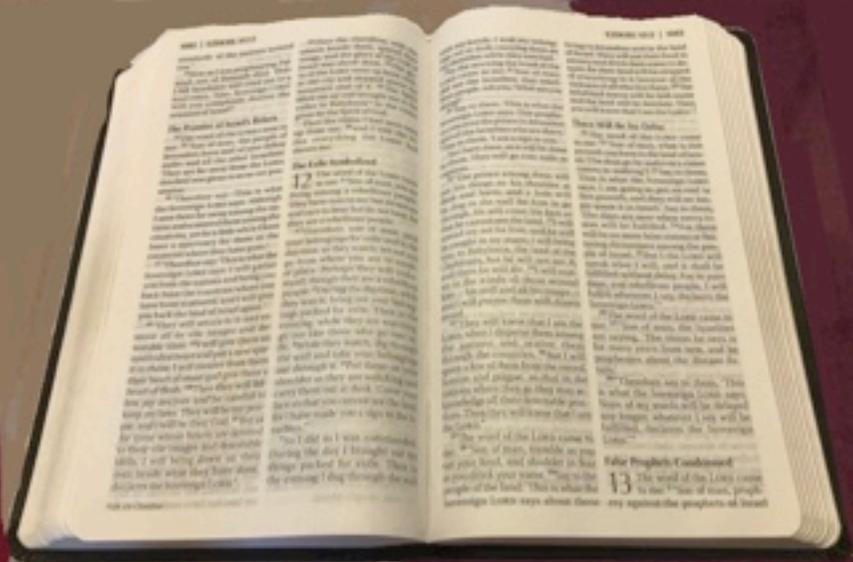


Devotional Thoughts From God's Word

Essays in Righteousness

*Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.- Ps 119::11*



John H. King

ESSAYS IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS
(The Spaghetti with The Sauce)

John H. King

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To All Those Who Hunger & Thirst After God's Righteousness

The following list of English translations might help to identify the limited use of them in this work. [<https://solarmythology.com/translations/bibles.htm>]

- AMP Amplified Bible 2015
- AMPC Amplified Bible Classic Edition 1965
- ASV American Standard Version 1901
- BBE Bible in Basic English 1965
- CEB Common English Bible, 2011
- CEV Contemporary English Version 1995 (NT - 1991)
- CSB Christian Standard Bible 2016
- CWB Clear Word Bible 1992
- ERV Easy to Read 2015
- ESV English Standard Version 2003
- ICB NCV International Children's Bible, New Century Version 1986 (NT - 1978)
- JPB J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English 1958 (Revised 1972)
- KJ21 Twenty-First Century King James Version 1994 (NT - 1992)
- KJV AV King James Version (also known as Authorized Version) 1611
- MLB NBV Modern Language Bible also known as New Berkley Version 1959 (NT - 1945; NT revised 1969)
- NASB New American Standard Bible (NASB) 1971 (NT - 1963; Revised 1996)
- NET New English Translation 2005
- NIrV New International Reader's Version (NIrV) 1996
- NIV New International Version 1978 (NT - 1973)
- NKJV New King James Version 1982
- NLT New Living Translation 1996
- NRSV New Revised Standard Version 1990
- TEV Good News Bible also known as Todays English Version 1974 (NT - 1966; Revised 1993)
- YLT Young's Literal Translation 1862 (Revised 1887, 1898)
- WIL Williams New Testament in the Language of the People 1937; Reprinted 2000 as Millennium edition.

The Greek Text used is the 28th Revised Edition of the Novum Testamentum Graece based on the work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013.

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Preface

Anyone who knows me—or thinks as much—probably knows my grotesque interest in the historical development of the Biblical languages. Much, however, of what I want to know is outside the reach of my resources: books, time, and education. Notwithstanding, and probably as a consequence, my primary interest in the Bible, theologically speaking, is more biblical and less systematic. Only recently have I shown an interest in Anselm's *Cur Deus homo*, Calvin's *Institutes*, or Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*. I have favored 19th century scholarship even while I found myself slowly becoming theologically more distant. And I cannot seem to appreciate denominationalism on a doctrinal level because Christian unity is not an option in Scripture. If we attend different churches for the worship culture that they offer and we are there to worship God—that I can get my mind and heart around. But debates like the Calvin-Wesleyan controversy are mentally and emotionally torturous to me and quite unnecessary. Christians need to understand Romans 14:22 and cherish their relationships with one another: “Do you have a belief that is more argumentative than edifying? Keep it to yourself!”

Rather than debate Romans, now, in old age, I would rather reminisce over the goodness of God with David or Asaph in a Psalm. I, no doubt, have a systematic theology, at least on an elementary level in my writings [God is omniscient, the Trinity, the Deity of our Lord ... and I do have my opinion as to God's foreknowledge, to name a few]. But the record of Scripture is bookended by Genesis 1:1 (in the beginning of time) and Revelation 22:5 when the sun sets for a final goodnight. This tells

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me that the Scriptures were, indeed, relevant to *this life*, first and foremost. Not everything is eschatological! Scriptures are somehow to be obeyed and lived. In so doing, we invest in that eternity with our Lord as we ought. The biblical message is psychologically significant as well as spiritually crucial to this life and the next. It encompasses every relationship and how each should be defined—especially our relationship with God!

The Old Testament is the Father's Story, as the New is the Son's, so, both are probably more an historical narrative than a systematic theology. R. K. Harrison points out that "...the theological concepts of the old testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization..."¹ So there's that.

I began to view the Scriptures as an historical record in which God was a major player; so, I tended to avoid the word "anthropological" as if this attribute was selected to imagine a virtual Divine encounter and not a real one. I never needed to explain God's presence in anthropological or Christological terms because I freed myself from any allegiance to a systematic explanation that required such. I tend to profile God rather than theologize Him, but with the caveat that my perspective must remain distant and open because there is much more about our God we must learn and we only learn on a personal level—not an academic one.

I thought myself odd and out of step with a seminary education. What I didn't know was the theological world is changing and calling into question the practical value of a systematic approach to understanding God.² I might be found somewhere in the following quote³ by Paul Helm, Professor of

1. R. K. Harrison, "Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 479

2. I know about the historical-critical method which has kidnapped hermeneutics to prove (or disprove) the authenticity and genuineness of each book in the canon without giving any attention to its message. The message is the reason for having God's Word!

3. Accessed 2/27/24 <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/07/why-covenant-faithfulness-is-not-divine.html>

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History & Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London. I have retained those parts that apply to me—or at least I think they do.

“For various reasons it is at present hugely fashionable to think of theology in narrative form: in terms of covenant (Horton), and of history (N.T. Wright), for example. More generally, it is vogueish to think predominantly in the category of history, redemptive history, biblical history, ‘biblical theology’, and to downplay or abandon the categories of systematic theology. In Wright’s case [and I think, mine, too] this way of thinking is habitual because he is first and foremost an historian, and so first and foremost he thinks in terms of historical sequences, of sequences of action, human and divine, and of their significance. He is much less interested in the ‘creedal’ statements in Scripture. He has little feel for the doctrinal debates in the history of the Church, and he sticks as closely as he can to the very words of Scripture and to the use of any analogies and metaphors that throw light on these.”

Helm is describing a theological shift in thinking about Scripture, which I, in large part, can get behind. In “Sunday School” the Word of God was broken down into digestible portions for those hungry to learn how to live on its message. The Word must be practiced and practical—not complex, esoteric ideas, that are only academic exercises in learning. Most of life’s lessons come to us anecdotally. So, we walk with God and let Him be our teacher! Moses said it best, Exodus 18:15, “This people come to me to enquire of God.”

But the paradox of a Biblical education is that we must dig through an academic complexity to find that truth that a simple faith and trust in the Savior offers. This is the course this work takes, not out of choice but necessity. How else might the foolish things confound the wise of this world unless we engage them in discourse and find that easier way to the truth. In this work the truth we are wanting to learn more fully is “The Righteousness of God” because we have heard many and different things about it from the scholars. Our happiness

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somehow is linked to such an enquiry [Matthew 5:6]. Solomon told us, "It is our honor to search it out" [Proverbs 25:2].

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“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” [1 John 2:29].

What is *The Righteousness of God*? One might think the answer obvious: this is God’s gift of salvation whereby now we are in right standing with God. However, the verb (in Protestant theology translated “to declare righteous”) has been variously interpreted from being *justified* to being *made* righteous or *sanctified*. One thing is true: the word *righteousness* in our Bible has no meaning without God. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.” [Romans 3:10]. “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” [1 John 2:29].

As I studied about the righteousness of God I came up against a problem. The primary emphasis on God’s righteousness was His justice. He is just and righteous. These words go together. God’s justice, for me, however, though an excellent foundation wasn’t the entire building. Doing a deep dive into the message of the Cross and words like *propitiation* [*hilasterion*]¹ I began to formulate in my thoughts the idea that there was more to righteousness than justice. Take, for example, Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” How do we interpret righteousness here as “justice”? Was Jesus actually saying: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall be filled”? I, honestly, do not know how to interpret

1. found only in Romans 3:25 & Hebrews 9:5 where the writer told us “of which we cannot now speak particularly.”

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this! If we maintain that God's Righteousness *only* speaks of a punitive justice [punishment for sin], how do we read Romans 10:3 which compares it to man's righteousness? "For they being ignorant of God's justice, and going about to establish their own justice, have not submitted themselves unto the justice of God." Are we honestly comfortable with this interpretation! Is anyone urged to "submit" to justice [punishment?] or is justice (or punishment) simply imposed on the guilty? If the Righteousness of God includes all that is right about God, His will and desires toward us, it makes better sense to submit to this. My systematic theology left me with a solid foundation of truth—yes—but where was the building? I think there's more.

We might define *righteousness* also as a quality of Christian character which God gifts to those who hunger for it [Matthew 5:6] and that brings believers into conformity to the Will of God [Matthew 6:33]. On God's part this sounds fair to us but did He provide this as our Judge only or also in His role as Creator and Savior! These things should be investigated. The argument is made that God's Righteousness and our righteousness in Christ [Romans 8:10] are *not* the same thing—that the word "righteousness" is defined different for us than for God. There are some who accordingly maintain that "The Righteousness of God" is not a divine attribute, because, were it so, it would mean more than "justice" which is what some scholars want to maintain. [Justice is an act not a quality.]

Righteous Devotion

The word "*righteousness*" is used in a more general sense, as well, for *all forms* of devotion to God. For example, the misguided righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes [Matthew 5:20; 2 Peter 2:21]. Jesus spoke of Pharisaic righteousness, which He said was "less" than what would get them into God's Heaven [Matthew 5:20]. Here, the Savior is referencing their devotion to God which was in part a good thing but they left some things out. The word never loses its true sense and emphasis. All English translations of our New Testament always translate the Greek noun with our word "righteousness."

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Jesus' dealing with Our Sin

In Isaiah 33:15-16 (in the Greek version) the prophet proclaims “He that walks righteously [in righteousness], and speaks uprightly ... he shall dwell on high.” Isaiah, no doubt, is describing a life lived in conformity with God’s will (which for the prophet was laid down in detail in the Mosaic law). So righteousness here is following the Law of Moses. In the language of the prophet in the Epistle to the Hebrews *righteousness* is contrasted with *lawlessness*. “[To] have loved righteousness [is to have] hated lawlessness” [Hebrews 1:9]. It is, therefore, from the Old Testament and the association of righteousness with the Mosaic Law that the word speaks of “uprightness, moral purity.”²

The writer to the Hebrews didn’t contrast righteousness with money, as Jesus did, warning us, “you cannot serve God and mammon” [Matthew 6:24]. Had he done so, we could easily see how a giving heart and greediness are mutually exclusive ideas. Service to God as a gratuitous act of love instead of a means to a financial end is imaginable because examples of both possibilities abound in our experiences. Then we might say that if you’re not greedy but a giver at heart and in practice, you are righteous [Colossians 3:5]. But in Hebrews the contrast is between following the law or being a law-breaker—something far less relevant for a non-Israelite.

If the writer to the Hebrews had employed Paul’s explanation of the war between “the flesh” and “The Spirit of God” [Galatians 5:17] righteousness would be a good word for spiritual victory in this conflict. Even if we overthink “the flesh” or we don’t always know when we are acting carnal, we do have an idea because in a spiritual sense we know this war is being waged. Carnality, a selfish spirit of “me, all mine,” cannot serve a God whose entire “thing” is grace, giving undeserved and unearned gifts of His love.

2. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 149.

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Somehow, as cryptic as these 2 descriptions of “living upright” might sound, they are, in fact, simple and concrete because we relate. We testify to spiritual victories all the time [Ephesians 6:12].

Christian Conduct

So, righteousness is living right. Righteousness in action is Christian conduct. Righteousness is being a law-abiding child of God—but what law? Well, it is now: “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” [Romans 8:2]. We are *not* discarding

- ◆ moral decency (“serving with reverence,” Hebrews 12:28) or
- ◆ peaceful social interaction (“Follow peace with all men,” Hebrews 12:14) or
- ◆ honoring “man’s” laws (“subject unto the higher powers,” Romans 13:1).

We are not limiting the meaning of righteousness to a spiritual experience to suggest we have no obligation to be just or fair to others or society as a whole or to honor the government. The simple truth is that when we are right with God, we are right with all these, too.

In the Old Testament *righteousness*, however, meant following the Mosaic Law. And the only way this truth proves relevant to us is through the Savior’s crucifixion, which now by faith provides for the law to be written on the believer’s heart. “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” [Jeremiah 31:33]. Paul agreed: “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” [Romans 8:4]. I am quick, here, to point out: this *is* the New Covenant!

Justice

Scholars like the word *justice* as the meaning for God’s *Righteousness* because it is the antonym of “lawlessness” in the

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Bible. The translators cover over any ambiguity connected with the word “lawlessness”³ in Hebrews 1:9 and interpret this word to mean, simply, *iniquity*, *evil*, or *wickedness*. So if you are righteous, you are not wicked or evil. Well, of course. I can’t see how we moved off the spot we were on when we started. One thing is significant in all this. The writer of Hebrews is saying that Jesus because He was righteous followed the *law*. So we are brought to conclude that the word *righteousness* does have a *legal* aspect to it.

Legally, righteousness is justice. So the righteousness of God is His justice: “He will judge the world in righteousness” [Acts 17:31; Revelation 19:11]. Jesus, like the Old Testament saints on God’s honor roll of Faith, “ruled with *justice* [righteousness]” [Hebrews 11:33].

To complete the thought: there are 2 forms of justice, *punishment* and *chastisement*. (In some languages, like Swahili, there is only one word for both.) Righteousness, therefore, represents a “retributive, as well as, restorative justice.”⁴ This truth is foundational that Christ’s crucifixion is *both* a propitiation and an expiation for sin. “For he hath made him to be sin⁵ for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” [2 Corinthians 5:21]. It is in this sense Jesus affirmed, “I am not come to destroy [the law], but to fulfill [it].” [Matthew 5:17]. Isaiah declared, “Because he is righteous, the LORD has exalted his glorious law” [Isaiah 42:21]. (We will look at 2 Corinthians 5:21 later.)

3. Hebrews, having been written to Jewish converts to Christianity, employs terms with more an Old Testament “flavor.”

4. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 198.

5. Some, after the use of the Hebrew verb in the Piel stem interpret Paul to mean “the sin offering” but this erodes the force of the actual accomplishment on Calvary. Jesus did not appease God regarding our sin, Jesus in His death, destroyed sin! [Hebrews 9:26].

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To Be Acquitted in Ancient Israel

It is the verb form [the action word], however, that is somewhat controversial. In a judicial or legal sense in secular Greek the verb meant to *pronounce* someone *free* of all *charges* against them, which in a Biblical parlance means to pronounce or declare someone *righteous*. (In hellenistic writings the verb also meant to validate or establish a law or principle of law as fair and right.⁶ This secular meaning, however, is not found in Scripture.)

The forensic sense of the word: to *declare* right or to *acquit* someone of all charges against them comes from the Old Testament. (And this is important to note) this applied *only* to the innocent [Exodus 23:7]. To *declare* righteous is, in fact, to *prove* or show that they are innocent of the charge.⁷ Ben Sira in the 2nd century BCE wrote, “The Lord only is righteous [no other is truly innocent of all sin], and there is none other but he.” [Ecclesiasticus 18:2].

So, when Asaph wrote, “I have cleansed my heart” [Psalm 73:13], he was declaring himself innocent or righteous as regards obedience to the Mosaic Law. “To have a pure or cleansed heart” was declaring one’s self righteous. But bemused, he groused that his devotion was alas “in vain.” He was moaning that living a righteous life should have translated into blessing; but it appears that only the wicked prosper! [Habakkuk 1:4].

The greatest influence on the New Testament use of “righteousness” is the Old Testament. The difference between them, however, which is of critical importance to note, is the declaration or judgment itself. In the Old Testament only innocent persons were declared to be innocent in the judging of a crime. In the New, the guilty—through Christ—are now justified, acquitted of all crime against God. “But to him that

6. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 211..

7. *Ibid*, page 212.

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believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” [Romans 4:5].

The Objective Aspect of God’s Righteousness

“In Paul the *legal* usage is plain and indisputable. The opposite of justification is condemnation. For Paul, the verb, to be righteous, does not mean to be made righteous but to declare righteous because it speaks of a divine *judgment* fulfilled in Christ’s death and resurrection. “Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again” [Romans 8:34]. As stated in its profound simplicity beginning this discussion: To be declared righteous is “to be pronounced in right standing with God.”

Under law a declaration of acquittal is only available to someone who earned such a recognition by living according to the law, while under grace sinners who accept Christ and believe in His death and resurrection are now judged acquitted [Romans 8:1]. We might use the word “forgiven” but doing so we must elevate the term above a simple resignation to the offense. Forgiveness with God means the record is now expunged—totally. The Amplified Bible reads, “...so that your sins may be wiped away [blotted out, completely erased]” [Acts 3:19].

It is the decision of a judge to declare a defendant’s record wiped of all charges.⁸ This simple declaration is foundational to our faith—not because we fully understand all that the Cross meant to God in either a legal or spiritual sense, but—because our hearts embrace it [Romans 10:9]. This is known as the objective meaning of righteousness. (There is a subjective meaning yet to be discussed.)

8. There are places where “to be righteous” means to *prove* righteous [Matthew 11:19] or to exercise righteous(ness) [Revelation 22:11] but they are limited in use. Self-justification, which everyone knows is all too real, is also in Scripture [Luke 10:29; 16:15].

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A Forensic Declaration of Righteousness

Some call this a forensic use of the word.⁹ Based on Jesus' message of His coming Kingdom [Matthew 6:33] Paul's discussion of righteousness with Jewry had to address righteousness in relation to Torah Law [Romans 3:20]. Paul was caught in a vortex of legal explanations [Romans 7:23]: the law of sin and the mind [Romans 7:23] ; the law of God [Romans 7:25] and of the Spirit [Romans 8:2]. His simple message was [and is] that "There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" [Romans 8:1 NLT]. "No condemnation" is a declaration of justification. This leads some to define righteousness as justification in verses where it seems to fit.

The Judge of the universe and of Heaven upon the Savior's death has ruled and we are absolved of all crimes against God if we accept this by faith! Some take this as addressing "original sin." Some see this as up to the moment of salvation. Others in an most absolute and permanent sense say that our sins—all of them: past, present *and future*—have been adjudicated in Heaven's court because Jesus took the punishment on Himself for them all [which He, indeed, did do!]. Perhaps, there is no more to understand here than 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The Subjective Aspect of God's Righteousness

There is a subjective or relational aspect to righteousness. The judicial act of God in Christ (the objective aspect of God's Righteous Act) provided on Calvary and our acquittal remain foundational to every other aspect of righteousness. Don't lose this truth in all our talks. But the Theological Dictionary adds, "The act of salvation is a

9. Catholicism interprets the verb to mean "to make righteous" of sanctifying grace. This came out of a counter-reformation prompted by Lutheran's teaching that justification came by faith only. [Accessed 8/6/21 *New Advent Encyclopedia on Sanctifying Grace*. <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm>]

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continuing present.”¹⁰ This is true because of faith. The very word *faith* speaks of faithfulness which speaks of a continuing trust relationship. This is what is meant by the subjective perspective on God’s declared righteousness. “With the heart,” Paul taught, “one believes unto righteousness” [Romans 10:10]. Paul taught a doctrine of a justification *by faith* which makes the sentence of acquittal a continuing part of our experience in Christ.

With the heart one accepts what Christ did for them on the Cross and believes now that they are declared forgiven, free of all guilt of sin. A true faith or belief in this provision of the Cross means a life lived free of the sin that sent our Savior to that Cross in the first place (or at least this is our heart’s desire). A believer exercises a trust in the Savior’s work on Calvary to save them from their sins and they accept the Savior’s death and resurrection *by faith*. Christ not only took our place on Calvary to justly fulfill the requirement justice demanded because of sin. Christ provided through His resurrection a newness of life to be lived in Him [Galatians 2:20]. All this scholars understand is nuanced in the word *righteousness*. “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” [Romans 6:11].

Righteousness and Justification

The word *righteousness*, then, means, among other possible ideas, *justification*.¹¹ But in what verse[s]? The actual word *righteousness* is never translated justification in any English version,¹² with the exception of Galatians 2:21 in the RSV. And

10. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 217..

