Law he had to establish his own righteousness. He came to the place to realize that righteousness was not going to be good enough on the Day of Judgment. That righteousness could not ever undo what he had done and bring him into a right relationship with God. So he desired to have that righteousness that comes to those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

This concept will change your life if you get it and grab hold of it. Many of us have been ignorant of it. I do not know why, other than we just have not got it yet. We have been blinded to the truth of what happened to us

at the moment of salvation. You need to understand that at the moment you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God made you right with Him. He fixed everything that was wrong with you, and made right. You are now a new person in Christ. The new person you are in Christ is the divine accomplishment of God. It is a result of God's saving activity of what He did in Jesus so that He could step into your life and reveal to the world that He is a righteous God. Your life reveals the righteousness of God in Christ. This righteousness does not come to you by virtue of works of the law, or flesh. It does not come to you based on anything you do. It comes to you based on two things:

1. The death of Christ
2. The resurrection of Christ

In other words, the righteousness of God, as the saving activity of God that reflects His attribute of righteousness, and results in a divine accomplishment of being transformed from a sinner into a saint, involves a death, and a resurrection. We will learn throughout the rest of the book of Romans that at the moment you put your faith in Jesus, God makes you right with Him because you are placed spiritually in Christ. In order for you to be right with God, He had to put an end to your sin.

According to Romans He put an end to your sin in the person of His Son Jesus. Jesus died a redeeming death on a cross. When He died on that cross, you died with Him. Faith in Him causes you to experience the very death of Christ. In other words, the death He died is the death you died the moment of faith. This is why the Bible could say "*You have been crucified with Christ*". On that cross, Christ died not only for your sin, He died to sin. If you can envision this, God put you in Christ. Because God put you in Christ, He died. Why did He have to die? One reason is because He had to pay your penalty. He took your sin upon Himself, even the very nature you had. This is why the Bible says He became sin for us. As well as paying the penalty for your sin, He had lived a sinless and perfect life under the Law of God, and He condemned the principle of sin as a power.

This is what it means to say He died to sin one for all. Your righteousness in Christ comes to you because you have, at the moment of faith, experienced the benefits of the death of Christ. Praise God, Christ did not stay dead!

I am convinced that many in the Church do not live on this side of the resurrection. You would almost think that being saved is being forgiven of your sin, and yet God just leaves you the way you used to be. Except when you sin now you are forgiven of it and do not have to worry about that sin separating you from God. That is not true. I mean yes, it is true, but that is not the whole story. Not only did you die with Christ, but at the moment of faith you were also resurrected with Christ. God put you into Christ and Christ died. But God also put Christ into you. And the Christ God put in you is not dead, He is alive. You are dead to sin but alive to God. When God put Christ in you, you got up. But the you that got up was not the same old you that went down. The you who came up is alive with Christ! You have the Spirit of God in you and now live a resurrected life! You are not who you used to be.

We have been raised in this church in the tradition of the reformers and I praise God for them, but many of them did not reform enough. We have labored to say that salvation is by grace through faith alone and we cannot do anything to add to our salvation, but we have fallen short by not realizing that God did more than just cover you with the righteousness of Christ. That is an Old Testament concept. You know that sin was never done away with in the Old Testament. All the blood of the bulls and goats could do was to cover sin. That is where we get our concept of atonement to cover. John the Baptist stood in the desert and said, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes (not covers) away the sin of the world*". Hebrews says that "*Jesus has appeared once for all at the end of the ages and has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself*". This means at the moment of faith that God does not treat a sinner as if he is righteous. I am so tired of hearing this concept among the theologians: as if I did not sin. No, you sinned. God took your sin and imputed it to Christ. He became your sin on

that cross. God does not treat you as if you are righteous while you are still a sinner. Martin Luther was wrong when he said we are justified and a sinner at the same time. At the moment of your salvation God did not just treat you righteous, or clothe you in the righteousness of Christ, He dealt fully with your sin at the cross. When He imputed your sin to Christ, He imputed Christ's righteousness to you. When you received the righteousness of Christ, it did not leave you as if you were just covered of your sin; it dealt with what was wrong with you once for all, and transformed you into a child of His. This means that you have a BC and an AD time reference. BC means before Christ and AD means in the year of our Lord. Before you met Christ you were not righteous. You were not right with God. You lived in Adam and had a nature to sin. That nature made you a sinner and you walked according to your unredeemed flesh. Yes, you could occasionally do acts of righteousness, but you were still a sinner because those acts of righteousness could never make you right with God. They could never undo what was wrong with you. In your core you were a self-centered being, and everything you did was for you, even the good you did. That was before Christ (BC). Then you met Christ. When you met Him and put your faith in Him, you are not in Adam anymore. You are now living in Christ (AD). When God put you in Christ, you died to sin and became alive to Him. You received a brand new nature. It is not your nature now to sin; it is your nature to obey God. You cannot live a lifestyle according to your unredeemed flesh anymore; you now live according to the Spirit of God. Yes, you can still do an act of unrighteousness, but you cannot practice a lifestyle of unrighteousness. But there is not an act of righteousness you can do that will make you unrighteous with God. You are now right with God because in Christ God dealt with what was wrong with you.

You wonder why you still feel yucky then. It is because you do not see yourself in Christ. Did Paul not say in 2 Corinthians 5 that we will no longer regard men in the flesh? And you still regard yourself in the flesh instead of as a new creation in Christ. You are not yucky, you are not dirty, you are

not rotten, and you are not grimy. You are a saint of God. Yes, from time to time you are going to sin. But when you sin as a saint of God, it bothers you does it not? The Spirit of God breaks into your life and convicts you. You are not sinning because it is your nature to sin, you are sinning because you have been tempted to sin and you have been deceived. You followed your flesh instead of walking according to the Spirit of God. But you, who have been made righteous in Christ, can never be made un-right. You have not just been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, you are in Him. Your life is in Christ, therefore you are not who you used to be. God says He did not put new clothes on an old man; He put a new man in the old clothes, so now change your wardrobe. This is where our behavior must match our being. Our being is right with God. Our behavior is not done to earn a right relationship with God; it is done to reflect that we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. If you were not birthed anew, if you did not sense a new nature, if you still live like you used to when you believe you put your faith in Jesus, you are probably not saved. Do not be deceived. If you have a biblical salvation, it must meet the test of what Scripture says, and it tells us we are not the same. The old man is dead, and you are a brand new person in Christ. Are you righteous in Christ?