11. *The Dictionary defined it in Theology* - the action of declaring or making righteous in the sight of God. But in Protestant parlance we learned that it meant, “just-as-if-I-had-not-sinned.” The theological difficulty with this later definition is that it implies, not forgiveness but, sinlessness-minimizing the importance of living above sinning.

12. 17 different English versions were compared.

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the Amplified Bible in Romans 10:10 reads, “For with the heart a person believes [in Christ as Savior] resulting in his *justification* ... [that is, being made righteous—being freed of the guilt of sin and made acceptable to God].” Three other translations replace the word *righteousness* with the verb “is justified” [NIV, ESV, and RSV]. The force of “justification” behind these verses is more from the Old Testament usage than in the New.¹³ In the Old it is generally interpreted “Justice.” In Genesis 18:19, a number of translations seem to be indecisive and translated “doing righteousness *and* justice” or “doing what is right *and* just.” (More later about justification as a word for righteousness.)

Linguistically speaking, we consent to this that, righteousness implies justification. Justification in this context should be understood as God’s reckoning us righteous, as Paul explained with regard to Abraham’s faith [Romans 4:3]. The Hebrew account for “reckoned” uses a word meaning “to think” or to value¹⁴ which carries the idea of thoughts that would impact God’s decisions and plans for Abraham—and us—going forward. This would effect God’s relationship with us. I interpret Paul to be saying that Abraham’s trust in God is all God considered in covenanting with him.

Punitive Justice

The forensic or punitive¹⁵ aspect of God’s righteousness is inherent in the verb form of the word: to be declared righteous.¹⁶ Let’s take a step back and look at this entire class of words all stemming from the word¹⁷ which means “justice.” Justice includes the judicial review and decision, the sentencing as well as the punishment meted out. Justice is the work for a

13. The Greek word δικαιοσύνη is found 93 times in the LXX

14. Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing. Peabody, MA.: 2015), page 363.

15. inflicting or intended as punishment

16. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 150.

17. δίκη [dike]

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judge¹⁸ to execute or bring about; so, this word is legal or according to “law.” We will not need to go deeper here. Just a surface study, in grammar, of the words for *judge*, *justice*, *justification*, tells us that the force of these terms is an official declaration and not the ability to *make* right. In American courts a not guilty verdict does not imply innocence, No judge can take away the offense, only legally expunge it from the record. The meaning “to make righteous ...is extremely rare if not altogether doubtful.”¹⁹ So “to judge” is to “pronounce judgment” [Romans 2:13]. It is on the limitation of this idea in the Old Testament. Solomon prayed, “Listen from heaven and make a just decision about your servants' claims. Condemn the guilty party, declare the other innocent, and give both of them what they deserve.” [1 Kings 8:32 NET- Underline added].

The Righteousness of God

The Righteousness of God²⁰ is centered in the Cross [Romans 3:25 5:9]. “When the apostle makes his most solemn and weighty pronouncements concerning the establishment of salvation, he uses the righteousness of God instead of the simple righteousness.”²¹

When talking about *God's* righteousness and not righteousness in general, we are describing God's punitive or judicial ruling. This meaning is primarily based on Old Testament usage—as we said—as in Deuteronomy 33:21 where Moses, speaking of the tribe of Gad, proclaimed, “he came with

18. The Greek for judge is κριτής [krités] from the word, “to decide” in an official sense.

19. Ibid.

20. The Righteousness of God can mean either, The righteousness “from God” which God gifts to man [a subjective use: What God gives to us] or the righteousness attributed to God [the objective use: What describes God's character]. The “objective” use: who God is. The “subjective” use What God demonstrates in salvation.

21. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 203.

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the leaders of the people, he obeyed the righteous laws of the LORD [the righteousness of the LORD] and his ordinances with Israel.” [NET]. The KJV translates: “the justice of the LORD.”

While God’s justice is more readily explained in Paul’s theology using the words, “The judgment of God”²² [Romans 1:32], it seems worth asking, “Does this satisfy every use of the phrase ‘The Righteousness of God’ in Paul’s writings?” It seems appropriate to review the 7 verses Paul uses the phrase (and once each by Peter and James). The immediate question is: Can we translate “The Righteousness of God” with the phrase, “The Justice of God”? Are all 9 verses referencing the Savior’s punitive death on the Cross? If not, what then?

The word “righteousness” occurs 90 times in the New Testament,²³ some of which are worthy our immediate attention. In particular: seven times the New Testament speaks of a “righteousness by faith.” This will require writing this book. My interest in this most important Biblical truth is to know if there might be an additional meaning to *righteousness*—a more encompassing of all that the Savior’s death provided, more—than a punitive measure. Did God only pass sentence against sin (punish sin) or did He, who is the Creator, also remove that sin (an expiatory act) and “make all things new” [2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:15] restoring fellowship between Him and us? And can any or all of these aspects of Calvary’s Truth be nuanced in this single word, *righteousness*?

The Theological Dictionary says: “God’s righteousness [is at] a conjunction²⁴ of judgment and grace which He enjoys and demonstrates by showing righteousness, by imparting it as His pardoning sentence, but which also draws into His kingdom

22. τὸ δίκαιωμα τοῦ θεοῦ

23. Matthew 6:1 says “Take heed not to do your righteousness before men” while the Received Text [KJV] uses the word “alms” instead of “righteousness.”

24. two or more events or things occurring at the same point in time or space

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as new life... It will be fully manifested at the last judgment.²⁵ ... The Righteousness of God includes justification. ... It is imparted to [the believer] as a new quality. [This is a forensic provision, but saying] forensic[ally] does not mean 'as if' [as if we never sinned] ... since the sovereign sentence of God is *genuinely* pronounced. Nor does it mean that moral rectitude is attained [sanctification is another matter]. What it does mean is ... [we are] right before God. ... We are not in the sphere of human jurisprudence [human justice is a poor analogy]. We are dealing with the *divine* Judge."²⁶ (underline added).

Justice and Righteousness

Both justice and righteousness share a common root idea. If we appeal to the Old Testament use, we are always brought back to the Law of God, Torah Law, because *uprightness* [the Hebrew idea] was conditioned on obedience to that Law.

"In the inspired Scripture," A. W. Tozer, an American Christian pastor, author, and spiritual mentor, correctly noted, "justice and righteousness are scarcely to be distinguished from each other. The same word in the original becomes in English justice or righteousness, almost, one would suspect, at the whim of the translator."²⁷

Scriptures to turn into Chapters

This work is an effort to interpret and understand the scriptures that speak of God's righteousness and ours by faith. Here are the seven Pauline references, to which will be added some that speak of righteousness generally.

25. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 203.

26. *Ibid.* page 204.

27. A. W. Tozer. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. (HarperCollins Publishing. New York, NY: 1961), page 86.

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1. Romans 1:17 “For therein is **the righteousness of God** revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, **The just shall live by faith.**”
2. Romans 3:5 “But if our unrighteousness commend **the righteousness of God**, what shall we say? *Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)*”
3. Romans 3:21-22 “But now **the righteousness of God** without **the law** is manifested, being witnessed by **the law** and **the prophets**;
4. Even **the righteousness of God** *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:”
5. Romans 10:3 “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.**”
6. 2 Corinthians 5:21 “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.”
7. Philippians 3:9 “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, **the righteousness which is of God** by faith.”

Hebrews 5:13-6:2

How are we, for example, to interpret Hebrews 5:13-14? Here the writer speaks of believers whose spiritual growth is stunted, stuck in an endless infancy, and inexperienced in righteousness. Righteousness here speaks to an ability to know right from wrong, good from evil, something some believers—at least as observed by the writer to the Hebrews—have not possessed. The 6th chapter begins with an elementary curriculum for all believers: the value of repentance and faith in Christ as well as the significance of baptisms and prayer. We all should learn early about the centrality of Christ's resurrection to our

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faith. But the persons addressed here are, metaphorically speaking, still toddlers ever gravitating toward the proverbial “hot stove” [religious practices that cannot save] or laying stress on unimportant religious practices instead of becoming living testimonies to the provisions of Calvary.

Hebrews 6:4-8 then theologically startles us, cautioning against replacing—if I may interpret—a life in the Son with a sheer religiosity. Righteousness seems here to mean something more than God’s punitive justice which is (as we have been saying so far) scholarship’s primary emphasis. The way to retain “righteousness” here to mean “justice” would be to read “the word of righteousness” in Hebrews 5:13 to mean “the provision of God’s forgiveness and acquittal for those in Christ.”

Does not this interpretation weaken verse 14 where an understanding in the righteousness of God knows the difference between right (good) from wrong (evil)? It seems like the word “righteousness” speaks of living right before God.

Depending on whether we interpret righteousness in verse 13 as an appropriation of God’s justice on Calvary (living right before God) or just an understanding of its importance in regard to salvation (our justification), we will see chapter 6 differently. In the former instance, Hebrews 6:4 implies a loss of salvation, whereas in the later, simply a false doctrine that cannot save in the first place.

The Word ‘Of’

In addition, scholars love to debate the significance of the word “of.” Here is not the place for a grammar lesson but when there is more than one interpretation of the relationship between the 2 words connected by “of” (in this case “Righteousness” and “God”) a discussion ensues. Take, for example, the phrase: “for the love of a woman” which can mean a woman’s love for a man [subjective] or a man’s love for a woman [objective]. Take, now, as an example, *The Love of God*, which might be easier to explain.

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- ◆ This relationship can be subjective as in: “In this was manifested the love of God [love *from* God] toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him” [1 John 4:9].
- ◆ This relationship can be objective as in: “But whoever keeps His word, in Him verily is the love of God (our love *for* God) perfected” [1John 2:5]

We might have expected Paul to say to Titus [3:5] “He [God] saved us not by works of righteousness that we have done but on the basis of his mercy.” This appears to be a complete thought. But Paul added, “through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” God’s mercy includes a washing and a renewal and not just justification or a declaration of acceptance with God. And since Paul is contrasting this with works of righteousness or our own righteousness, it is reasonable to assume he is talking here about the Righteousness of God.

What, then, is the meaning of Paul’s words, “I do not frustrate [nullify, reject] the grace of God.” He explained, “If righteousness comes by the law, then Christ is dead in vain, without effect” [Galatians 2:21]. If justification alone was Paul’s thought, the only way God’s grace could be said to be “rejected” or “without effect” [inefficacious] would be by refusing to accept salvation. But Paul began by affirming that Christ is alive in him. Paul’s life, as a child of God, now is taken up completely in the work that Christ called him to [Galatians 2:20]. Frustrating grace has to include the notion of interfering with Christ’s efforts by personal and selfish endeavors. The righteousness Paul is talking about is far more than a declaration of righteousness. The righteousness of God does not only justify, it makes alive [Romans 5:18]. This agrees with what Paul told Titus. The most succinct way of saying this is 2 Corinthians 5:21, which we will review later: Jesus went to the Cross “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

So is this true with “The Righteousness of God”? Can it not be understood both objectively and subjectively?

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- ◆ **Subjectively:** God's righteousness [the Righteousness of God] was His act of justifying us: Christ paying the penalty for our sins.
- ◆ **Objectively:** God's righteousness [the Righteousness from God] as a gift is His covenant faithfulness.

In Sunday School

God's righteousness for us doesn't mean following the Old Testament Law. "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested" [Romans 3:21. underline added]. Salvation offered to the Gentiles had to be free of Torah legal requirement (for they did not live by these nor observe them, nor should they! Righteousness is by faith, Romans 3:22).

The "Righteousness of God" included God's Justice because Jesus' death satisfied the punishment for sin, but we can say that it meant more than this. God's love forgave us but now, because He loves us, He provides also the means to live for Him without sinning. All of this is because He does right by us.

Romans 1:17

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

“The term *righteousness of God*,” Francis Godet explained, “cannot here mean [just]... retributive justice.”¹ What he is saying is that God’s righteousness is not to Paul only this one act. He died not just to show Himself righteous but to make us righteous, as well. “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin [to become sin, itself] so that we could be made right with God through Christ” [2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT]. The message of the Cross, Godet reminds us, is “God acting first as *judge* to pardon (*to declare man just*), and afterwards as *Spirit* to quicken and sanctify.”² We learn that God’s righteousness is a free pardon for sin, a declaration of the believer as now considered justified before God and, thereby, reconciled to God by faith.

This is a Pauline advancement on the Old Testament understanding of God’s justice. Then God honored innocence but punished evil. Now God is found pardoning all—no one is truly innocent [Romans 3:23]—and His pardon comes to those who get in line to receive it by faith [Galatians 3:22]. The pagan notion of appeasing an angry God through sacrifice has no theological relevance here [1 John 4:18].

The wrath of God will be revealed upon the wicked [Romans 1:18] because they refuse to be pardoned. There is no

1. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 93.

2. *Ibid.*

Romans 1:17

sentence of death for the believer [Romans 8:1]. This revelation of a pardon, an unearned grace through faith [Ephesians 2:7], becomes a reconciliation between God and the believer and, for a reconciliation to be complete with a holy God, believers need to be brought into a newness of life. “He washed away our sins,” Paul taught Titus, “giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit” [Titus 3:5 NLT]. “He ... was raised again for our justification,” Paul proclaimed the message! [Romans 4:25]. On that first Easter Sunday, a pardon was heralded! The Savior’s resurrection was proof that He did not die in vain.

It was important to Paul to free this simple truth from the shackles of Jewish legalism; so, Paul would not teach specifically about the believer’s “walk in the Spirit” until chapter 8. The free gift of a pardon cannot be stated any clearer than by a declaration of righteous, and this must be emphasized here by the undisguised and simple proclamation of a salvation by grace contrasted with the evil that surrounds humanity without Christ. No one can intelligently mistake Paul to be allowing for any goodness in man whereby he might have earned a drop of the Savior’s blood shed for him.

Godet calls a “declaration of righteousness” (being declared righteous) “the evangelical principle”³ which detaches a man radically from himself (“not of works” Ephesians 2:7) and throws him on God. Godet credits Karl Christian Johann Holsten, a contemporary German Protestant theologian, with defining God’s righteousness as “an objective state, in which man is placed by a divine act.”⁴

On the Believer’s Part

On the believer’s part, this is a life-changing faith [Habakkuk 2:4]. It is a faith that keeps revealing in the believer’s experience that their reconciliation with God is a reality. Such has to be the significance of a revelation from faith to faith and by which the believer lives [Romans 1:17].

3. Ibid. page 94.

4. Ibid. page 95.

Romans 1:17

I have a friend, who is a retired pastor, who reminds me from time to time of the injustice of leading someone to Christ and then not disciplining them. God's justice not only provided in Christ the reconciliatory punishment for our sins; it seems reasonable to say that the Cross was the prerequisite also for His resurrection to provide for a continuing relationship between Him and us as we follow Christ.

When Paul wrote "from faith" [Romans 1:17] he was copying Habakkuk 2:4 where it is read "by faith." Faith is not a dead creed but a living trust in the God who pardons. One way to say this is recognizing that the faith that brought us alive in Christ now keeps us alive. Similarly, Paul wrote, "We walk by faith, not by sight" [2 Corinthians 5:7].

From faith, that first step, accepting Christ's offer of a pardon and eternal life, in what some call a "faith journey" *into faith*, that is to the journey's end [Philippians 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 4:7]. Paul's heart ached for the church in Galatia because some did not understand that what God gives us never grows old or outdated. It is never only "from faith" but also and always "into faith". There is nothing about God's gifts that are temporary [Romans 11:29].

The Gospel is not just efficacious to save through a powerful conviction [Romans 1:16] but has keeping power as well. God does nothing temporarily [2 Corinthians 4:18]. The Gospel message is a study into the grace and love of God that needs an eternity to be shared. The lesson only begins in this life.

Along the way God continues to reveal Himself to those who trust in Him [Romans 4:20]. As the writer to the Hebrews summarized, we "[patiently keep] looking unto Jesus the *author* and *finisher* of our *faith*" [Hebrews 12:2]. "He is your example, and you must follow in his steps." [1 Peter 2:21 NLT; Psalm 37:23].

The Revelation

Is the *revelation* of the Righteousness of God different than the *demonstration* of the Righteousness of God [Romans 3:25-26]?

When Paul spoke of demonstrating God's righteousness, he, scholars generally agree, was talking about a public promotion and heralding of the Gospel message. Let them know that salvation is now free! Just come and receive! There were reasons for broadcasting the message of God's Righteousness as saving grace, among which, were the closing of one dispensation in which God overlooked sin's past [Romans 3:25] but now requires all to repent [Acts 17:30]. Now, the Gospel message is a "manifestation of his glory" [John 2:11].

But a revelation of His Righteousness can be seen as far more personal, as Paul spoke of his Damascene experience when God shared His desire: "To reveal His Son *in me*" [Galatians 1:16].

Philip Schaff, an American religious scholar from the 19th century wrote, "The grand truth here enunciated is the warm, living reality of a personal UNION with Christ ... by which ... Christ's RIGHTEOUSNESS and LIFE are communicated to the believer, and become the inward quickening mover of every thought, feeling, and action."⁵

God's pardon is by faith. It is free requiring no pilgrimage or animal sacrifice or anything else except wanting it. Into relationship with Christ we come carrying all the baggage of a hurtful past—some done to us but, probably, most the causes of a thousand regrets. We bring it all to the Cross and Christ knows what to do with it and us. It was because this truth must be clear and emphatic that Paul wisely spoke of grace in the center of a description of the absolute ugliness of sin [Romans 1:18-3:20]. This is the power of the Gospel! [Romans 1:16].

5. John Peter Lange...*Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 77

The Faithful Covenant Justice of God

It is understandable that some scholars cautiously take a step back from N.T. Wright's definition of "The Righteousness of God" as "The Faithful Covenant Justice of God"⁶ because it seems too soon for Paul to detail the relationship that is now ours in Christ. As already pointed out, Paul needed to explain *grace first* lest a work that God does *in us after* salvation would be confused as a requirement or work done *by us for* salvation.

But Wright's interest is the covenant. To Wright, salvation meant restoration, a return to God's plan in Eden for Adam and Eve. Through the disobedience of our first parents, that divine "dream" was on pause until Christ. Wright sees in Paul's reference to creation [Romans 1:25f.] an interest on God's part to follow the Cross back to Eden.

To appreciate what Wright is purposing in his interpretation of "The Righteousness of God" one has to understand the connection that God's covenant has to do with His creation. Said a bit differently: It is a God of Covenant that Created the universe; and it is the Creator who has throughout biblical history cut a covenant beginning with Noah [Genesis 9:11], then Abram [Genesis 15:18], and finally on the Cross with the Savior thru His death [Jeremiah 31:31-32; Romans 11:27].

Wright calls this a "theology of creation and covenant."⁷ "There you have it:" Wright explains, "the Creator God is the Covenant God and vice versa; and His word, particularly through His prophet and/or servant [Christ], will rescue and deliver His people...."⁸ Creation is invoked to solve the problems within the Covenant and the Covenant is invoked to solve the problems that came from Adam's disobedience.⁹ "The Creator and Covenant God can be relied upon to act in

6. N.T. Wright. "Paul" (Fortress Press Minneapolis, MN: , 2009) page 29f.

7. Ibid. page 22.

8. Ibid. page 24.

9. Ibid. page 28.

Romans 1:17

accordance with His creating power as well as His covenant fidelity to put the world to rights."¹⁰

It might appear incidental but God spoke also of the sacredness of His covenant: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods." [Exodus 23:32]. Covenant was a big thing with God! It was right up their with making idols which drove Him to an enraged jealousy [Exodus 20:5]. In Romans 1:18f. God's creative genius was His first epistle to us written in the sky but sinful man did not recognize His handwriting and began to redact the message until it wasn't readable at all. God not only must avenge His covenant [Leviticus 26:25] but His creation as well [Romans 8:22].

The issue arose as to whether God's justice is contained in His covenant faithfulness or His covenant faithfulness is a quality of His justice. Later we will propose neither. The relation or connection between them is different. But here making one a subset of the other either way is more philosophical than practical.

But we also confuse covenant faithfulness with faithfulness, as some are accused of confusing The Righteousness of God with righteousness in general. God's justice and His faithfulness are aspects of His mercy¹¹ toward us. God's justice and faithfulness are *actions* while a covenant is the vehicle by which He does them. Using the analogy of a firehose: The hose is the covenant; the water is God's mercy; the fireman is God, Himself. God demonstrates justice and faithfulness but He does so in covenant. We will later discuss His covenant. The mistake we might make is to have in mind a particular 'old' covenant and divide history into dispensations. Such a study would be separate from ours here. If, however, it is important here to introduce God to us as the God of covenant or a covenant God, it should be the New Covenant God ratified on Calvary. This covenant reaches back and ahead to gather into His Kingdom all those to whom righteousness was imputed by faith.

10. Ibid. page 25.

11. CHESED חַסֵּד Psalm 118:1

Romans 1:17

History past, present and future leaves no imprint upon God's eternity.

The Sunday School Lesson

Romans 1:17 teaches us that God reconciled with us so that we might live with Him forever. God does nothing that is momentary. Everything about God is eternal. This is why our trust in Him must continue [from faith to faith] and we must live our lives always trusting Him. When we talk about God's Righteousness as God accepting you, know that He will never change His mind about you—ever! And He will always be there to help; just call on Him [that's the covenant part we have yet to discuss]. And there is one more thing to say here: the word "revealed" in our verse [Romans 1:17] only tells us that it gets better and better and better as we trust Him and learn more and more about Him and His love for us!

A Note About God's Vengeance

Justice could easily be confused with vengeance in Jewish thought in Paul's day [Romans 3:5]. Let's talk about this next.

Romans 3:5

“But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)”

Remember the early days of your salvation when somehow the preacher’s message was infused with exciting news as they quoted scriptures that used words that were new to you? Somehow your heart knew what they meant even if your head didn’t? God recalls those early days—I dare say, often—as He shared with the prophet Hosea: “When Israel was ... young ... I took them by the arm (taught them to walk)... and gently fed them” [Hosea 11:1-4 NET].

Those were the days of discovery for me when the Bible was a treasure store of truth no one argued or debated but hungry hearts—all—embraced because this treasure was given to us by God! And one of those words was the word *righteousness*. I seemed to instinctively know it meant to be *right with God*—because it contained the word “right” in the word. I, somehow, knew that salvation brought me to this place, a relationship, with our Lord. What more is there to know! I have been “...justified (made right with God) by His (Jesus’) blood” [Romans 5:9]. There might have been more to know but not yet. I was not weaned at the time but living “on milk [and] inexperienced in the message of righteousness, because [I was in knowledge] an infant¹ [Hebrews 5:13].

1. Righteousness in the sense of “correct” here might mean correct speech.cp Kittel vol II page 198.

Romans 3:5

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,” Jesus assuringly promised, “he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” [John 14:26 RSV]. In John 16:13 Jesus spoke encouragingly about His pending “physical” absence that The Spirit would be here to “guide you.” The Greek is more picturesque: “He will show you the way!” [Psalms 25:4]. It is the Spirit’s opportunity to teach us righteousness [John 16:8]. “The Spirit of truth.” Jesus explained, “will guide you into all truth.” [John 16:13]. “[Jesus] concealed nothing from them (John 15:15);” Francis Godet interpreted, “but with a view to their spiritual incapacity, He had kept to Himself many revelations which were reserved for a later teaching.”²

“He (The Spirit) shall testify of me,” the Savior admitted [John 15:26]. Perhaps, it would be inappropriate to suggest the Spirit’s curriculum except to say that it was and is and always shall be all about Jesus. It is not unreasonable to interpret every truth in terms of the Cross, either something that caused His death or something provided because of it when He rose again [1 Corinthians 2:2; Galatians 6:14]. “He shall glorify me!” Jesus added [John 16:15]. So, we must depend on the Spirit to illuminate in our hearts what righteousness means to us—even if those lessons come through some form of discipline by Him [Hebrews 12:11].

An Academic Study of Righteousness

If in those early days I had been given William Lane Craig’s *“Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration”* I would not have had known what the title meant, let alone Craig’s discourse on righteousness within its pages! I must admit, part of me, still wishes that I didn’t know. I miss those simpler days of Sunday School learning as a tween!

2. Francis Godet. *“Commentary of the Gospel of John ”* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 311.

Romans 3:5

Another part of me, however, was warmly drawn to the words³ in the original Greek and Hebrew, as a totally separate study from my Sunday School days.

Would it be possible to enjoy together both the simple and the more complex studies—a Sunday School lesson along with a seminary lecture on righteousness—into one spiritual meal, milk and meat—into one *me*? I can appreciate the appeal for simplicity in Christian education. After all, our faith is simple!

Or is it? The word *faith* may be correctly translated *faithfulness* and I am not always sure which word fits best: *faith* or *faithfulness*. In Matthew 23:23, for example, in the King James Version, Jesus cautioned, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you ... have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith [*faithfulness* in the New English Translation]....” Dietrich Bonhoeffer alerted us that “...faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience [being faithful].”⁴ In Philippians 1:29 Paul used the words “into faith” meaning faithfulness and not “in faith” which is our idea of faith or trust: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, ... to believe into [**be faithful to**] him....” Francis Godet wrote, “God acting first as Judge to pardon (to declare man just) [gifting us faith], and afterwards as Spirit to quicken and sanctify [faithfulness].”⁵

I have come to agree with those scholars who maintain that faith [trust] in the Lord [John 14:1] and our faithfulness [Galatians 5:22]—because they are one word in the Bible (not 2 as in English)—need to be viewed always together like two sides of one coin (to use a favorite analogy). Our faith in God and our

3. “Righteous” like most words has a verb, adverb, noun, and adjective form. Scholarship often assigns these different meanings from just and justified, to living in God’s will. They can even mean fairness and vindication in some cases.

4. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. “The Cost of Discipleship” (New York, NY: Touchstone Edition, 1995), page 64.

5. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 93.

Romans 3:5

faithfulness toward Him are a single Biblical truth. We must never think of them any other way.

Look at the love of God. Is the love of God, for example, God's love *for us* [Titus 3:4] or our love *for Him* [1 John 3:17; 5:3]? Or should we understand this to mean that a divine love having been given us [Romans 5:5] is powerful (efficacious) and life changing in us making us now capable of showing that love back to God and to others as His ministers [John 15:12]?

God's Righteousness

Like the words "faith" and "love," *righteousness* might not be as simple as Sunday School implied. Some scholars see *The Righteousness of God* [Romans 3:21-26] as something different from "our" *righteousness* [Romans 5:17, 18, 21]—a point worth emphasizing. God's Righteousness was, first and foremost, *justice* accomplished at Calvary through our Lord's sacrificial death [Isaiah 53:10]. We can talk about ours later. Suffice it to say here that before Christ it was compared to a filthy rag—which I won't describe further [Isaiah 64:6].

In ordinary language justice is the opposite of mercy! If justice is fair, it is blind. And if blind its rulings against the guilty have to be unbending and uncompromising, according to law. Mercy, on the other hand, may show a marked disregard for law. Mercy is free but justice (which restrains and punishes evil) is earned.

Yet with God we cannot always make this distinction since God's judgments were made *to show mercy*. His law is love. According to Paul, "love is the fulfilling of the law" [Romans 13:10]. Solomon told us, "He that follows after ... mercy finds ... righteousness...." [Proverbs 21:21]. And David concurring, set the thought to music: "I will sing of mercy and judgment" [Psalm 101:1].

What are we saying?

Well, God's Justice had to find a way to punish sin but save the sinner; and I, for one, am very grateful for this. At least, now, I am beginning to understand the Jewish complaint in our

Romans 3:5

verse, Romans 3:5. If The Righteousness of God is, by definition, God executing justice and in fulfillment of the Law of Moses, (as the Jews in Paul's world saw it) in the substitutionary death of the Savior (that is to say, "in our place") why God's rage against any sinner? Paul just got through warning of a final judgment coming: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" [Romans 1:18].

Where did their reasoning go wrong?

They missed the part about "faith." "Everyone who *believes* in him is declared right with God—something the law of Moses could never do" [Acts 13:39 NLT]. As Paul explained to the church at Rome, "For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are" [Romans 3:20].

So, in one sense, God's Righteousness was a punitive⁶ justice, but Christ took our punishment, which is what the word *propitiatory* is suppose to tell us. (More later about this word.)

But is there not more to this most sacred of terms: The Righteousness of God? Yes, of course, for this we write books! But here's a peek: According to Zacharias, John-the-Baptist's dad, this truth was written somewhere in God's *Covenant* arrangement with Abraham. This makes sense, since this covenant was ratified by Abraham's *faith* in God and not "law." Mercy was promised by God in the holy covenant God made with Abraham [Luke 1:72-73].

If I may speak allegorically for a moment: Somehow God's Righteousness escaped the confinement of an offended Justice and began hanging out with Covenant and Mercy. Meanwhile, I, too, feared Justice that according to the word on the street was looking for me. Running into Faith, I began a friendship. And it was Faith who introduced me to God's Righteousness, Covenant and Mercy, whose life-long friendship along with Faith's, I now cherish. I am no longer afraid of Justice because my four faithful friends tell me I don't have to be!

6. Christ's death satisfied the curse of the law [Deuteronomy 27-31].

In God and For God; From God or Of God

There is, also, the Righteousness *of* God (His Judgement received by Christ) and the Righteousness *from* God (the gift of newness of life and salvation given us). These are 2 different things. This whole “of” or “from” thing seems to concern the scholars. Some are further bothered about calling God’s Righteousness (as it is grammatically understood) God’s pronouncement or declaration of righteousness by faith. Perhaps the problem comes when we tend to use words metaphorically or in picturesque ways. In metaphors, parables, analogies, idioms of speech, and other euphonic and rhythmic forms of speech, the story of grace is told in Scripture. This could make the exact meaning of a word hard to interpret—or at least cloth it in an unfamiliar way of talking that obscures the meaning.

For example: In 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul taught that the Savior was made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” These are qualities—or some see them as abstract ideas that are expressions of personal behavior. Paul, in a rather allegorical way, is describing what the Savior is to us; so, when He is in our lives, these are in our lives [Galatians 2:20]. Nowhere does Paul refer to Jesus as our Redeemer.

Paul taught that God “made him to be sin for us” [2 Corinthians 5:21]—an interpretation that bothered some translators; so, after an Old Testament use of the verb they translated “He was made the sin offering.” And what does it mean that He was made righteousness unto us? Francis Godet says He was made: “wisdom, by His life and teaching; righteousness, by His death and resurrection; sanctification, by His elevation to glory; redemption, by His future return.”⁷ Perhaps righteousness here speaks of a justice that satisfied or fulfilled the Mosaic law and removed the curse by His death. But all this is couched in language foreign to Greek thought which

7. Frederick Louis. Godet. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Zondervan Publishing House. Grand, Rapids, MI: 1971), page 116f.

probably challenged to some degree their fuller appreciation for the words used [Acts 17:30-32].

A Garment of Godliness & a New Nature

Paul spoke of “putting on” the new man [Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10] describing Christian behavior in terms of wearing a garment. There is a saying in English: Act your age” which is the simple message here. To the Ephesians, he addressed Christian behavior in terms of the new life God is forming us into by nature— in “righteousness and true holiness.” He urged us to live for Christ because we are being made in His image. “put on the new man who has been created in God's image - in righteousness and holiness ” [Ephesians 4:24].

Paul’s metaphor of “putting on the new man” reminded me of Isaiah 61:10, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” We are to pattern our lives after Christ or to follow in His steps [1 Peter 2:21].

To the Colossians he spoke more specifically about being “clothed with this newness that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.” [Colossians 3:10]. Here Paul spoke of a new “you” that is being intentionally [in knowledge] renewed by God’s Spirit [Titus 3:5]. But what does “renewed” mean? *Renewal*, reads the dictionary, means “completely changed for the better.”⁸ But Paul, by changing the spelling of the Greek word replacing one letter, made a new word, whether, on his part, intentional or unwittingly; how could we know? We do know that the “new” part of the word speaks to a new “kind” of life not just beginning over. [In Ephesians, the new man emphasized our beginning, our spiritual birth, the start of the journey in faith.] The renewing of

8. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 39.

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our minds in Romans 12:2 is not just rethinking truth but understanding it for the first time because our minds, our hearts, are new, too. We are new creatures; everything has become new [2 Corinthians 5:17].

One additional note is worth studying. We are not simply renewed—as if in an instant]. This renewal is more than the moment of our salvation or our status in Christ. We are *being* renewed, suggesting an ongoing work of the Spirit. Taken together with Paul’s admonition to the Ephesians, there can be no ambiguity as to what he was saying. In saving us, the Lord has created us new [different and holy] beings from what we once were (“created new” Ephesians 4:24) but there is a growth process [being renewed Colossians 3:10] which is supported and expressed by our living the life God has made us capable of living.

All this is offered in metaphor because explaining spiritual truths is made relevant and, in a sense, concrete, rather than left as abstract ideas difficult, at best, to understand. Most Christians are not wired to appreciate philosophical jargon, anyway.

I’m Confused

I want to be back in Sunday School again! “In Righteousness” (in Ephesians 4:24) seems to be talking more about how I treat others [how I live] and not God’s “justice.” As pointed out already, scholarship recognizes that our word “righteousness” has a different meaning here because it is *our* righteousness Paul is talking about and not God’s.

So, in Sunday School language: God shows Himself righteous by dying on the Cross for my sins and forgiving me and giving me a new birth in Him. I show righteousness—not mine but Christ in me [Galatians 2:20]—by loving ...well ... *you!* It sounds like there is a “relational component” to righteousness and that it is not just a legal or moral/ethical term.

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Dr. Craig also doesn't like that phrase, "relation-restoring love," used to describe God's righteousness.⁹ For the good doctor, God's righteousness is His justice—plain and simple. He took care of that on Calvary. After that, Paul uses other language to describe our relationship with our Lord—yes, including the word righteousness alone, without the words "of God" tacked on. But N.T. Wright following some earlier scholars suggests otherwise. For him, and I must admit, for me, too, an understanding of God's righteousness embraces God's covenant faithfulness.

Righteousness as God's Covenant Faithfulness

All this meant taking a step back to read Dr. Charles Lee Iron's article¹⁰ "*Response to Two Reviews of The Righteousness of God.*"¹¹ Dr. Irons served as adjunct Professor at the California Graduate School of Theology. He earned a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary. The debate then between two scholars I admire, N.Thomas Wright¹² and William Craig, had to be settled, if possible, in my head because it isn't "right" for the parents to argue in front of the children (me).

Dr. Iron called Bishop Wright's idea a "new perspective on Paul" (NPP)—something I found meaningful but with which Dr. Craig seems less impressed. "New Perspective scholars claim that 'the righteousness of God' should be translated 'God's covenant faithfulness.'"¹³

9. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press , Waco, TX.: 2020) page 56, fn. #6.

10. See JBTS article, page 66-67. On righteousness, accessed 3/6/24 <https://jbtsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/JBTS-1.1-Article-5.pdf>.

11. Charles Lee Irons. *The Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies: Response to Two Reviews of The Righteousness of God* (JBTS 1.1 2016) pages 57-72.

12. N. T. Wright is the Bishop of Durham in England and wrote "*The Climax of the Covenant*" and "*Paul*" among other works.

13. Charles Lee Irons. *The Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies: Response to Two Reviews of The Righteousness of God* (JBTS 1.1 2016) page 80.

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Dr. Iron explained Dr. Wright's interpretation: "Paul's 'righteousness' and 'justification' language is to be understood covenantally. Specifically, it is claimed, the noun 'righteousness' can mean 'covenant faithfulness' or 'covenant membership,' and the verb 'justify' can mean 'reckon someone to be a member of the covenant.'"¹⁴

"I do not wish to be understood as saying," Iron clarifies, "that Paul's doctrine of justification is a non-covenantal concept."¹⁵ Almost professing agreement with Wright, he expounds, "Indeed, covenant theology plays an architectonic role in my own understanding of biblical theology in general and of the Pauline doctrine of justification in particular."¹⁶

"Furthermore," he confesses, "I agree that 'righteousness' in biblical theology has a definite covenantal context. That is to say, the biblical theological concept of 'righteousness' cannot be rightly understood without reference to a specific biblical covenant."¹⁷

Then, almost in an all out retreat, he seem to herald the very idea he disagreed with; but there is a caveat, "To return to 'righteousness,' I claim that 'righteousness,' is not strictly a covenantal word, even though in biblical theology it functions within a broader covenantal context."¹⁸

Professor Iron concludes that when writing the word *righteousness* in a Biblical or theological dictionary, one can discuss nuance and context but separate the word, itself, out from all metaphorical uses, figures of speech, and those rare uses that might even be unnecessary when a well used, clearer and simpler definition fits the context.

Did you get all that?

14. Ibid..

15. Ibid. page 67.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. page 68.

18. Ibid. page 69.

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Dr. Iron summarizes, “To understand what biblical “righteousness” [and its cognate] words mean and how they operate lexically, you don’t analyze the social world of [covenant making]. You analyze, in the first place, the social world of judicial activity in a court setting, and secondarily the realm of moral or ethical behavior, which is plausibly viewed as a metaphorical extension of the court setting.”¹⁹

It is interesting to interpret Dr. Iron’s view of *righteousness* as a judicial, moral or ethical term *but not relational*, although, he just told us “it functions within a broader covenantal context.” Compare this with Dr. Lightfoot’s overview in his Commentary to the Philippians, “Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a *Person* and a *Life*.”²⁰ Like we taught the children, the Bible is all about Jesus.

So the following paragraphs in this chapter are my way of untwisting the knots in my understanding while keeping the scholarship of all these scholarly voices. I have not intentionally sought to misrepresent any of these outstanding men of God.

My Understanding

The scope of God’s righteousness extends beyond its judicial significance. Like many biblical terms we learn, as Professor Trench discovered, “...words often contain a witness for great moral truths—God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know...”²¹

Although the professor didn’t single out the word *righteousness* for special attention, since its major contribution to

19. Ibid.

20. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, 15th printing. Grand Rapids, MI: 1976) Introduction.

21. Richard Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures* (New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 56.

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Christian thought is theological, it seems misguided to me to limit our study to only one reason for Jesus' crucifixion, divine justice—notwithstanding that reason must be loudly trumpeted.

I might, also, caution the overuse of secular Greek—even within Koine—to describe all that Calvary meant and offered for our eternal salvation. Again, as Professor Trench, in a study of God's grace, alerted us, "There has often been occasion to observe the manner in which Greek words taken up into Christian use are glorified and transformed, seeming to have waited for this adoption of them, to come to their full rights, and to reveal all the depth and the riches of meaning which they contained, or might be made to contain."²²

Here is not the space to go down a list of words, some among them are the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, that have been so elevated by The Spirit. It has to be indefensible to interpret the Spirit's qualities of "love" or "forbearance," for example, to characterize that of a weak humanity. Should we view the term, *righteousness*, which in the Old Testament was contrasted with things common or defiled, with any less respect in the New Testament!? Again, though Trench is speaking about God's "grace" can this be any less true about *righteousness*? The professor wrote, "The word being thus predisposed to receive its new emphasis, its religious, I may say its dogmatic, significance; to set forth the entire and absolute freeness of the lovingkindness of God to men."²³

Perhaps we best not chain ourselves to the sole significance of God's righteousness as His justice, since, now, we must understand what His justice must include. If justice is placed in our system of jurisprudence or legal system, we are left with a parable which may or may not at all parallel what was in the Divine plan for our salvation. It seems unlikely our form of justice, or any country's form of justice, could do justice (pun intended) to what Calvary meant to our Lord and His Father.

22. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 166

23. *ibid.*

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And does not this apply also to anything Plato might have envisioned in a perfect society?

The Christian interpretation of the verb form meaning “to be declared righteous,” say the grammarians that lean theologically that way, toward this reformed view, is the only meaning the Greek word can reasonably support. This is logical because human judges are not empowered to “make” anyone anything—let alone “righteous.” Judges judge; that’s all. So, we cannot expect the Greek word to mean otherwise. But the Judge of the Universe through His gift of salvation can and does “make” us “new” [2 Corinthians 5:17]. None of this is intended to support one view over the other. Within an eternal perspective—outside this brief life—both ideas merge into one [Isaiah 55:11].

The *Righteousness of God* might speak primarily of His justice, but what is this justice it speaks of? It is rooted in His repeated reference to some covenant He has introduced to His people—through Calvary that includes you and me. Pardon my rudeness but this is like describing the taste of the spaghetti without acknowledging the sauce. Scholars continue to debate how the Divine agency (God’s actions) are His righteousness on display. When Abraham asked “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right? [Genesis 18:25] we must ask ourselves what is “right”? Perhaps, “right” means simply God doing what God wants! It was the writer to the Hebrews that put the Judgeship of God in context with Jesus’ mediation of the New Covenant [Hebrews 12:23-24] making it impossible to distinguish them in a single act of Divine grace.

There is far more to say in coming essays but let’s look briefly at our verse Romans 3:5. Paul introduced the word “vengeance” but it clearly has a Biblical nuance. Paul’s dissenters asked, “If breaking God’s law has given God, as Judge, reason to be celebrated [by celebratory sacrifices, seeking His mercy, and prayer], then, why His vengeance, rage, or anger!? The word “vengeance” here is better translated “anger.” Vengeance, the Biblical word, speaks more of a fair judgment [2 Corinthians 7:11].

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As Judge, God did more than declare, He provided a new, and the only, way for us to be reconciled to Himself! But does not Christ's death deliver us from the judgment of God? "...by his blood, will we be saved ... from wrath," Paul assured us [Romans 5:9]. "It is clear that the authors of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek ... translators are far removed from the crude pagan idea of propitiating a capricious and malevolent deity."²⁴

The apostle apologized for using the term, *vengeance*, because he knew they were struggling to understand what the *Righteousness of God* was really all about.²⁵ Vengeance is God's judgment in dealing with the curse Israel brought down upon itself in not honoring the covenant God made with them [Leviticus 26:25; Deuteronomy 27-30].

Relation-restoring Love

Professor Paul Helm, Professor of History & Philosophy of Religion at King's College, London (1993-2000) in his article "*Why Covenant Faithfulness is not Divine Righteousness (and cannot be)*" wrote, "In numerous places in "*Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision*" Bishop Wright claims that God's righteousness is his covenant faithfulness. I deliberately stress the 'is'. How is Wright taking it? One way would be to understand *God's covenant faithfulness* as (an expression of) His righteousness'. But it is clear that he means something much stronger: more like, God's righteousness is (nothing other than) his covenant faithfulness."²⁶

"As well, from the new perspective," Professor Craig noted, "the inconsistent characterization of the righteousness of God as both God's "relation-restoring love" (a divine property)

24. Colin Brown. ed. al. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. (Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, MI: .1986), vol III. page 157.

25. I go into detail here in my work, *A Reasonable Salvation*.

26. N.T. Wight and "The Righteousness of God" Accessed 2/27/24 <http://paulhelmsdeep.blogspot.com/2009/07/why-covenant-faithfulness-is-not-divine.html>

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and “God’s saving deed” (a divine act)²⁷.” Dr. Craig sees the meaning of righteousness in the grammatical history, primarily its Old Testament meaning. He sees righteousness as a divine *act*, while Dr. Wright sees it as a divine quality of relationship. I am asking: Why can’t it be both: the spaghetti and the sauce?

Somehow, scholarship is out to sea here but, at least, they know how to navigate the choppy linguistic waters that would probably capsize my puny mentality. Is God’s righteousness an attribute of Who He is or what He does? We are actually back to asking, “Are we talking about the Righteousness *of* God” [attribute] or the “Righteousness from God” [action]? Is our attention more on the baker or the pastry he makes? We will continue to think on these matters as we go through the verses where this phrase is used.

Sunday School Lesson

The religious people who disagreed with Paul and wanted only to prove him wrong brought up this question: Does not our sinning provide God with more opportunity to be merciful and forgiving? He cannot forgive or show mercy to someone who has *not* sinned!

And what is “The Righteousness of God” in this verse? It is Jesus dying on the Cross for our sins and then rising from the dead three days later. It is the act of God whereby He provided for our salvation by dealing decisively and once and for all with our sin and sinning. It is His covenant promise being fulfilled.

Their logic went like this:

- ◆ When we sin, God shows mercy.
- ◆ When God shows mercy He is fulfilling His Covenant with us

27. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020) page 56, fn. #6.

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- ◆ Therefore, let's sin so that God can be merciful and faithful to His word in covenant.

So Paul argued back, "So, you are implying that God's anger is misplaced!" All this shows is that in your reasoning you have no idea what God is about. These things are spiritually discerned [1 Corinthians 2:14].

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“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference”

Paul exposed his message of grace in stark and absolute terms when he proposed to the Jewish mind that God’s righteousness was, what he designated, “without [the] law.” Since when does doing what is right, fair, or just have nothing to do with a code of law? How is such rightness to be defined or understood? “Law” in Greek philosophy was always a question of moral and ethical truth—as it probably is with us! Law was not a scientific term. (The law of nature, as a phrase, would have had no significance to them.) Law was commissioned by society to bring order and integration, a cultural identity, that allowed its citizens to live peaceful and happy lives.

Morality might have been considered a kind of psychological coping mechanism helping its citizens, through established tradition and language, to assign each one their role, if not class identity, and place in life. All such interpersonal behavior and relationships were thus considered “lawful.” In modern society, as well, behavior is not recognized as socially acceptable until it has been codified. Even gay relations were not acknowledged as normal until gay marriage was legalized. Nothing is “right” until it is “lawful.” Nothing is moral until it is part of the cultural identity.

If righteousness disassociated from law and became the possession of God instead, the implication is either God has a moral code of His own that we are to follow or we have been cut

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loose from the chains of a legalism that we no longer choose to follow or with which to culturally identify “for our citizenship is in heaven” [Philippians 3:20]. We are “in the world [John 17:]¹¹ but not of it [John 17:14, 16].

What might the possibilities be then for a people who are righteous not because they follow a written law or because they identify within a certain culture but because, whatever this righteousness is from God, they are living it? This does not mean there is no comfortable overlap; after all the law frowns on murder and so does God. Sadly, this is not always true. Infidelity is listed in the decalogue. But, opposed to God’s Word; open relations in some modern cultures is practiced, seemingly, with impunity.

Paul chose his words carefully saying that it was not this way until “now.” What is he saying? “From *now* on, righteousness in God’s economy will have nothing to do any longer with the Mosaic law? Or is the word “now” there to highlight what Paul says next, “God’s righteousness is *now*, at last, manifested? Is there that big of a difference in meaning between these interpretations? As Francis Godet explained, “Under the old dispensation, righteousness came to man through the thousand channels of legalism; in the new, righteousness is given him without the least cooperation of what can be called a law.”¹

When God broke this link between His law, which is what the Mosaic covenant always was, and His righteousness, He, at the very least, proposed something Paul’s message of grace to the Gentiles could work with. Non-Jews didn’t need to follow Judaism as a way to God’s righteousness. The Law of Moses was no first step any longer to godliness [Hebrews 10:8].

Manifest Not Revealed?

We must also note that Paul did not say that God’s righteousness was “revealed,” to suggest it was under wraps or

1. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 146.

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hidden and mysterious until now, until Calvary. Righteousness was always the sacred trust of Judaism. "The Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God," Paul argued [Romans 3:2 NLT]. But "manifested" means God would shine a light upon this sacred trust. Israel's scribes and religious leaders were in need of enlightenment. "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" [Romans 10:3].

But how do we submit? We are told to obey righteousness. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." [Romans 6:13]. Is not this "law"?

The Fruit of the Spirit might be the best description of a righteous life "without law" [Galatians 5:23]. Paul taught us that there is no law governing them. According to Bishop Lightfoot, "law exists for the purpose of restraint, but in the works of the Spirit there is nothing to restrain."² As Paul told Timothy, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man." [1 Timothy 1:9].

We are asked to submit to God, to righteousness, but without the benefit of a written guide or some roadmap, some form of legalism, that tells us where we are or how we're doing? We are asked to submit to the Spirit as our guide. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." [Galatians 5:25]. We have a guide greater than law!

More Than Law?

Is the Righteousness of God more than a judicial ruling? In our verse, Romans 3:22, Paul told us, "The Righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ." What does Paul mean here? How should this verse be interpreted?

2. J. B. Lightfoot. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), page 213.

Romans 3:21-22

- ◆ This is referring to Jesus' crucifixion: "The Justice of God which is [manifested] by [the] faithfulness of Jesus Christ [when He died] unto [for] all ... for there is no difference [no favoritism here]." Or
- ◆ According to the New Pauline Perspective, we should understand Paul to mean, "The Righteousness *from* God which is by faith of [our believing in] Jesus Christ [offered] unto all "for there is no difference [no favoritism here]."

The difference is subtle but theologically real. The 'Old' perspective sees God's Righteousness as a judgment against sin executed from the Cross. The 'New' perspective maintains that God's Righteousness is His Holiness produced in us under the terms of the New Covenant ratified from the Cross. The new perspective does not deny the punitive aspect of God's righteousness but builds our "life in the Son" on it as foundational to what the Cross provides further. God's justice is only part of the covenant outlined in Jeremiah 31:31. The old perspective does not disparage the covenant faithfulness of God but, scholars like Dr. Craig maintain that the Bible writers use *other phrases* to describe—and teach us about—the covenant.

The scholars are divided on this because the language supports both. I am reminded of Philippians 1:7 which has Paul remarking [in the King James]: "I have you in my heart." But Darby's translation has every grammatical right to say, "ye have 'me' in your hearts." The Amplified Bible chose not to choose, "[you have me in your heart as] I have you in my heart." Do you think God did this intentionally to keep us meditating on His Word?

In Hebrew the word *righteousness*, which means "what is right"³ primarily speaks of God's justice—as we have noted. But there is a curious explanation attached in the dictionary to the

3. Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing. Peabody, MA.: 2015), page 841.

word righteousness when it speaks of justification: it “speaks of God’s covenant-keeping, in redemption....”⁴

The Lord speaking through Isaiah declared, “You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its farthest regions, And said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” [Isaiah 41:10]. God’s righteousness, by Isaiah’s understanding, upholds, helps, strengthens, and is euphemistically referred to as God’s “right hand,” a *nom de guerre* of His omnipotence.

Isaiah and David tended to be a little different in their use of words. David spoke also of what best is understood as covenant-faithfulness: “I have not hidden *Your righteousness within my heart*; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth....” [Psalm 40:10]. Here David folds God’s righteousness, faithfulness, lovingkindness and salvation together into one single act of deliverance.

Justification by Faith

God’s righteousness is His justice but in another sense, it is His declaration of our being justified. God’s righteousness is then 2 things: The act of Jesus dying for our sins and the resulting declaration of a righteousness for us by faith.

Paul could not be clearer: “by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them who are believing.” “By” means *through* or *via* faith [trust] in Jesus. There is no other path to God’s justification [John 14:6; Acts 4:12]. “Unto” means *into* or *for* any and all who will acknowledge and accept it; “there is no difference” [Romans 10:9-10]. He died for you and me—no other reason. “Upon” means “*on which basis* we acknowledge and accept this justification, that is, in believing or trusting.

4. Ibid. page 842.

The Language of Relationship

Trusting the Savior is the language of relationship. The act of our justification is not like an acquittal in man's court where the accused simply walks away free and unpunished with no further contact with the judge who pronounced their freedom. Freedom in Biblical language is obtained through redemption, which is what our Lord became to us on the Cross [1 Corinthians 1:30]. But God's redemption is, for Him, a purchase [Ephesians 1:14]. We are *His!* [Psalm 100:3; Ephesians 2:10]. "[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own" [Titus 2:14 NIV].

Paul, to the Philippians, wrote, "I count all things but loss for the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord which is to be valued first and foremost above all ... that I might invest my life in Him, ... and through my trust in Him receiving the righteousness which is of God by faith: ... that I may [in turn] know him, and ... his fellowship" [Philippians 3:8-10]. Here God's righteousness is explained in relational terms. (We will explore this verse later.) As Paul told the saints at Rome, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" [Romans 1:17].

An Analogy

I wish I could say that I spent weeks in technical footnotes, reading volumes of texts and scholarly works until I found it—the perfect analogy that explains why 2 of my favorite scholars, Drs. Craig and Wright, seem to disagree about God's Righteousness. I wish I could say that in some obscure corner of an ancient scroll all but obfuscated by half readable markings in an unknown language was deciphered the perfect analogy that brings miraculous clarity to this whole controversy. I can't. But I did make up one from my favorite topic: *food!*

I am no longer confused, as I admitted freely in the last chapter that I was, because God's Righteousness [and His gift of righteousness to us] are like spaghetti—always *with the sauce*.

Romans 3:21-22

The content is *justice* but the context is *covenant*. This analogy is perfect, in my thinking, because we never eat the spaghetti without the sauce and we never ask, “What’s for dinner, sauce?” We always reference only the spaghetti but it’s the sauce that gives it palatable appeal. ...and great taste! Likewise, God’s Righteousness should not be studied outside the faithfulness of the God of Covenant we love (I was going to say, ‘serve’ but I think that might confuse us here.) I appreciate Dr. Craig’s focus on the content, the dictionary definition (and even the secular uses) of the word righteousness, but I also love Dr. Wright for alerting me to the importance of Covenant in relationship with God.

I don’t plan to “milk” this analogy, although, one person in one of our Bible studies did ask, “What about the meatballs!” I said, “That’s us!” (But only to be silly not serious). We also know that boiling spaghetti on the stove does not have a favorable aroma ... but the sauce! The Sauce! That’s different. Raw justice in a criminal proceeding without mercy is —well—a distasteful thing. Even God turned away when Jesus took our sin upon Himself [Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1]. But being in relationship with a loving God in covenant is the very fragrance He, too, enjoys, as Paul wrote, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved” [2 Corinthians 2:15]. There is no way to understand this scripture outside of a covenant relationship with a faithful God, its context. Content-wise, I leave it to you to look up “savor” in a dictionary.

If we need a scripture comparing food with our Lord: Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusts in him.” With us the eyes are the instrument of perception, the tongue and olfactory senses were this in the parlance of Ancient Israel.

The Sunday School Lesson

The Lord does not give us a map and say find your own way; He walks beside us. He does not give us a bunch of rules to follow knowing how difficult that might be—not just to follow them, but maybe even know what they mean! No! The Lord says

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“Follow *me*.” Paul knew all this when He wrote that all we need do is trust Jesus, trust His leadership in our lives. Be sheep in His fold! This is what the Lord has been saying in the Old Testament but, sadly, most persons, the very people He loved, didn’t understand. And if it wasn’t evident before, it is now, that there is no one—not one person—Jesus will refuse who comes to Him.

Romans 3:25-26

“God set forth [Jesus] as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance [He] had passed over the sins that were previously committed. To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.”

Our interest in writing is to understand what righteousness meant to the New Testament writers. We have already discovered that its basic Old Testament meaning of *justice*, which depended on the Mosaic Law for context, serves when talking about *God’s* Righteousness but not righteousness in general terms when applied to a believer’s life. Justice is a good word because our Lord on the Cross “redeemed us from the curse of the law” [Galatians 3:13]. It also provides context for understanding Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation [“to judge worthy of punishment”]¹ to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

The Sunday School version of *our* righteousness or uprightness, “to be right with God or living right before God,” uses the word in a moral or ethical sense. “For Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which does those things shall live by them” [Romans 10:5]. These are legalistic interpretations tied to a law or a code of morality, whether from God or man. The problem is, in Paul’s Theology of grace, God’s Righteousness has been unlinked from “The Mosaic

1. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 332..

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Law.” So, we need a *new* context!. To use the food analogy: our dish of spaghetti is now served with another sauce.

Professor Craig has a lesser interest in the “sauce,” the context. But this is extremely problematic because we risk returning to a legalistic understanding of righteousness. Craig gives preference to the *basic* meaning of the word, which we may reasonably conclude can be used in some sense *other* than judicial or with reference to the Law of Moses. When referencing Hebrews 1:9, for example, he points out that the antonym of righteousness is lawlessness: This is correct: “You [Lord] have loved *righteousness* [NLT: justice] and hated *lawlessness*.” This might be a basic definition of the word but like spaghetti without the sauce should not be served up alone without the context which “flavors” the meaning. Certainly when Paul admonished us, “You were [once] the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness” [Romans 6:17-18], Paul saw “sin” as the opposite of righteousness. Francis Godet, astutely observing in the language that we are called to *holiness* not legalism, wrote, “... this precise form of the truth of the gospel ..., seems to us that we find it best summed up in 1 Corinthians 1:30.”² Here Godet maintains that our verse is part of the *sanctification* provided through faith in Christ. Righteousness in Sunday School talk is “following Jesus—not ritual or a written law code.” Paul’s entire discourse was intended to free believers from religious observances as a quality of being right with God.

In Hebrews 1:8 righteousness is descriptive of heaven: “a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom.” Righteousness in verse 8 is the Old Testament word, “uprightness,” which is appropriate in an epistle written primarily to Jewry. It seems reasonable that the writer here would use the Old Testament meaning of *justice* because throughout this discourse “the Mosaic Law” is highlighted. But let’s zoom out and see righteousness in the context of eternity.

2. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 257.

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We learn what we knew all along, that Heaven is a place where only righteousness and the righteous dwell³ with God. At the wedding banquet, we will wear gowns of righteousness [Revelation 19:8]. Hebrews 1:8 is a quote from the Greek translation of Psalm 45:6-7 “Your throne, O God, is permanent. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of justice [ESV: uprightness]. You love justice [righteousness] and hate lawlessness [evil].”⁴

Here, it might be shortsighted of us to limit the meaning of God’s Righteousness in the context of God’s Heaven to a term of jurisprudence. Not to put to fine a point on it but will we need to use judicial language in a place where no evil dwells and where we are all “peacemakers” [Matthew 5:9]? No doubt, we will retell “The Old, Old Story of Jesus and His Love” over and over endlessly, and I am the first to want to spend an eternity hanging on every word! But will we be talking discursively if we include His covenant faithfulness in the telling of it? It is here where my enquiry began where righteousness is possibly a synonym of *holiness*. (I decided to write only after I learned that 2 of my favorite scholars disagreed.)

A righteousness of God is more His justice, but a righteousness from God speaks more to the grace of God that our Lord offers us by faith—a declaration of righteousness and newness of life. “Of” speaks of His righteousness as an attribute of God. “From” speaks of His righteousness as a gift. Either

3. Isaiah 61:10 reads, “For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments, And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.”

[The LXX reads, χιτῶνα εὐφροσύνης - a garment of joy]

4. The word עָשָׂר here Girdlestone informs [Robert B. Girdlestone. *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Doctrine*. (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids: 1974), page. 81] depicts confused and agitated activity [Isaiah 57:20-21]. The picture is created of someone not staying to God’s path (walking uprightly) but wondering directionless. They are trouble-makers and create unrest [cp Ezekiel 18 & 33]. the thieves beside the Savior on Golgotha were this type of persons [Isaiah 53:9].

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word works grammatically; so, we can choose one or both, depending on the text.

Is the revealed Righteousness *of* God also the revealed Righteousness *from* God [Romans 1:17]? Is the manifested Righteousness *of* God also the manifested Righteousness *from* God [Romans 3:21]. As Dr. Iron concluded, "Righteousness," is not strictly a covenantal word, even though in biblical theology it functions within a broader covenantal context."⁵

In support of this idea but wanting to keep the basic lexical meaning [justice] intact separate from the context [God's covenant] we used the analogy of spaghetti because spaghetti is not eaten alone. We cannot evaluate how good or tasty it is without the sauce, its context. In like manner, God's Righteousness is inseparable from its covenantal context—a context which changed from a law written on parchment to one written on the heart [Jeremiahs 31:31-33].

I thought it proper, in support of this idea, to quote Bishop Lightfoot on the Epistle to the Philippians (in case you missed it, it is worth repeating), "Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a *Person* and a *Life*." To the Church at Rome Paul emphasized, "God's righteousness is being revealed in the gospel" [Romans 1:17 CEB]. We are now more prepared to address the center of Paul's theology (verses worth memorizing) in Romans 3:25-26 where our word group is found 4 times making it of critical importance if we are to understand this word—and the Gospel, itself.

For the remission of sins

The wording in Romans 3:25-26 has raised not a few questions as to Paul's use of terms. Perhaps, we should begin by focusing on what appears unusual in these verses before offering

5. Charles Lee Irons. *The Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies: Response to Two Reviews of The Righteousness of God* (JBTS 1.1 2016) page 69.

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explanations. Ultimately the goal here is to “taste the sauce,” determine how we should understand “The Righteousness of God.” Paul said, specifically, “to declare His righteousness,” a truth which must not get lost in the jumble of theological ideas!

To begin with Paul spoke in verse 25 of the sin committed *prior* to Jesus’ Crucifixion. Obviously, things changed after the Cross. We know that now God requires “all men everywhere to repent” [Acts 17:30]. Now salvation is found in no other sacrifice [Hebrews 10:12, 26] but what was God’s thought *before* the Cross? The larger meaningful question is: Will those Israelites and proselytes to Israel who faithfully kept the sacrificial system alive in their hearts and practices be numbered now among the redeemed? This is a legitimate interest because Paul clarified that sacrifices never saved anyone [Hebrews 10:1-3]. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins [Hebrews 10:4].

A couple of translations given here clarify that God disregarded pre-Calvary sinning:

- ◆ NKJV - “God had passed over the sins”
- ◆ NIV - “he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished”

One Modern Spanish translation, unless I err in interpreting the Spanish, incorrectly translated Paul by “forgiveness of past sins”⁶ instead of God’s “disregarding”⁷ past sins. An English translation of Swahili speaks of releasing past sins: “whom God has set to be a reconciliation through faith in his blood, so that he can show his righteousness, because of *releasing* all the sins that were *committed before* in the patience of GOD.” The Hebrew idea of releasing or letting something go translates as *forgiveness* but that is not Paul’s word here, nor should we think his idea of overlooking past sins as a synonym of forgiveness. God’s forgiveness now is a provision of Jesus’ shed blood! [Colossians 1:14].

6. perdón de los pecados pasados

7. indiferencia

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William Craig argues, "The interpretation of the Greek word "passing over"⁸ depends on taking the [Greek] preposition⁹ to mean 'by' rather than 'because of' which is an extremely rare usage lacking any contextual justification."¹⁰ Dr. Craig is saying that the Greek word means forgiveness if you use "by" but it means "to ignore or overlook" the sin if you use the words "because of." Scholars who are familiar with the text in the Greek—as these brethren are—know that this depends on 1 letter being changed (an 's' to an 'n.' Thanks for asking. Oh, you didn't?) Trench agrees interpreting: '*because of the pretermission,*¹¹ [abandon for a time] in the forbearance of God, of the sins done aforetime;' [Italics added].

In Sunday School lingo: These scholars maintain that God's Righteousness, His justice, was evident in that those who lived before Calvary did *not*, on the basis of that fact, have to pay eternally for their own sins. I think David, Moses, Joshua, and a few more will be with us in Glory. If they were eternally lost because Jesus had not died yet, if that were the case, we would be receiving a form of mercy they could not share in, and if that were the case, God would be showing favoritism to us who lived *after* the Cross, and that would not sound at all like "grace." Paul said all this if we translate "because of," meaning because God tolerated sin (or in Swahili the translation references "the patience of GOD").

If we use the word "by," Dr. Craig maintains, we would be saying That a light was shown on God's righteousness *by* overlooking past sins. I know: sounds like a distinction without a difference. But Dr. Craig is saying the Dr. Wright is saying, "God has demonstrated his covenant faithfulness *by* forgiving or simply overlooking former sins." N.T. Wright who supports this

8. πᾶρεσιν

9. διὰ

10. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020) page 71.

11. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 115

interpretation of "The Righteousness of God" as "God's Covenant Faithfulness" is purported to have explained, "Paul is referring to Israel's former sins. God is faithful in the Messiah to the covenant through Israel for the world, and to that end he has pushed the former sins to one side."¹² God manifested or demonstrated His righteousness through *overlooking*,¹³ sin He tolerated.

I reread this last paragraph in proof reading and wasn't totally sure I explained it. I think Craig is saying that Jesus' death on Calvary reached back and saved the Old Testament saints by the same means (through His death) as He saved us after Calvary. Maybe Dr. Wright is implying that the Old Testament saints were saved because they followed the covenant they had at the time with God, whether Abrahamic or Mosaic, etc. Some see Abraham's Covenant with God as a Covenant of Grace, If this were the case, their salvation begins to sound like it wasn't contingent on the Savior's death—something Dr. Wright would never conclude (I believe).

It should be noted that the wording that best represents the original is what Drs. Craig and Tench maintain: "because of."

Sin Tolerated?

If I may ask, now, how is justice served by tolerating sin! Up until now, the word group for righteous acts was *contrasted* with an act of mercy [tolerance?] when the defendant before God was guilty. Judges do not set guilty verdicts aside for guilty persons. How should we understand "His righteousness" here? If we understand God's righteousness to mean His justice or "the virtue which gives one his due"¹⁴ we are at a loss to explain

12. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020), page 70, #45.

13. διὰ τῆς πάρεσεως

14. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 150.

how overlooking sin provides this! It sounds more like mercy and not justice.

If we understand, instead, Paul to say “because of” (to use Trench’s word) God’s *pretermision*¹⁵—meaning God simply “abandoned” punishing sin *for the time being* [a nuance that attaches to our word “passed by”] the Righteousness of God is demonstrated in God’s *tolerance* [forbearance] and *not* His *ignoring* sin. Forbearance is patience exhibited but only until Jesus would die for sin.

Paul did not speak of forgiveness or remission of sins in Romans 3:25 but rather God’s *forbearance*. According to Paul in Romans 3:25 “... because in His *forbearance* [He] had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”

God’s Tolerance or Forbearance

God, in judgment, will show mercy—not in setting aside the guilty verdict, but—by bringing that judgment sooner rather than later. As Paul taught, “For the LORD will carry out his sentence upon the earth quickly and with finality” [Romans 9:28 NLT]. This is a quote from Isaiah 10:22-23, the Greek Translation reads, “And though the people be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall be saved. He will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness.” Francis Godet says, “God cuts, this time, short righteously.”¹⁶ As Jesus, Himself, taught, “And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.” [Mark 13:20].¹⁷

Hear Professor Trench out: “[forbearance] is *temporary*, transient: we may say that, like our ‘truce,’ it asserts its own temporary, transient character; that after a certain lapse of time,

15. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 117.

16. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 366.

17. Taken from my Commentary on Romans.

and unless other conditions intervene, it will pass away¹⁸ [Romans 2:4]. And this temporary provision—a kind-of dispensation, to use an ecclesiastical term—is now no longer available since Calvary [Acts 17:30]. Associating God’s righteousness with God’s forbearance or patient waiting for His Son, the Savior, to perfect our salvation [Hebrews 2:10] is the “just” thing to do not only because the Old Testament saints were looking ahead to a promised salvation through the Savior’s death. “These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” [Hebrews 11:39-40]. Another reason was because God’s judicial act intended to kill the cancer but keep the patient alive—deal with sin and provide newness of life for us.

Propitiation

Perhaps no word is more controversial in this text than this word translated in the King James Version “propitiation.”¹⁹ The word used here by Paul is used only one other place in our New Testament, in Hebrews 9:5 translated “mercy seat” of which the writer informs us “we cannot now speak particularly.” So there’s that! But we do know, as Paul made perfectly clear, that we are talking about the demonstration of His Righteousness, which is our chief concern here.

If we appeal to the Greek language, we are told the word can refer to either “a place where” or “the means by which”—and then William Tyndale invented the word “atonement”²⁰ to explain what Paul meant. (It didn’t help me much!) We know this has everything to do with the Savior’s shedding His blood. It is important to raise an additional issue here:

18. Ibid.

19. the action of appeasing God or what is favorable to Him

20. William Tyndale (1494 - 1536) is credited with coining this term in translating the Scripture into English. Accessed 7/19/21 Tyndale & Atonement. <https://rsc.byu.edu/king-james-bible-restoration/william-tyndale-language-one-ment>

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Is propitiation an appropriate translation? In Swahili, the word used is “reconciliation” because in using this word, the emphasis is transferred from God’s anger (which “propitiation” suggests needs to be appeased) unto God’s desire to reconcile and His love [John 3:16]. Regarding appeasement, are we saying that God was enraged and someone had to pay to assuage His wrath? A sacrifice would be required ...or else!? Dr. David Wells maintained, “[In] Pauline thought, man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from men by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted, so that God can look on men without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated.”²¹ That is what “propitiation” means but is that the best translation for the word Paul used?²² P. T. Forsyth wrote, “The atonement did not procure grace; it flowed from grace.”²³ John Calvin agreeably commented, “The work of atonement derives from God’s love, therefore it did not establish it.”²⁴

It was because the word contains the word for “mercy” that the word used to be translated “the place of mercy” or “the mercy seat.” But scholars found a few places in the Greek language where the ending that was on our word, “propitiation” indicated “the means by which” such mercy is administered. God is showing mercy through His sacrifice. To see God propitiated, after the pagan idea in Greek literature, notably misrepresents the heart of God in this matter of our salvation;

21. David F. Wells. *The Search For Salvation*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978) p. 29. cp. Stott. 172.

22. An argument can be made here that Jesus' crucifixion did *not* appease an angry God as was common in pagan sacrifices. One New Testament Scripture references God’s wrath distinguished from His anger. Romans 2:8 ... *wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and disobey the truth while obeying unrighteousness*. The RSV correctly translates “*fury*.” It has been defined as “setting fire to straw” in a rush of rage but God exhibits this only at the end of time. The concept of a propitiated wrath on Calvary suggesting that Jesus' death had to appease a divine rage is theologically questionable.

23. P. T. Forsyth. *The Cruciality of the Cross*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909) p.78. cp. Stott. 172

24. Calvin’s Institutes 2.16.4

for, it was *He* who was hanged there! I prefer the word, “reconciliation.”

Justifier

To interpret “just and justifier” in Romans 3:26 in solely a legal sense seemed to be nearsighted because Calvary is more than a certificate of our Savior’s death on our behalf. The next verse [Romans 3:27] makes it clear that Paul is talking about God’s unmerited and unearned grace, a work totally accomplished by God. He is the one who does what He does as the “Just” one. It remains to understand what a “Just” God does. If we interpret this to mean God does what is right, He must do what is right by Him. Since He sent His Son to die to effect a reconciliation between Himself and us, we must interpret this to mean that in justifying us He accomplished that purpose.

Scholarship has put forth great mental effort to define this word in context here, where there is great disagreement. Five other words might have been used if Paul meant them: Holiness, grace, truth, faithfulness, or goodness. But Paul used *Justice*. “It was a great problem,” Godet posited, “a problem worthy of divine wisdom, which the sin of man set before God—to remain just while justifying (declaring just) man who had become unjust. God did not shrink from the task.”²⁵

In an effort to understand the word *just*, the Dictionary adds, “the substantial meaning is *holy*, that quality by virtue of which He [God] hates and punishes sin.”²⁶ Both meanings: *just* and *righteous* are, therefore, legitimate theological contenders for this prize because God is not following a written law code. His justice is righteous because it is an expression of Who He is. He is, thereby, both righteous and just.

We could even argue that the Mosaic Law was first and foremost a reflection of Who God is or His holiness—even *before*

25. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970), page 158..

26. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 149.

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it was chiseled in stone on Mount Sinai for Ancient Israel to consider. This is to argue that what the angels mediated between God and Moses was nothing other than a more detailed description of the Great I AM that appointed the prophet to lead Israel. It was in the legal language to point out the estrangement (sin) between God and His creation [Galatians 3:24].

So, if we argue for a justice based on the Mosaic Law, it is a reflection of Who God is in Christ [Hebrews 10:1]. Even in the Pentateuch and prophets, justice to the Law always brought God's mind back to the upcoming death of His Son for our sins. It is *not* possible for the honest and reasonable student in searching through Scripture for enlightenment and direction *not* to see Christ in its pages everywhere. So when God's Righteousness is on display, as here, His Son is in the spotlight. The Spirit Who is here to guide us into Truth, Jesus in summation said simply, "He shall glorify me" [John 16:14]. So, how can we not put Christ in the center of such a profound truth: He is the justifier of those who believe *in Jesus!*

God displayed His Righteousness in overlooking past sins according to verse 25 but that in and of itself has no meaning. He did this because He expressed an uncommon forbearance—beyond any human display of tolerance, for the express purpose to make that same righteousness available to anyone whose trust in Him comes through Christ. Until we reach this truth, a sanctified life dedicated exclusively to following Christ, God's righteousness is not really illuminated [manifested].

John Stott, like Dr. Craig, stays with judicial language: "When God justifies sinners," Dr. Stott explained, "he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all, he is pronouncing them *legally righteous*, free from any *liability* to the broken *law*, because he himself in his Son has born the penalty of their law breaking."²⁷ [Italics added].

27. John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL 2021), page 187.

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Now this sounds right but I am still left with a couple concerns. Was I ever *liable* for *breaking* the Mosaic Law? I'm not Jewish! And I tend to cringe at the word "legal" not because I am not a good citizen. I hope I am. I don't like religious legalism and I don't think that attending church and putting money in the plate would suffice with God to declare me upright, anyway. Beside, what is *legally righteous*? I don't know if there is a scripture using that phrase. [The closest I came was the NET of Proverbs 29:7 where Solomon spoke of the righteous who know the judgment [legal rights] of the poor. The righteous defend the cause of the poor.

The Righteousness of God

Is it possible that Righteousness in the Old Testament had everything to do with the Mosaic Law because the Mosaic Law was under covenant? Understandably, God would refer to the content (not the context) of the covenant because Israel could, at the time, relate to it and understand God's interest better in legal terms. But when we arrive at Calvary, the *context* [our salvation and rescue from sin] was more important. The Mosaic law was fulfilled and not just upheld at Calvary. If it was only upheld, Jesus' death would be only a punishment for the crime of our sins. But the Law was fulfilled because it was only a shadow [Hebrews 10:1] of the real object of God's interest and plan. If we understand God's righteousness [the justice] to mean the *fulfillment* of the Law²⁸ as in Isaiah 26:2 Matthew 3:15} we are approaching N.T. Wright's meaning of "Covenant Faithfulness," which both Craig and Trench reject as grammatically "extremely rare."²⁹ The difference, perhaps, between Dr. Wright and myself might be, whereas he might have made the covenant an ingredient in making the spaghetti, for me, the covenant is in the sauce [the context *not* the content].

28. Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon* Oxford at the Clarendon Press. London: 1968), Page 429.

29. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020) page 70, #45.

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If you forget the value of this cuisine comparison: no one eats just spaghetti without the sauce, but no one asks, “Are we having sauce for dinner?” either! We talk “spaghetti” but “think “sauce.” It seems reasonable to interpret God’s righteousness in this way: We talk “justice” but we think “covenant.” We find this reasonable not because the nuance referring to the covenant is found in the *definition* of the word righteousness—it isn’t—not the content but it is found in the sauce, the context of Scripture in that everywhere God is talking about His righteousness in covenant with us. And since God is always faithful ... you see where Dr. Wright and others came up with the idea of God’s righteousness being covenant faithfulness.

In addition, our righteousness should be understood in the same context: a covenant between our Lord and us! And we should, also, be faithful! It is not incorrect that the words “just and the justifier” in Romans 3:26 should use the word “righteous” instead of “just,” as in the Bible in Basic English [BBE], “And to make clear his *righteousness* now, so that he might himself be *upright*, and give *righteousness* to him who has faith in Jesus.” Or as Young’s Literal Translation [YLT] reads, “... His being *righteous*, and declaring him *righteous* who is of the faith of Jesus.”

The Sunday School Lesson

I should apologize for Paul and his long sentences. Here Romans 3:21-26 are all one sentence! But they tell a beautiful truth that we can know because we can relate to it by the experience of our own salvation. Let me try to translate stripping away all the big words and controversy that scholars love to get entangled in—as we spoke of above in this chapter.

(21) Now, thank God, at last, Jesus came to die for our sins. God showed up in the person of the Savior to fulfill the prophecies and to retire the Mosaic Law (22) because our salvation, now, is simply in trusting Jesus whether we were Jewish or not. (23) Here’s the explanation: Everyone has sinned and no one without Jesus can please God or do His will (That’s why the Law was retired). (24) We can only be right with God by

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accepting the freedom (given to us who were unworthy of such a gift) from sin which Jesus provided in His death; (25) God appointed the Savior to be the means by which we would be reconciled to God simply by accepting the shedding of His blood and He extended this offer to even His Old Testament saints; (26) He decided not to punish them for sin, knowing Jesus would accept that punishment also for them when He came to die. We all, together, are saved by this grace through faith in Jesus.

Romans 10:3

“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.”

Does the Old Testament meaning of *The Lord’s Righteousness* [The Righteousness of Yahweh] in the Hebrew language explain the New Testament Greek use of the phrase, *The Righteousness of God*? Scholarship has relied on an Old Testament’s association of The Righteousness of Yahweh with the Mosaic Law to call it God’s *justice*. Since the meaning *justice*, for the most part, worked to interpret the word “righteousness” in classical Greek writings, also, as those of Aristotle and Plato, it appears there was no further need to investigate its usage.

Very often the Greek word used in the Greek translation of our Old Testament from the Hebrew does serve to shed light on its meaning in the New. But this is not a hard and fast rule. Richard Trench told us, “There are words whose history it is peculiarly interesting to watch, as they obtain a deeper meaning, and receive a new consecration, in the Christian Church; words which the Church did not invent, but has assumed into its service, and employed in a far loftier sense than any to which the world has ever put them before.”¹ So, we have earned a closer look at the idea behind the phrase “The righteousness of Yahweh” in the Old Testament to learn what we might about “The Righteousness of God” in the New.

1. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 1.

God's Justice as Keeping Covenant

I am aware of the controversies surrounding the word *righteousness*. Not only is the grammar brought into service to point out the difference between being *declared* righteous and *made* righteous, but NT Wright's definition of *The Righteousness of God* as covenant faithfulness itself is controversial.

William Lane Craig interprets the Old Testament use of the word as "God's nature grounded in His holiness" but sees Wright's view as "incorrect" adding, "It [God's Righteousness] cannot be reduced to covenant faithfulness or salvation. Righteousness in the Hebrew scriptures involves punitive divine justice..."²

Craig goes on to say, "If one reduces God's righteousness to his covenant faithfulness, this will radically impact one's understanding of Paul's atonement doctrine."³ Craig assumes here that we would no longer see Calvary as Christ paying the penalty for sin. He has an argument since we are basing our soteriology on the typology of the Mosaic Law. A Greek study of terms like "punishment" and "debt" are not sufficient to explain the Savior's death. Is it possible that we are employing judicial (or even financial: debt) terms to understand Divine truths that need the Covenant of God for context?

Dr. Sharon Baker in her work, *"Executing God: Rethinking Everything You've Been Taught about Salvation and the Cross,"* taught the story of atonement but from a perspective of love, mercy and compassion instead of in payment of a debt of sin or appeasing an enraged God. Dr. Baker confessed that her "whole belief system came crashing down around" her. She "wandered around in the rubble, kicking at the broken pieces of [her]

2. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020), page 61.

3. Ibid.

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absolute certainty"⁴ when she revisited all she had been taught to believe about the atoning work of our Savior on Calvary.

Calvary is what Dorothy Sayers called "miraculous and unfathomable"⁵ admitting in her play "*Man Born To Be King*" that "When you understand this, you will understand all prophecy and all history."⁶ But understanding the atonement. There's the 'rub'—as they say. For Dr. Baker "one foundation survived...that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.. And upon that foundation", she wrote encouragingly, "I began to rebuild."⁷

Sharon Baker suggested that "we reinterpret our tradition [in a way] that it remains relevant for our changing world and powerful enough to transform our world with the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ."⁸ Whatever she might have meant by this, what we mean here, in this work, is the need to stay true theologically and practically to the New Covenant in Christ.

William Craig argued that The Righteousness of God as covenant faithfulness and not divine justice makes no sense to avail for salvation."⁹ But this is not what we are arguing here: We just want sauce with our spaghetti—a justice that satisfies the conditions of a covenant which puts God's faithfulness on display.

Mark Seifrid tried to reconcile these ideas arguing, "All 'covenant-keeping' is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is 'covenant-keeping'"¹⁰ Craig consented that God's

4. Sharon Baker. *Executing God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) page 2.

5. Dorothy Sayers. *Creed or Chaos* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1974), page 8ff.

6. Dorothy Sayers. *The Man Born to be King*. (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press. 1990) Page 290.

7. Sharon Baker. *Executing God* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press) page 2.

8. *ibid.* p. 6.

9. William Lane. Craig. *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*. (Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.: 2020),. page 55.

10. *Ibid.* page 56.

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faithfulness is taught using other words like "truth" or the verb "to establish," as in 2 Corinthians 1:21 "And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us." J. D. G. Dunn, who likes "covenant faithfulness" attempted a marriage of these 2 ideas: *God's righteousness* as His punitive yardstick, "right order" or "norm" and *His covenant faithfulness*, by qualifying "The norm is not seen as some abstract ideal but rather as ... concretized in relation between God and creatures [us]."¹¹ In Sunday School we might simply say that in order to be reconciled, God needed to right wrongs by His death—and this is a punitive measure.

God's Righteousness In The Old Testament

Out of 159 uses of the word *righteousness* in the Old Testament Hebrew, 39 referred to the Lord's Righteousness.¹² The link between judgment and righteousness is unmistakable.¹³ "The LORD executes righteousness and judgment" [Psalm 99:4; 103:6]. Also, the connection between law and righteousness¹⁴ was commonly used by Ezekiel, and the contrast between iniquity and righteousness is well established.¹⁵

But there is also a link between faithfulness [a term of covenant] and righteousness. "Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications: in thy *faithfulness* answer me, and in thy *righteousness*." [Psalm 143:1]. And also between *righteousness* and *uprightness* of heart and truth.¹⁶ In Hebrew (time for a metaphor)

11. Ibid. page 61.

12. Deuteronomy 33:21; Judges 5:11; 1 Samuel 12:7; 26:23; Job 37:23; Psalm 5:8; 22:31; 24:5; 31:1; 36:6, 10; 40:10; 51:14; 69:27; 71:2,15, 16, 19, 24; 72:1; 88:12; 89:16; 98:2; 103:13; 111:3; 119:40, 142; 143:11; 145:7; Isaiah 9:7; 46:13; 51:6, 8; 56:1; 59:16; Daniel 9:7, 16; Micah 6:5; 7:9

13. Jeremiah 9:24; 22:3,15; 23:5; 33:15; Ezekiel 45:9 [judgment, and righteousness.]

14. Ezekiel 18:5, 19, 21; 18:27; 33:14, 16, 19 "that which is lawful and right"

15. Psalm 69:27 "Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. "

16. 1 Kings 3:6 in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart

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faithfulness and *righteousness* are married—"the two are one." *Righteousness* and *uprightness* are, indeed, synonyms. And even if they have their own domain of thought, as divine attributes, there is a single action implied because God is One [Deuteronomy 6:4]. When would He show Himself faithful but not just!?

In the New Testament to link words together as one idea there is a separate "and" that can be used which we might translate "even" although that isn't quite what it means. The Greek is a bit like using the phrase "cats and dogs" when it rains heavy. It never rains cats only and it never rains birds or fish (although I did hear once of it raining fish). We would never say, "cats even dogs" because that makes no sense. There is a metaphorical marriage here in this colloquialism that simply makes it a synonym for a "downpour." This word "and" in our New Testament makes it "as having an inner connection"¹⁷ In 1 Corinthians 4:21, Paul spoke of visiting them in love, **and** [even] in the spirit of meekness. There is a gentle component to love [Psalm 103:13].

Paul also—as a second example—taught "For there is no difference *between* [both] the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." [Romans 12:10]. I think we get this one easily. This word "and" is known as a "copulative particle" showing a closer bond between two ideas or words. In every possible sense there is not, nor can be—ever—any racism in God's heaven!

In the Hebrew Old Testament, there is no such connector. There is only one "and" which is used to facilitate a running narrative. But in reading the Hebrew and concluding a weakened pension for distinguishing the use of synonyms, I am inclined to accept, for example, "righteousness and uprightness" as two words that describe one contextual idea. If this be a reasonable view, even though prima-facie, then "faithfulness and righteousness" [Psalm 143:1] links God's justice to His covenant.

17. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 616.

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Charles Spurgeon wrote, “with God's faithfulness and righteousness upon our side we are guarded on the right hand and on the left.”¹⁸ Spurgeon then says what I wanted to hear him say. He connected the covenant with God's justice by referencing the opposites: “Requests which do not appeal to either of these attributes it would not be for the glory of God to hear [such prayer], for they must contain desires for things *unpromised*, and unrighteous.”¹⁹ [Italics added]. “Unpromised” is an indirect reference to God's covenant—for His covenant is His promise.

In Hebrew, God is a faithful judge—in English, and even Greek, these words are not generally associated. We tend to associate God's wrath or a punishment with justice and God's covenant of grace with His faithfulness. Justice tends to adhere to the letter of the Law [its wording] but faithfulness to the Spirit of the Law—the ultimate goal to eradicate the sin freeing the sinner from its grasp. As Paul pointed out more than once “a new covenant not based on the letter but on the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” [2 Corinthians 3:6 NET].²⁰

Walter Brueggemann called uprightness and truth synonyms of righteousness.²¹ He included justice as a practice that makes community viable.²² Brueggemann drew this conclusion, if not earlier, upon reading Isaiah 59.

Isaiah 59 - Waiting for Justice

The plan of salvation is visible in Our Lord's lament and heartbreak in Isaiah 59. It seems appropriate to provide here a little commentary on God's grief and what He did about it. Walter Brueggemann entitles this section of Scripture “Waiting for Justice.” I cannot read it without turning it into an

18. Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David*. (Passmore & Alabaster, London. UK.: Reprint 1984), vol II. page 1403.

19. Ibid.

20. See also Romans 2:29 and 7:6.

21. Walter Brueggemann. *Isaiah 40-66*. (Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, KY: 1989), page 199

22. Ibid.

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Evangelistic message on Salvation. It is because we can associate God's Justice with His Righteousness that we can view this text as man's need of salvation. Brueggemann says, "something is deeply amiss in the community of faith. The covenant agreement between Yahweh and the community is not working."²³

God is not to fault, "The LORD's hand is not too weak to deliver ...; his ear is not too deaf to hear..." [Isaiah 59:1]. We have become estranged from God "[our] sinful acts have alienated [us] from ... God" [verse 2].

Isaiah's description of the depth to which evil goes once sounded to me more like a fairy tale than reality when I first read these verses as a much younger man. But a sepsis, a cultural evil, was only beginning to infect the body politic. We could almost translate in modern terms verse 5a, "Whoever stands for truth and honesty gets canceled."

What caught my attention is the emphasis on justice in this chapter—or the lack of it! In verse 5 "They weave the spider's web,"—a description of the ultimate deception and lie that entraps the unwary insect. The web is a perfect euphemism for deception, and the worse kind is spoken of in verse 13 "they feign godliness"—they are religious, attending festival and sacrificial gatherings but the lie has reached to the very soul, "uttering from the heart words of falsehood."

Yet the death of a society, when they have succumbed to the deception is when it reaches the courts—no justice [15b]. Verse 4 [NET] reads "No one is concerned about justice; no one sets forth his case truthfully. They depend on false words and tell lies...." The report on the street is "we are all the walking dead! [Verse 10] which describes the utter hopelessness of a world without God's righteousness, "justice is far from us, Nor does righteousness overtake us" . [verse 9 NKJV].

Here, we admit that God's righteousness and His justice must share a common interest: how will God deal with a culturally systemic deception in which, no doubt, perception is truth and God's wisdom is no longer heard in the streets! How

23. Ibid. page 195

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can God cure the disease while saving the patient? Only Christ's coming to die will do. "He takes matters into his own hands; his desire for justice drives him on." [verse 16 NET]. Brueggemann says uprightness, truth, justice and righteousness constitute a covenantal practice.²⁴ He concludes, "no justice and righteousness—no viable community life."²⁵

Here we have Isaiah's description of Yahweh's Righteousness. It is His breastplate and helmet. God is dressed for war! He wears an enraged vengeance as a mantle. "Sin, you are a dead man!!" This is far more than a "declaration". God is a God of few words; God is a God of action. In Verse 19: His zeal [such a polite word] comes like a tsunami, a flood, a raging river; His name alone instills fear in the hearts of His enemies and now He is coming to put an end—if this context tells me anything—to lying [Zephaniah 3:13].

Jesus said, "I am the Truth!" [John 14:6]. He has come to redeem us. "'The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,' Says the LORD." [Verse 20]. Nothing sounds more Pauline and New Covenant than this sentence! Truly, Isaiah's prophecy is the fifth gospel! The only distinction here is that the Father is the Redeemer and Paul calls Jesus our Redemption, or *the means by which* the Father redeemed us [1 Corinthians 1:30].

This chapter seems to be a detailed discussion of what Isaiah introduced in chapter 1, verse 18 [NET]: "Come, let's consider your options," says the LORD. "Though your sins have stained you like the color red, you can become white like snow; though they are as easy to see as the color scarlet, you can become white like wool." It is a call to come to the Cross couched in the Hebrew language of justice but also covenant. It is more than a declaration of forgiveness or even acceptance by God. It is a way to reconciliation and total victory over rebellion, sin, and all deception.

24. Ibid. page 199.

25. Ibid.

Jehovah Tsidkenu

It was revealed to Jeremiah that "The LORD [is] our Righteousness," a title given to the Messiah: "In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our Righteousness.'" [Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30]. Israel does not survive as a nation without God's righteousness, justice, truth and their living uprightly. But how is this accomplished? It will take the Cross to fulfill this prophecy.

Will Israel learn to be faithful and honor the Torah any other way? No. In the language of the New Testament: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus Christ, their Messiah, the Lord of Righteousness] under heaven given among men by which we must [or can] be saved" [Acts 4:12]. In the language of the Old: "And he saw that there was *no man*, and wondered that there was no intercessor [no other]: therefore *his* [own] *arm* brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him" [Isaiah 59:16]. The Lord told Isaiah, "I am he who blots out your transgressions for *my own sake*" [Isaiah 43:25] which Dr. Lange explained "There is that in Himself that impels Him ... Love."

Justice and Righteousness

Limiting the meaning of a Biblical term to one English word or idea might be limiting the vision with which God blessed that word when He providentially oversaw its development. The Lord gave this message to Isaiah, "Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and *do* righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed" [Isaiah 56:1]. Here, justice is "kept" but righteousness is what God does.

His righteousness revealed must refer to His Son's incarnation which God referred to as His plan to provide salvation for us [by faith]. Malachi referred this to His coming as "the Sun of righteousness" [Malachi 4:2] —the hope of a new day, a new era in time. David saw the Lord's coming as "[His] righteousness ... like the mighty mountains, ... justice like the

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ocean depths. ... care for people and animals alike..." [Psalm 36:6 NLT]. Franx Delitzsch interpreted that "His righteousness [is] like the mountains ...unchangeably firm, that bear witness to the greatness and glory of God; ...God's judgements [justice is] ... incomprehensible and unsearchable. [Still with] compassion [that] embraces the animal world, as well as mankind."²⁶

David prayed "Deliver me in thy righteousness"[Psalm 71:2]. Here also deliverance is more than a declaration. It is God moving to save.

Self-Righteousness

If God's righteousness is God's promised salvation, which required an exercise of His justice over sin; self-righteousness must be mankind's desire to save itself. Is not a scientific materialism man's belief in his own efforts to eradicate poverty and sickness and bring about a utopian world of peace?

What is self-righteousness in our verse, Romans 10:3? The dictionary says it is "a state ... characterized by a certainty, especially ... unfounded ... , that one is totally correct or morally superior." This is, in fact, a self-justification. It is not needing to be sorry or feel remorse or repent of anything or be self-forgiving because such a person feels justified or right. They are never guilty; when the glue that holds a relationship together is dissolving, it's the other person's fault.

So, we are asking: is self-righteousness also self-justification? Should the word *righteousness* ever be interpreted to mean "justification"? Dr. Lange concluded that "The point of this distinction [with God's Righteousness] is lost, if the phrase be construed as = [equaling or meaning] *their own justification*."²⁷

Self-righteousness is more a self-reliance? Here, an appeal to the Scriptures, themselves, offers a true understanding

26. F.I-Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Eerdmans Publishing., Grand Rapids, MI. 1980), vol V, page 7.

27. John Peter Lange. *Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 342.

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of what self-righteousness is. Paul taught “not having *mine own righteousness*, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” [Philippians 3:9]. J. B. Lightfoot points out that Paul did not say “the righteousness which is mine:” The word “the” is absent because there is no such true possibility. There can be no such thing as a personal righteousness only one that pride falsely assumes. The Psalmist wrote, “I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only” [Psalm 71:16]. Isaiah concluded “...we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags” [Isaiah 64:6]. Paul admonished, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: ... that I may win Christ, And be found in him” [Philippians 3:8-9]. Lightfoot adds, “It is only by becoming one with Christ, that Christ’s righteousness can become our righteousness.”²⁸ All of this suggests that a self-justification is not the best interpretation of Paul’s thought in writing. Paul tells us such persons are ignorant of God’s righteousness.

According to my Sunday School days and said simply, Israel in Paul’s time didn’t understand that salvation is by faith not obedience to the Mosaic Law. Instead through the law they sought to be acceptable to God even though Abraham, their father (as they thought), was *reckoned* righteous [simply] *by faith*. Francis Godet called Israel’s ignorance a misinterpretation of the law and the prophets²⁹ which spoke of Christ and the true way to salvation.

Keep this truth simmering on a back burner of your thoughts for now. There is not, nor ever was, a separation between the words, faithfulness and righteousness. Self-righteous is unrighteous is unfaithful! A self-righteous attitude does not humbly seek God’s help in the difficult circumstances.

28. J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, 15th printing. Grand Rapids, MI: 1976), page 149.

29. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970)), page 375.

Self-righteous persons believe incorrectly that the solution can be found within their own being. Self-righteousness is self-help is self-reliance without God.

With Israel it was the moral and ceremonial law in Torah. In our day, it is the law of science. "Through not using the law in this spirit of sincerity and humility," Godet wrote, "[they] stumbled at the divine truth manifested in the appearing of the Messiah."³⁰ Godet was quick to add, "...providing it be not forgotten that ... the want of knowing is the result of ... *unfaithfulness*."³¹ [Italics added]. It is very interesting and noteworthy here that the meaning of God's Righteousness [its content] is put in the context of faith and faithfulness.

The Righteousness of God

Godet admits, "We did not know from the first part of the epistle [of Romans] the meaning of the term"³² [God's Righteousness] ... only that it is "revealed from faith to faith" [Romans 1:17]. By way of review: Perhaps an appeal to Aristotle's definition provides insight,³³ which was "to judge or dispense justice."³⁴ Others derive the word "righteous" to mean what is customary or right. Plato identified it as "moral goodness."³⁵ Dr. Lange appealed to the Old Testament where it speaks of "the will of God, as expressed in the written law, ... perfectly fulfilled in Christ, both moral and religious."³⁶ Dr. Lange [as did Professor Craig] appealed directly to "the

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. **Nicomachean Ethics** v. 2. "[...] Righteousness is goodness of the spirit shown in distributing what is according to [just] desert." [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0062:chapter=2&highlight=righteousness>]

34. John Peter Lange. *Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 74.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

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dictionaries and concordances."³⁷ To be righteous means to "conform to the law *inwardly* [morally] as well as outwardly [ceremonially], holy, perfect."³⁸ [Italics added].

The word "submit" used in our verse corresponds to Paul's idea of yielding ourselves as instruments unto righteousness [Romans 6:13]. This means replacing the word 'of' with the word 'from' [The Righteousness *from* God] because our life in Christ is a work of grace *from* God to make us holy. It is insufficient in meaning to interpret our verse only in terms of God's justice enacted at Calvary. The Cross is much more than forgiveness; it speaks of a new birth as part of a new Covenant in Christ [Galatians 2:20].

Dr. Lange's summation reads, "The Righteousness of God is the self-communication of the righteousness which proceeds from God, which becomes personal righteousness in the person of Christ, which, in His passion as propitiation, satisfies the righteousness of the law (in harmony with the requirement of conscience), and, by the act of justification, applies the atonement to the believer for the sanctification of his [the believer's] life."³⁹

Back in Sunday School I might say it this way: When Jesus died on the Cross He showed us how fair and just His Father, God, is. God wanted to save us by getting rid of our sin and reconciling [becoming friends] with us like He was with Adam before he sinned. This is not just God's forgiveness but a brand new day in the world because we don't have to be Jewish to please God. He wants us to get to know Him, personally.

Righteousness & Revelation

Dr. Lange continues, "The fundamental idea of the Epistle [of Romans] as set forth in the theme, every expression used in verses 16 and 17, and the contrast presented in verse 18

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid. page 75.

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[of chapter 1], point to a more comprehensive meaning answering to the definition of the gospel as ‘the power of God onto salvation,’ full and final, from ‘all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.’”⁴⁰ What scholarship is saying is that there is more—much more—to God’s Righteousness than just a declaration of forgiveness or God’s acceptance of us. God’s Righteousness involves all His desires toward us [Philippians 2:13] which makes His forgiveness only the beginning of an active reconciliation.

Aristotle had another view that might be more supportive of what we are learning in Sunday School. He said that the word *righteousness* came from the Greek root meaning “a relation between two.”⁴¹ Lange then admits that “the majority of evangelical commentators restrict the righteousness of God to God’s *justifying* righteousness; some even ungrammatically identify it with justification ... or God’s ‘method of justification.’”⁴²

Thus we discover 3 meanings for God’s Righteousness: God satisfies the curse; He then reconciles with us; He then makes all things new in our lives including a renewed mind.

1. **God’s Retributive Justice:** Jesus became sin for us to redeem us from the law’s curse, to fulfill the law. (Matthew 5:17; Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 21; Galatians 3:13).

- Specifically in Romans 3:25 this aspect of His righteousness was demonstrated against sin and evil [Colossians 2:15]. It is impossible for evil to go unnoticed and unaddressed by God because He is righteous, holy. The Spirit *convicts* of sin and judgment to come [John 16:8-10] because a righteous God will eradicate even the memory

40. Ibid.

41. John Peter Lange..*Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 74.

42. Ibid. page 75

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of it in His coming Kingdom [Matthew 5:20; Hebrews 1:8].

- We might say that whereas retributive justice is the content *grace* is the context!
2. **God's Justifying Righteousness:** We are declared righteous by faith (Romans 3:26; 8:1)
- Here the verb and other forms of the root word are employed as an imparted righteousness or exoneration, acquittal, from the sentence of death—which includes His forgiven [Romans 3:28]. Beyond this, it speaks of reconciliation and acceptance.
 - Specifically in Romans 3:26 God's Righteousness is manifest in God's acceptance of us by faith. [2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Hebrews 2:17].
3. **God's Sanctifying Righteousness:** "Christ in us" [Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 9:8-9; Colossians 1:27-29]
- The Gift of Righteousness. "More than forgiveness, the helping, saving, and efficacious action of God as radical deliverance"⁴³ [Romans 5:17; 8:10; 9:30; 10:6; Philippians 3:9-10].
 - In covenantal language "all things have become new" [Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17].
 - Specifically, the ultimate directive and purpose of the Righteousness of God. Having exercised the defeat of sin and being reconciled to us, He now works in us to bring about His perfection, holiness, in us. It is here, ultimately that our "submission" unto the righteousness of God makes sense [Romans 10:3].

These are not separate definitions of the Righteousness of God. Perhaps, we might see these in terms of the Revelation of

43. Gerhard Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), vol II. page 205.

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God: #1 as Savior, He takes our place on the Cross; #2 as Judge, He declares us acquitted, forgiven, and reconciled, and #3 as The Creator, He creates us anew in Christ.

Or consider what Jeremiah learned about our Lord: “But let him that celebrates rejoice in this, that he has insight and is attentive to observe, that I *am* the LORD which exercises lovingkindness [grace greater than all our sin], judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD” [Jeremiah 9:24].

Sunday School

If I were to teach a Sunday School class of 6th graders [11-12 year olds] on the Righteousness of God, I would simplify this message, but I would not limit my talk to only the first aspect of this truth: Jesus on Calvary’s Cross judging my sin. That is the starting point. Because sin has been dealt with by the Savior accepting my punishment, I can now be released from that sentence of death, declared righteous. That’s the second piece of good news here but there is a third part. I am not released to live my life any way I want. I am now, the Bible uses the word, “redeemed” which means I am free now to love and serve My Lord [Romans 10:9].

Said an even simpler way: He made it possible now for us to be reconciled to God, We should cherish that friendship! All this equals God’s righteousness or fairness or justice [you decide what word you like] in getting rid of the sin and satan; so that, God could keep us forever. And this is why we talk about His covenant faithfulness.

2 Corinthians 5:21

“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.”

God made Jesus to be sin? This is an unusual form of justice—if we understand Jesus’ death to be punitive [and we do!]. The judge descends the bench to assume the criminal’s place in sentencing! God proposes His own death to replace us in order to satisfy the law and, at the same time—using the Biblical word—redeem the sinner. A couple English translations backed away from such a radical idea (making Jesus to *be* sin) interpreting the text to mean that Jesus didn’t become sin but “the *offering* for our sin” [NLT & CSB?].¹ The basis for this claim was because the word can refer to the *sacrifice*—at least in Jewish thought. Henry Alford dissecting our text called God’s righteousness here the opposite of sin. Then he asked us to compare Galatians 3:13 where Paul refers to “the curse of the Law” from which Israel—and we—have been redeemed. He summarized: God’s Righteousness is “the whole justification of all God’s people, as one act accomplished, with the Sacrifice of Christ.”²

Jesus not only became sin; we became God’s righteousness. This is Martin Luther’s “Wondrous Exchange.” Paul’s use of symmetry (as in Romans 4:25) adds a poetic touch

1. John Calvin, we are told [Lange, 102] did not endorse the sacrificial language here, probably because nowhere else does Paul use such language. But to equate Jesus with sin might follow the outline of Pauline thinking that called the Savior our wisdom and redemption, etc in 1 Corinthians 1:30.

2. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*. (Moody Press. Chicago, IL. 1958), [sorry ‘bout this]. vol II. page 666.

2 Corinthians 5:21

to his genius and inspiring words. Jesus gets our sin; we get His righteousness. Whether we are talking about a sacrifice or a debt settled or a ransom paid or a wondrous exchange, this is metaphorical language for what really happened at Calvary. But God's Righteousness is *not* a figure of speech. And it is just as real as the sin it replaced in our lives!

Sin

Opening the Old Testament dictionary to this word, "sin," among the definitions for this term,³ we find listed God's way of dealing with it. This is a study in itself which must be taken up elsewhere but for now we go down the list. God deals with sin: by *visiting punishment upon it*, Exodus 32:34; by *forgiveness*, Exodus 10:17; by *pardoning it*, Exodus 34:9; by *removing it*, Isaiah 27:9; by *casting it into the depths of the sea*, Micah 7:19; by *covering it over* (making atonement), Psalm 79:9; 85:2 ; by *blotting it out*, Isaiah 44:22; by *washing it away*, Psalm 51:7, Zechariah 13:1; by *forgetting it*, Isaiah 43:25; by simply *looking away*, Deuteronomy 9:27; Romans 3:25. But also by providing for a *sacrifice to atone* for it, Leviticus 4:27; or *punish it*, Zechariah 14:19. Paul offers one final thing God will do with it—to "make an end" to it, Daniel 9:24; Jesus will *become it*, 2 Corinthians 5:21!

We admit the language is harsh. Would it not have sufficed to make the Savior a sinner, in our place, to die for us? Or why not "a sin offering" which fits the Jewish understanding. After all, what really transpired that day on that Cross—we must admit— exceeds our ability to explain it [Isaiah 55:8; Romans 11:33].

Perhaps, Paul's language was intended to shock and awe because some tend to become insensitive to what once impacted their lives but now is just another theological study. The Gospel message does not excite some people any more—if it

3. Brown, Driver, & Briggs. [BDB] *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. [The BDB]. (Hendrickson Publishers. Sixteenth Printing. Peabody, MA.: 2015), page 308f. 1.d.

ever did; but it ought to! Some congregants seemingly can be bored to sleep by the telling of the greatest story ever told. Sad! Scholars, anyway, will look closely at the words and dissect Paul's explanation, ad infinitum, until the many possible interpretations overwhelm us. There are many, so-called, theories of the Atonement out there in academia. As humble recipients of salvation, the subject of the Cross is what some of us always want to talk about. For us it is not a dry piece of research; it is our testimony and life!

The Righteousness of God

What did we become in Christ when He made us the Righteousness of God? Chrysostom⁴ believed that Paul's abstract language here, sin for righteousness, was not mere poetic license. When God gave us His Righteousness He shared *Himself* with us. If we are "made" into *His* righteousness, we are made *like* Him. This is another way of saying "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son" [Romans 8:29]. Paul did not just say "The Righteousness of God" but, he added, "*in Him*," that is, in Christ. Dr. Lange called this: "A fellowship with Christ which takes place by means of a faith which is by its nature a putting on of Christ"⁵ [1 Corinthians 1:30].

Not as a riposte or to be controversial, let's ask, "Can we substitute our word *justice* here and be theologically comfortable with what it might mean?" God made Jesus to be sin for us that we might be justified in him. Perhaps, we took liberties with this interpretation. The New Living Translation reads, "so that we could be made right with God through Christ." The Amplified again: "[that is, we would be made acceptable to Him and placed in a right relationship with Him by His gracious lovingkindness]." Perhaps of interest is that some languages use a single word for both justice and righteousness. The New

4. John Peter Lange..2 *Corinthians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 101.

5. *Ibid.* page 102.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Testament in Today's German [1982] used the word "freigesprochen" or to be "acquitted" or declared free.

To use my metaphor: I do see sauce on this spaghetti! Lange pointed out "By what Christ does *for* man and *in* man, He makes it consistent for God to *pardon* and have *fellowship* with man."⁶ "For" us was taking our sin and declaring us free of it; this is God's justice [the spaghetti, if you will]. This is the "pardon" But "in" us is the relationship [the sauce in this analogy], the "fellowship" that reveals His covenant faithfulness.

We might find Paul's way of talking profound—even perplexing, but the task before him and before our Lord, who is directing him, is to point out that salvation is real! The Gospel is powerful because Calvary was no allegory or metaphor. Calvary was historical. What actually occurred was the final and decisive victory over satan and sin. Provision was, thereby, made for all those who accept it by faith to be holy as God is holy [1 Peter 1:15].

Christ was not treated as a sinner, but *sin*. When He died, it was rendered powerless over all those who by faith are redeemed from its bondage [Romans 6:2, 6, 18]. Those who fear that theologically we will misconstrue the meaning behind the Savior's death should allay that concern because no one here is proposing we dine on sauce alone. On the contrary: we are proposing that Jesus' death provided more than an acquittal but a new way of life, and it is this new way that betokens God's New Covenant through His Son.

We don't argue it here but fellowship is built on relationship; relationship is built on trust; and trust is built on faithfulness. God's faithfulness was never questioned and ours is now provided through Christ. Neander⁷ wrote: "A perfect righteousness, the ideal of a holy life, like the sufferings in which this holy life was perfected, is given to our humanity."⁸ Dr.

6. Ibid. page 103.

7. August Neander (1789–1850), a German theologian and church historian;

8. John Peter Lange. *2 Corinthians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 101.

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Craig's contention presupposes that all this cannot be summed up so conveniently in a single phrase "The Righteousness of God" whereas Dr. Wright is not inclined to be so dismissive. So we must look closer.

Covenant and Creation

Could Paul have meant to equate Jesus' death with a divine plan to end sin ...to kill it by His own death? He became sin; then, He died; so, sin died! Whatever definition might be in Paul's thoughts of "The Righteousness of God," can we rightly say that it is more than justice?

Some dear friends of mine like the way I talk but admit me difficult at times to understand. They wait on that Sunday School explanation—that they already know—because it confirms their faith, as it should. They leave the rest (all the Greek talk) for others. This is okay because God never required us to pass a course in Theology before salvation. Grace is still free! What some scholars probably keep secret is that not even they comprehend fully what they share with us. You probably already asked Peter what he thought of Paul's mind? 2 Peter 3:15-16a [my paraphrase]: "Regarding our Lord's suffering for our salvation, our beloved brother Paul also spoke of this according to the wisdom God gave him, [which is] in all his letters, speaking ... of ... things... hard to be understood..."

Perhaps, this is what N. T. Wright was talking about when he overlapped the justice of God with God's covenant faithfulness, because God's brand of justice, the way He runs His court, when it comes to believers, is under the auspices of the New Covenant made in the Savior's blood. One of Wright's themes is the relationship between God's covenant and His creation, how the two ideas support one another in an effort to make God's vision in both areas reality.

The creation was damaged by the first man's, Adam's, disobedience which was "made right" at Calvary in the New Covenant. But this covenant does not stand alone, God needed to create in each of us, as believers, a new "man" and hereby restore His garden vision. It is in this context Wright picks up his

2 Corinthians 5:21

thoughts, “the problem of how to translate this phrase [The Righteousness of God] ... evoked in Paul's day as it had done for a long time before: the fact that the Creator and Covenant God can be relied upon to act in accordance with His creating power and His covenant fidelity, to put the world to rights.”⁹

Wright then goes on to say what we knew he would say, “There is no such word in English.” He explains, “One might say ‘faithfulness’, but it hardly carries the sense of ‘justice’, of putting things to rights. One might say ‘righteousness’, but people inevitably hear [this] ... either in the sense of ‘ethical uprightness’ or in the (to my mind mistaken) familiar Reformed understandings of it as the status which God imputes to the faithful....”¹⁰ He then goes on to include “justification” as a form of justice, which is logical.

What I am saying—and I think N.T. Wright is saying—is that God’s primary interest in Calvary is relational not just standing or positional. Another analogy which is Pauline is marriage [Ephesians 5:32]. To some, marriage is a status legally binding that guarantees certain provisions by law, especially, tax breaks and what happens in a divorce. A number of couples probably “tie the knot” for this reason only. For them marriage is all about the wedding; but for others, the wedding is all about the marriage—a life long commitment to love another. The former is positional (status) and the latter is relational. We could write volumes documenting the obvious that salvation through faith in Christ is relational—a life-long commitment to be faithful to a faithful God. The question here is: Is this all implied in “The Righteousness of God”?

Dr. Craig maintains that this is another word—in Hebrew: *truthfulness* or *faithfulness*. I agree with Dr. Craig that truthfulness or faithfulness is to be distinguished from *justice*. But we are adding that God’s covenant faithfulness undergirds all His actions. Justice and Covenant Faithfulness like spaghetti

9. N. T. Wright. *Paul*. (First Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.: 2005), [page 25.

10. *Ibid*.

2 Corinthians 5:21

and sauce belong together; we tend not to want one without the other.

Reconciliation

An interesting translation of Romans 3:25 in Swahili interprets the King James' Word "propitiation" as upatanisho, "reconciliation." It reads thus: "whom God has set to be a *reconciliation* through faith in his blood, so that he can show his righteousness...."¹¹ The writer to the Hebrews taught that the Savior died "...to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" [Hebrews 2:17]. My Sunday School lesson likes to emphasize this: Jesus went to the Cross to reconcile us to His Father in heaven in order to restore a love relationship between Him and us.

How is this a demonstration of His Righteousness? Does not His death vindicate His desire to reunite with His creation? [Covenant and creation restored]. Does not the reality of our *reconciliation* with God now prove that He did not die in vain? Every aspect of this reconciliation, after a judicial act in the Savior's death, is *relational*. We serve a personal God Who provides for our fellowship with Him and each other (which gives meaning to an act of reconciliation). "You also ... have fellowship with us; and ... our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." [1 John 1:3]. The Gospel message is nuanced by this "abiding in the vine" relationship we have "in covenant" with Him! [Hebrews 12:24].

The Sunday School Lesson

Jesus took the blame for all our sin; so that with His forgiveness we could start over as new persons [He made us new] so this time we could be His friend and be the person He wanted us to be. He works with us because He gives us love and peace and whatever we need (the Fruit of the Spirit) to live for

11. ambaye Mungu amekwisha kumweka awe **upatanisho** kwa njia ya imani katika damu yake, ili aonyeshe haki yake

2 Corinthians 5:21

Him “according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: ... that we might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” [2 Peter 1:3-4].

The New Testament for Everyone [NTFE] reads, “The Messiah did not know sin, but God made him to be sin on our behalf, so that in him we might embody God’s faithfulness to the covenant.” The International Children’s Bible [ICB] translates, “Christ had no sin. But God made him become sin. God did this for us so that in Christ we could become right with God.

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And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Recently, to the time of writing this (perhaps, this was providential) in a Bible study in Galatians 5, one participant asked me to define some of the “works of the flesh” [Galatians 5:19-21] since Paul appeared to, needlessly, choose terms that were synonymous. In everyday speech we might see “adultery, fornication, and uncleanness [sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures in the NLT] as interchangeable terms. In verse 20 the NLT lists these: hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division. These have so much in common as to suggest at least an overlap in meaning. Is it possible to envision any one of them in the human heart without the others?

Among the ideas I proposed was a thought given often in the study of words in which a term is treated as if it had personality and we were wanting to make its acquaintance. We just met this term in some writing or scripture and want to become more familiar with it. But to do so, we decided to visit the word’s best friends, first—the other words it “hangs out with.” Like people, words have a past, a history of use, that often give us a “gut” sense of whether or not we may want to use them in a sentence (befriend them). So, even if we know little about a term, we might know a bit more about another term it often associates with in sentences—in the places they frequent together. And we may decide not to go there!

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Words, like the people who use them, have personality. It would seem odd, as an example, to hear a self-made man who makes his living playing the stock market talking about faith in God, or someone who has been divorced a half-dozen times and is now single again give advice about love. Pardon me if I have overstepped my right here. Even if you didn't know what "meekness" is, what might you think of it knowing that it hangs out with humility and obedience to God? (It does.)

In the list in Galatians 5:19, talking about immoral behavior I don't need to meet "uncleanness" to know I don't want to be its friend. And I may not know what "dissension" is but one of its closest friends is always angry, quarreling over everything. This is not for me! Whatever "revelings" are, they seem to be something one does drunk [Paul added the phrase "and such things"}. Not for me, either!

We also know that people use words in different ways. We don't need to be psychologists to pick up on this. (Although learning what a person is really saying with the words they use is an important psychological tool.) If you were a Jew in Paul's day, you would probably say that Gentiles sin but we, Jews, transgress [the Law]. Jews are more upright than righteous (their choice of terms). But uprightness and righteousness do hang out together all the time! Like people, we can learn a lot about a word, a person, by meeting their associates and friends.

This might be a surer source of knowledge than trying to learn the word, alone, in a dictionary entry. Our association with a term in sentences should give us a sense as to its meaning, but like people who might seem friendly with us in a private meeting, the word might have left us with a false impression. A favorite example of this for me is the word "grace" which Paul preached to His Jewish friends. He was saying one thing [unearned salvation] but they were thinking something else [favor with God]. With salvation, we begin to hang out—not only with grace but—grace's friends, God's mercy, answered prayer, forgiven sins, spiritual healing, etc. We begin to see that there is more to this word, and that God treating us how He

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treats us has everything to do with Jesus and Calvary and not some worth in us before we met Him.

It's the sauce that makes spaghetti one of my wife's favorite meals. It is the friends (the spices and vegetables and meats) that the spaghetti hangs out with that gives it appeal.

A Word's Friends

The distinction between a word, its definition, and what we might see as synonyms, the words our word hangs out with that gives our word relevance, is not always evident.

- ◆ The word "good" in the New Testament can also mean "beautiful," or "useful" It lives with *excellence*. Jesus spoke of "good" fruit, which meant in this context *edible*. The opposite in Matthew 12:33 is translated "corrupt".
- ◆ Another favorite example is the Hebrew word for peace [SHALOM]. This word in our Old Testament hangs out with harmony, prosperity, health, to name a few. In the New, there is the peace of God [reconciliation], the peace from God [which passes understanding] and unity in Christian community.
- ◆ In James 3:17,¹ James defines wisdom by its relations: "But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere."
- ◆ The Fruit of the Spirit, some scholars point out, is summed up in the first one, love.²
- ◆ Sometimes friends hold hands as lovers, like "carnality"³ and "the flesh." The New Testament word for

1. I chose the NLT but any translation would do.

2. In my work on *Essays in Grace* I look into this aspect in Galatians 5:22-23.

3. See my work on Romans, the appendix on "Carnality" for a deeper dive into the idea.

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“carnality” means both “consisting of flesh” and “rooted in the flesh.”⁴

- ◆ A most obvious example should be our love for God and one another which according to Romans 5:5 “The love of God for us ... becomes our love for God.”⁵

Forgiveness

Perhaps we should ask the same question about forgiveness. Is our forgiveness in the Covenant of Jesus’ death or is it simply a consequence of His death? Luke reportedly [Luke 23:34] told us, “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” The Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament reads, “The absence of these words from such early and diverse witnesses... is most impressive ... [These words] though probably not a part of the original Gospel of Luke, bears self-evident tokens of its dominical origin and was retained.”⁶ On a grading scale of A thru D, this text was rated ‘C’.

It is reasonable to say that had Jesus not declared our forgiveness we would be no less forgiven. Perhaps, however, we needed to hear Him say it. It is very much like Him to have said it, but does this raise a theological question: Did He die to provide forgiveness? His forgiveness for You and I, we being on His heart, was never in question.

God’s Righteousness and Faith

There is a story told about Archimedes and the golden crown its owner suspected was not pure gold. He gave it to the

4. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page 569.

5. John Peter Lange..*Romans* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol x, Page 163.

6. Bruce Metzger. *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament*. (United Bible Societies. 3rd edition. London-New York: 1975), page 180.

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“math whiz” to ascertain. Archimedes while pondering how to verify whether or not it was pure gold, sunk down into a warm bath. As the water rose by the displacement of his form, he suddenly knew how to find out. “The young Greek math whiz leaps out of the bath and rushes home naked crying ‘Eureka! Eureka!’ Or, translated: ‘I’ve found it! I’ve found it!’”⁷ His word “eureka,” a word we have since become familiar with, is the Greek word “found” in our verse [Philippians 3:9]; The word, Bishop Lightfoot tells us, “involves more or less prominently the idea of a *surprise*.”⁸

This reminds me of a story my Greek teacher in College shared with us about his father’s testimony of “the old man’s” salvation. When his dad accepted the Lord as Savior, it appeared to be with little or no emotion—unlike most people who cry a lot (after all an altar was once called “the mourner’s bench”). But the old man simply went on with his life working in the mine. He was a coal miner. One day, deep underground while working alone and meditating on his new “found” faith, he suddenly bellowed out, “I’m saved!!” What a jolt of joy when we first discover something God has been up to in our, otherwise, ordinary lives. Eureka! I’m an adopted child of God!!

This excitement is here in this verse! Oh what a discovery! The good bishop wrote, “It is only by becoming one with Christ, that Christ’s righteousness can become our righteousness.”⁹ And what a righteousness this is!

As we have been saying, what interests us in Philippians 3:9 is who (or what) Righteousness associates with which will tell us a lot about God’s righteousness, itself. There is a sense in which it has brought God and us together. We were introduced

7. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fact-or-fiction-archimede/>

8. J. B. Lightfoot. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), page 117..

9. J, B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Philippians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, 15th printing. Grand Rapids, MI: 1976) page 149..

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to Righteousness by “faith” and Righteousness introduced us to God.

It seems acceptable to use this allegory here because verse 10 now gives the result of that introduction to God, “that I might know Him.” And knowing Him, I might become more faithfully informed, in that relationship, of the changes in me because of the power of the resurrection. I now, no longer want to avoid what price I might pay for my faith but I embrace it as suffering not just for Him but with Him. I follow Christ, because I died to myself when I accepted His death on my behalf. And now I await in hope of a glorious resurrection!

Scholarship that limits this word to its meaning of punitive justice might see this as God’s justification by faith similarly understood as with Abraham, “[Abraham] believed on him [God] that justifies the ungodly, his [Abraham’s] faith is counted for righteousness. [Romans 4:5]. This Paul called “The righteousness of faith” [Romans 4:13]. Here Paul added “of God”—*the righteousness which is of God by [based on] faith*. If we are even close to understanding Paul here, God’s Righteousness as a punitive measure against sin is only a first step. God has introduced us to the path of Righteousness; now He purposes [predestines] to keep us on that path.

No Biblical scholar doubts this but the question remains, “Does The Righteousness of God mean more than punitive justice?” We have been saying here that it has to, in this chapter, *by association*. A righteousness that only pays the penalty for sin either must be more involved in the believer’s life or must hope that other of its friends, truth, virtue, knowledge, ... grace, sanctification, will take up the gauntlet and run with it. To separate out the attributes of God by definition is to suggest a jurisdictional responsibility or that God does one thing without a thought to the other aspects of the work He must bring in to complete it (This is not sound theology even if you don’t believe in the simplicity¹⁰ of God).

10. I cover this topic in my work, “The Cross” and in the student version: Jesus: God’s Gift of Himself. “All of God’s attributes are in the

Philippians 3:9

We have contended that this further work of God is the *context* surrounding the Savior's death and resurrection. He authored our faith but now must *finish* it, too [Hebrews 12:2]. Many scholars are satisfied when a word carries a definition that fits the sense in which it resides without sounding absurd. But, this for me is the spaghetti without telling me what kind of sauce comes with the dish.

Faith

Faith or trust in the Savior plays a double role here in obtaining the righteousness which is from God: *through* faith and *by* faith. Paul says "through faith" because our faith or trust in the Savior is the conduit by which we receive from God; faith is not the source. Such a distinction is worth making less we think we receive anything from God simply because we are believing God will bring it. Said another way: faith and faithfulness together are this conduit or the way God's righteousness comes to us. If we trust Him, we will be faithful to Him in following Him and God is provided His opportunity in this way to make His righteousness real in our lives.

And His righteousness is, also, *by* faith. The word "by" means "based upon." "Without faith it is impossible to [not only] please God" [Hebrews 11:6] but receive from Him [James 1:6-7]. We might translate Paul here saying, "Faith [and faithfulness] is the way and the *only* way."

The Righteousness of God takes on greater significance than a punitive measure for sin or a declaration of acceptance by God for the sinner. Paul is recognizing here the importance of faith *also as faithfulness* on the believer's part. Abraham believed God and it was considered by God as acceptable for Him to accept the Patriarch [Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3] but Abraham's act of trust in God required some action on his part, which we

background of all of his actions; ... all of his actions will exhibit a unity and consistency worthy of **perfect** agency." [Adonis Vidu. *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, (Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 2014),. page 248].

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might call a *step* of faith: “By faith Abraham obeyed” [Hebrews 11:8, 17].

It is in the context of this, our, faithfulness that God’s faithfulness is manifested and on which we base a discussion of the covenant faithfulness of God. We are saying that The Righteousness of God is also based on and comes as a manifestation of God’s covenant faithfulness.

Nothing here argues against the need for a punitive divine measure to deal with the curse of sin [Deuteronomy 27:11-26] and fulfill the Law [the Mosaic Covenant] which defined that curse [Leviticus 26:25; Matthew 5:17]. But once dealt with through the Savior’s death: “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood [Romans 3:25a], it reaches us “through faith,” the conduit [Romans 3:25b], and God is able, thereby, “to demonstrate His righteousness,” both His justice and His Covenant Faithfulness [Romans 3:25c].

There is, probably, with some, still a residual concern that Christ’s death in our stead will be minimized theologically unless we keep the focus *exclusively* on God’s justice on Calvary. They make an appeal to the Greek definition of the family of words used for righteousness in support of this. But this fear should be assuaged here when we realize that our faith and faithfulness are of equally importance before God. Scholars refer this to the passive [faith or trust] and active [faithfulness or obedience] aspects of this single grace. Paul in Philippians 3:10 referenced “the power of the Resurrection” [Romans 6:11].

There is also a deep concern that we might be supporting a “salvation by works,” but it is the same fear that called James’ Epistle into question and this has been resolved sufficiently to allow it to remain in the Canon of Holy Writ. We are saying no more or less than James here.

The Sunday School Lesson

A rather free interpretation of our verses, Philippians 3:9-10, might go this way: As I serve the Lord, I find my resolve fails me when I try to follow a list of what is required of me as a

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good person. I know now that my salvation is not based on this! I am excited to discover that He has given me the ability to honor and live out my Christian testimony by trusting His grace. I know by this that my Christian experience is real and just as real is His acceptance and love. I am getting to know Him even through my struggles and afflictions.

James 1:20

human anger [a man's anger] does not accomplish God's righteousness
[CSB]

James simply contrasted God's Righteousness with the very human penchant to lose our composure in rage thinking that heated passion is sometimes justified even though it is always hurtful. It is often intended to cause pain (which is what our word vengeance means—even though, it is not the biblical idea). The Lord's statement that "vengeance" belonged to Him was absolute. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance [sentencing, passing judgment, punishing...] is mine; I will repay [decide retribution], saith the Lord." [Romans 12:19].

If we want to know what "The Righteousness of God" meant to James, we only need to look at the words which with this phrase hangs out: 1:2 joy; !:3 patience; 1:4 contentment; 1:5 wisdom [James 3:17]; [learning]; 1:6-8 faith; 1:9-11 humility; 1:12-15 happiness; 1:16-18 faithfulness; 1:20 righteousness; 1:21 meekness; 1:22-25 obedience; 1:23-25; 1:26 love; and 1:27 holiness.

Righteousness v Human Filth

James viewed righteousness in terms of "... ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent [abundance of evil], humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your soul" [James 1:21 CSB].

Filth or "Dirt" in the Greek literature is well understood: dirty grain is not winnowed [mixed with chaff, Psalm 1]; dirty

gold is alloyed with other base metals; dirty wool is greasy; dirty living is a sordid life, defiled with sin. Revelation 22:10-11 "... the time is near. Let the unrighteous go on in unrighteousness; let the filthy still be filthy; let the righteous go on in righteousness; let the holy still be holy."

Human Rage vs. God's Righteousness

Did you see the 1996 movie "Eraser"? It starred Arnold Schwarzenegger as a U. S. Marshal, John Kruger, assigned to protect Venessa Williams who played a whistleblower, Lee Cullen, working at an arm's manufacturing company. There was for me in it a memorable line from which all believers can take a lesson. Kruger told Lee, instructing her to exercise extreme caution in his absence, "I work alone!" Later, when a corrupt marshal, claiming to be working with Kruger, tried to win her confidence to harm her, she knew it was a lie and ran to safety.

God works alone; don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Angry people, even believers, who claim in their rage to be led by the Spirit, are lying—always! God told us He worked alone when He saved us! Who helped God provide for our salvation? That's right—*no one!* God's righteousness and anyone's wrath are mutually exclusive and have absolutely nothing in common.

Human rage has many causes. We all have the human tendency to be passionate, sometimes in anger, or wanting to be helpful or simply thinking it is required of us to defend some one or some dogma. To make such a general statement James used the word "man" which the CSB translate as simply *human*. "human anger [a man's anger] does not accomplish God's righteousness" [James 1:20].

But why use the masculine word "man"? Women are not exempt from this adage (the masculine form can include them). Maybe children are not included here if James is using the word "man" for adults (the word speaks of adults). Perhaps, James was thinking of certain leaders within the church—who happened to be men.

James 1:20

But nothing in the context before us suggests any justification for our rage as persons. James speaks here of: joy, patience, contentment, wisdom, faith, humility, happiness, thankfulness, faithfulness, prayer, meekness, obedience, truthfulness, love, and holiness. Clearly God's wrath is not at issue here but ours is. God's righteousness exercises: Justice, judgment,, vengeance [Jeremiahs 23:5; 46:10; Ezekiel 25:14]; He administers retribution and punishment [Matthew 25:46; 2 Peter 2:9]. Here is where our Sunday School lesson helps: God's righteousness is God doing what is right but not according to "law". His wrath is in harmony with Who He is—as a Holy God [Matthew 21:12-13]. One Hebrew for "revenge" speaks of administering a retribution that comforts God because until sin is effectively dealt with and God's people are free of its bondage (through the Savior's death and resurrection) God cannot be satisfied or comforted. [Isaiah 1:24; 53:11].

It appears interpreting God's Righteousness here as His justice is a good interpretation because He judges aright while we would not, could not, and should not even go there. Peter admonished, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing [to *be* a blessing!] " [1 Peter 3:9]. When a brother or sister in Christ needs an intervention because they are into something they should not be into and the Spirit chooses you to address it—do it discreetly [Matthew 18:15-16] and in love [Ephesians 4:15]. I shouldn't have to say this here because we do not want to dull the sharp edge of James' words.

God's Covenant

Dr. Wright's observation had to do with Paul's use of the phrase *God's Righteousness*. But could James have had the New Covenant in mind using these words? Clearly William Craig's interpretation fits the context so naturally and conveniently that we might be better off saying little more.

In the roll call of faith [Hebrews 11:33] the writer memorialized the recipients of this high honor among other

things as having "...through faith ... wrought righteousness..." The translators of this verse were not sure how to interpret this: the NKJV reads "worked righteousness;" the NASB20, "performed *acts of righteousness*;" but others, "ruled with, enforced, administered, *justice*." So you see even the most scholarly minds are quick to expand the meaning of God's righteousness to where it seems to embrace the very heart of God and speak of things beyond our current comprehension.

Work - Accomplish

Nonetheless, what did James mean by a "working" righteousness? A man's anger does not *accomplish* God's righteousness. If by righteousness he meant justice, we would understand him to have admonished God's people to stop pretending to speak for God in matters of divine judgment. Stay sweet!

James was not just talking about an attribute of God but God *in action*— especially in referencing God's vengeance or wrath, which are His judgment. The first chapter of his epistle is encouraging or admonishing Christians to live up to the calling of God in their lives even if it means suffering. Face temptation with a patient resolve to let the grace of God reign in your decisions. Redefine your religion in terms of a Christian love in action.

Work It Out or Work At It.

Our word *accomplish* means "work" but there are two words that have been found in the Greek versions of this verse: The one means to work *out* as in Philippians 2:12 "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." The second means to perfect or perform: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord" [Colossians 3:23 NIV]. To some, the words might be interchangeable, one being more empathic than the

James 1:20

other; but since either might be used here and while one word is a compound¹ of the other, it is up to the preacher to say.

We are asking instead: is James 1:20 simply the adage: Judgment belongs to the Lord. Or is there here the added understanding that on our part—*love*. Henry Alford says it means “to produce [in our lives that]which is God's end in begetting us to a new life.²” If this interpretation be allowed, for me, it speaks to the New Covenant ratified on Calvary in the Savior's blood.

The Sunday School Lesson

The Lord wants us to be joyful, happy in Him, at peace with one another, caring for one another, doing right by one another which means showing Christian love. To be this way, we need to be humble, always praying that the Lord would help us. The temptation will come to get mad at other Christians. We will be tempted in other ways, too. When we come through these temptations victoriously we prove how real the Lord is in our lives! There is a reward coming for you and me! We trust the Lord to take care of all things that are beyond our responsibility and beyond our ability to do anything about them. Trust the Lord and don't live a hateful or bitter life! You are a Christian! It also helps to visit others in need and let God use you on their behalf. That is what religion should be all about! But more so, instead of thinking of self, our minds are on loving others.

1. Work and work out.

2. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*. (Moody Press. Chicago, IL. 1958), [sorry 'bout this] vol IV. page 285.

2 Peter 1:1

“...to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”

In May 1979, I was privileged to teach for four days at the Charismatic Conference, at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The January before, I sat in a hospital bed for a week with my commentary studying this text [2 Peter 1:1-12] in preparation. When I went to the University, I felt strongly impressed of the Lord not to go home but remain on campus for the 4 days staying in prayerful preparation to share with a few hundred students what was on my heart. This was during the days of the Charismatic movement also known as the Second Evangelical Awakening in the 60's and 70's. My focus seemed, perhaps, to have nothing to do with Pentecostalism or the Spirit's outpouring, but to think that, would have been wrong.

I didn't consider then what "The Righteousness of God" might mean in the first verse of this text, because, it wasn't, at the time, the focus of my thoughts. On reflection now a half a century later the context of this verse, the subject of my, then. lectures, the first chapter, has a lot to say about The Righteousness of God.

The question we are learning to ask in order to understand "The Righteousness of God" is: what is its context. What do the verses surrounding this phrase tell us about it.

2 Peter 1:1

Verse 1: “The word [obtained] excludes all personal agency and merit”¹ so it speaks to the grace of God. But what was gifted us unworthy as we were? *Faith* was given, both faith and faithfulness, both the joy of trusting our Lord and the empowerment to be faithful. But our trust is not simply in the Lord but in His righteousness. Some copies of the Greek read “into” His righteousness which is a relational idea. If we see His righteousness as justice, we are getting to know how just He is. If we see His righteousness as his covenant faithfulness, we are getting to know Him.

This text might read: “We have all been gifted with a faith to trust in His covenant faithfulness and be faithful to it. This is the righteousness of *our* Saviour-God, Jesus. Christ.”

The words “our” and “like precious” are regarding Christian Community. Peter clarified that this esteemed or precious faith we have is equal to his very own. And it is on this foundational faith that in verses 5-7 our entire Christian lives will be built,

Verse 2: “May God’s grace and peace be multiplied in you. Oh that the your dependence on God and the peace He brings become ever more real in your lives

Verse 3: as He gifts to you the ability in every way to live a godly life as you get to know Him who called us by His own glorious power

Verse 4: through whom the priceless promises were given us in order that through these we might become natural participants in a godly community with our Lord and one another while fleeing the temporary highs of worldly desires, lusts, and passions.”

Verse 5: And with all urgency of focus and desire, by this faith live a virtuous life [doing what you already know is what God desires of you: prayer, fellowship, giving, living a moral and ethical life].

1. John Peter Lange..*James* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XII, Page 10.

2 Peter 1:1

Verse 6: As you do, your knowledge of Him will grow giving you direction and an empowerment when temptation comes that by His grace you might patiently endure it. You are learning to live a godly life

Verse 7: And godliness enriches Christian fellowship and ultimately empowers you to love as Christ loves.

Verse 8: You want to bear fruit as David in Psalm 1 described and go deeper into a loving relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ? This is how!

The Righteousness of God

I found myself contemplating a question whether or not a word could have different meanings depending on the writer using it. Specifically, could the word “righteousness” in this phrase mean one thing with Paul but something else with Peter? Such a word study, as an independent piece of Biblical research remains to be done.

Paul’s use of this phrase, *The Righteousness of God*, had been interpreted as God’s *justice*, which is how scholarship generally interpreted it before “The Covenant Faithfulness of God” was introduced as an explanation. Is Peter to be understood this way: that our common faith comes as a result of the justice of God enacted on the Cross? This certainly can be construed as a possible interpretation. This meaning is also supported by the following words: “and our Savior...” Our faith was given to us—gifted to us—through our Lord’s death and resurrection, and this was indeed, an act of divine judgment against sin!

There is nothing untoward in this interpretation. It encapsulates the salvation message by saying in this context that for the believer life begins at the Cross. Everything Peter is about to “add” [2 Peter 1:5] including the empowerment to live above fleshly interests and realize in a fuller way the promises of God—all—proceeds from the Cross. We certainly cannot do better in interpreting not just the words but the heart of the Apostle, as well.

Justification

Some interpret the Righteousness of God as His justification. Is this a possible meaning, “acquitted of all charges”? What some do not appreciate about this term is the suggestion that we can consider ourselves now to be sinless, like a person whose judgment has been vacated and now they go around telling the world they are not guilty—and never were. It seems theologically incongruous and personally disingenuous to see our forgiveness as anything less than Christ’s suffering in our place for the sins of which we, indeed, were and are guilty. “Just as if we had not sinned” does not do theological justice to what actually occurred the day Jesus died for us!

Even going forward, our righteousness is not merely an acquittal but an empowerment coming from the Savior’s death and resurrection. “For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” [Romans 6:10-11].

It would seem grammatically “forced” to say here that our faith comes through our acquittal. Justification is in effect God taking something *away* [our guilt and liability] but faith or trust is based on what God has *given* us. Faith is, itself, a divine gift.

There is a justification by faith but this is different than talking about a faith by justification. Paul spoke of our justification by faith (not works or effort) to mean our sins were dealt with through the Savior’s effort and death and resurrection. His rising from the dead to die no more was clear proof that we are now justified or declared free from judgment or punishment—only *by faith* [Romans 4:25]. Paul began His letter to the saints at Rome explaining, that, “.. the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” [Romans 1:17]. Whatever the Righteousness of God is, it remains for God by revelation to share with us as we faithfully follow Christ in a trust relationship.

Acceptable unto God

Because faith can mean both trust in Christ and faithfulness in following Him, it becomes a term of relationship. Paul referred this to “the steadfastness of our faith in Christ.” [Colossians 2:5]. On occasion Paul preferred to use the word “into” instead of “in” (a distinction the translation cannot conveniently make).² One day, Dr. Eshbaugh, a Presbyterian pastor in the town I also pastored, saw me outside and came up to greet me with an interesting question. He wanted to know how I might translate the phrase, “faith *into* Christ” found in Jesus’ message to Nicodemus in John 3. I don’t recall what I said then. I probably told him that my understanding was that it was the same as faith *in* Christ. But now, on years of study and reflection I have come to think there might be a slight difference worth our attention to detail.

Francis Godet noted that the phrase in Romans 12:16 “toward another” where “toward” is the word “into” carries the idea “*in relation to* one another.”³ Often in Scripture the word “into” signifies movement toward. In terms of relationships it can speak to a developing closeness and camaraderie. “Into” is the perfect word to describe trust *in* Christ.

It is in discussing our relationship with Christ that “The Righteousness of God” begins to take on a greater meaning than simply an act of divine justice. It becomes the product of what that justice provides, first and foremost, our acceptance by God into fellowship through His Son.

It might sound crass but, perhaps, this is like saying, “Any friend of Christ is a friend of the Father. I think it correct to say that not only did Christ provide for our salvation without our help, we live for Him the same way. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith[fulness] of

2. John 2:23; 3:15, 16; Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 2 Corinthians 1:21

3. Francis Godet. “*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*” (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1970)), page 437.

the Son of God" [Galatians 2:20]. Bishop Lightfoot calls this being "merged with Christ."⁴ So, whether we interpret Paul to be testifying of his own faith in Christ or Christ's faithfulness to Him, these are the same because he is not talking about his salvation only but his *life*. (Paul referred to living for Christ 5 times in this one verse.)

Covenant Faithfulness

It is here we begin to see God's Righteousness first as an act of divine justice on Calvary in Jesus' crucifixion, then, as God's acceptance, and finally, as a walk of faith (faithfulness) in covenant with God. The New Covenant is written on our hearts expressed as a life of faith into a deepening relationship with our Lord. On God's part this is His faithfulness to the New Covenant in Christ.

In Hebrews 12:23-24 the writer places God's justice and His covenant in the same thought. The Message translation reads: "You've come to Mount Zion, the city where the living God resides. The invisible Jerusalem is populated by throngs of festive angels and Christian citizens. It is the city where God is **Judge, with judgments** that **make us just**. You've come to Jesus, who presents us with a new covenant, a fresh charter from God. He is **the Mediator of this covenant**. ... a proclamation of grace."

The Amplified Bible reads, "the church (assembly) of the Firstborn who are registered [as citizens] in heaven, and to the God Who is **Judge** of all, and to the spirits of **the righteous (the redeemed in heaven)** who have been made perfect, And to Jesus, the Mediator (Go-between, Agent) of a **new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks [of mercy],"

4. J. B. Lightfoot. *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*. (Zondervan Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI: 1974), page 119..

Granville Sharp

Granville Sharp,⁵ a British scholar, in his studies of the Greek language, believed to have identified a rule of grammar, now known as Granville Sharp's rule.⁶ In brief the rule presumes to identify in the language a way of using 2 names or monikers for the same person where appositives are not generally usable. The primary reason behind the rule is in support of the deity of Christ as in our verse, 2 Peter 1:1, where Peter calls our Savior Jesus Christ, *God*. Perhaps, it will be clearer to translate the word "and" using the word *even*: "the righteousness of God ~~and~~ even our Saviour Jesus Christ." A clear example is Colossians 1:3 where Paul writes about "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The NET and others correctly renders the sense: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The rule applies here: God *is* the Father of Our Lord.

T. F. Middleton, who wrote extensively on the Greek article, *the*, asserted that "this passage is plainly and unequivocally to be understood as an assumption that Jesus Christ is our *God* and Savior."⁷ Middleton concludes that "Granville Sharp's rule is not universal but its general truth cannot be shaken."⁸

We mention this here—not because we need to prove the deity of our Lord (which we take here as established truth) but because of the effect of this rule on our phrase "The Righteousness of God." Until now, having understood this to mean, "the justice of God" we have assumed it referred to God, the Father who in an act of divine justice sent His Son to the Cross for us [John 3:16]. Does this change the meaning of the phrase?

5. **Granville Sharp** (10 November 1735 – 6 July 1813) was a British scholar, devout Christian, philanthropist

6. Granville Sharp's rule, accessed 4/10/24 <https://www.theopedia.com/granville-sharps-rule>

7. John Peter Lange. *The Second Epistle General of Peter* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XII, Page 11.

8. Thomas Fanshaw Middleton. *The Doctrine of the Greek Article*. (J.&J.J.DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE, London: 1833), page 33

Our Lord

In verse 2, Peter calls Jesus, “our Lord.” Dr. Lange points out that only here Peter refers to Jesus as our “Lord”⁹ This entire chapter was written with an emphasis on the Lordship of Christ in the Christian’s life. “But what is ‘the righteousness of God *and* our Saviour,?’” asked Dr. Lange.¹⁰

Dr. Lange implies a difference that has led to much discussion in scholarly circles. A righteous person [in other Greek writings: a just person] is one who sustains a right relation to others.¹¹ This is why we can refer to a righteous person as someone who is now acceptable to God or reconciled to God. Perhaps, it is as simple as that (a note I make for my Sunday School lesson).

If Granville Sharp’s rule applies, then, the “righteousness of God” is also, one and the same as, the righteousness of Christ.” We, at least, must say that both the Father’s righteous act of justice and the Son’s together and in harmony participated in and co-operated in an act of eternal justice to save us!

I know we have been here before in this work but let’s summarize: God is “the judge who protects and administers justice, ... as evidenced in the salvation and reward of the godly, and the punishment of the ungodly.”¹² The good professor then points out that Peter’s use of the phrase here is different from Paul’s in Romans 1:17 (which we introduced in an earlier chapter) in which, Paul, is talking about a righteousness *from* God, in the same way God “imputed” righteousness to Abraham [Romans 4:6, 22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21].

Peter’s interpretation of “the Righteousness of God” is more like Paul’s in Romans 3:25-26, where Dr. Lange believes it is an attribute of God, “descriptive of the judicial activity of

9. John Peter Lange..*The Second Epistle General of Peter* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XII, Page 10.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid. page 11.

12. Ibid.

God.”¹³ This is the righteousness of the Savior in that He satisfied the justice of God [Isaiah 53:11].

Sunday School Lesson

Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is, itself, a gift from God. It is something we would not have if the Lord had not taken the first step [John 6:44] to accept us into His family [Ephesians 1:5] by dying for us. In this way all Christians are the same. That is why we are called believers—not because of a dogma or doctrine, but—because we follow and love Jesus as our Lord and Savior [Romans 10:9-10]. Peter makes it clear that we can now live for God thanks to Jesus, His Son, who died for us. Everything Jesus did and provided through His death was the “right” and just thing to do to reconcile us to Himself.

13. Ibid.

Ephesians 4:24

“put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

If you are like me, you are probably wanting to find a single word in the English language that answers to the Greek word, *righteousness*. But we are discovering that a study using this word is not that simple. Righteousness seems to refer to everything between God’s justice to our sanctification. Perhaps, we might have expected this to be the case since our word, *righteousness*, is not the only term in Scripture which embraces a number of English words. The Old Testament words, *love* and *peace*, for example, have a similar testimony. We are for the best part dependent solely on Scripture to understand what a Biblical word means. Referencing other ages of the Greek language through its literature to understand the meaning of a word in our Bible should remain a humble and prayerful endeavor.

This does not suggest we cannot know the meanings of words, but, as was already pointed out, some terms have been elevated to a higher level of inspirational truth. The “Fruit of the Spirit” are definitely in the list. Paul made it clear that God’s truth is spiritually discerned [1 Corinthians 2:14]. Again, as Professor Trench, in a study of God’s grace alerted us (which is equally true of our word *righteousness*): “There has often been occasion to observe the manner in which Greek words taken up into Christian use are glorified and transformed, seeming to have waited for this adoption of them, to come to their full

Ephesians 4:24

rights, and to reveal all the depth and the riches of meaning which they contained, or might be made to contain.”¹

Many words are simply “good” Greek and can be trusted to make sense without much intellectual effort. Some have a certain “Jewish” bent to them, called a “Semitism.” Granted, if we, as believers, could get in a time machine and return to the middle of the first century, and maybe, dialog with Brother Paul for a while, things would get much clearer, but we have a greater than Paul to teach us—The Holy Spirit [John 16:13]. This is why I would rather trust the Body of Christ— as a whole—to get it right, rather than the single input of the most renown scholar. And this is one more reason for our fellowship around God’s Word. If we keep our hearts humble and open and we listen with the heart to the testimonies of our fellow believers (the scriptures *lived*) we will find the meanings to the most cherished of Christian truths, including *righteousness*.

We will, then, know, by living it, what righteousness means when Paul says that we have been created in true righteousness [Ephesians 4:24], not a counterfeit misrepresentation of it nor a dictionary definition that satisfies an academic interest in it, but what Habakkuk called “living by faith” [Habakkuk 2:4].

The Bible is not a mere theological treatise. It is from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 all about God’s righteousness *for* us and *in* us. In many ways, God has already provided spiritual insight into Biblical truth by what He is perfecting in us [1 John 2:5]. Some believers, I surmise, have only begun to befriend the new person they are becoming under Christ’s Lordship in their lives and to discover what God’s righteousness is all about.

A New Man and Woman

The fourth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus is, itself, a treatise on this truth, that God has changed us—once again, to make us after His image, as in the Garden of

1. Richard C. Trench *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company,,Grand Rapids, MI: 1975) page 166

Ephesians 4:24

Eden, by making us capable of living in the righteousness He provided through Christ's death and resurrection. One cannot read the apostle and go away thinking this chapter a reprimand for misbehaving [James 1:5] or that living for Christ could be a mere human endeavor or choice [Galatians 2:20]. Paul is not addressing us as a humanity that has been made conscious of the destructive power of our selfishness and carnality and now it is all up to us what to do about it. Paul is not admonishing us to find some way within ourselves only to sever ourselves from a destructive past life of "sin" as if we are alone responsible now for how we live (God somehow is watching us from a distance).

There would be a certain cruelty in believing that the Gospel message was nothing more than a warning to obey God or else because it would return us to the importance of Old Testament Law and minimize the scope and power of God's grace in our lives. No! We are, indeed *new!* [Ephesians 4:24]. We are not new only in the sense of starting over again. We are a new kind of person, one brought about by the creative power of an omnipotent God of love—a newness patterned after God's own *righteousness and holiness*.

We live in a time of scientific advancement in which even the social sciences lay claim to ways of improving behavior or rehabilitating the wayward, bringing us back into conformity with acceptable social norms. If therapy alone doesn't work, they often prescribe medication. They have borrowed our theological term, "reformatory justice," not as a description of eradicating the sin—something they do not even recognize as a destructive force—but as a corrective measure or means of learning skilled coping mechanisms to live above primitive drives, such as fear and rage that dissolve social adhesion, unity and peace. But modern science, social work, or psychology cannot claim to change the human heart and recreate it after the desire of a Holy God.

Injustice vs Righteousness

It seems evident to me that the real crime about crime is that scientific pride has usurped the role of God in dealing with

Ephesians 4:24

sin because only He has the solution through Christ's work on the Cross and all He provides through His death.

Injustice, which is another way of discussing all forms of violence and hurt, is the product of what Paul labeled "carnality." Another Biblical word we could use is "self" or "selfish" [2 Timothy 3:2]. These words "befriend" one another in evil counsel [Psalm 1:1]. And it is this "injustice" that will be absent in heaven's citizenry because carnality is not immortal [1 Corinthians 15:40].

As light dispels darkness, righteousness dispels injustice. God has made us new inwardly, or by nature. We now need to discover the new person we are in Christ and live it out [Philippians 2:12-13]. Our new bodies after the resurrection will have no such challenge because the new body will match the new nature, as Paul, taught, "if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind..." [Ephesians 4:21-23].

Righteousness and Holiness

Commentaries have been written already that we are invited to use in an in depth study of Ephesians 4. Our purpose here is a focus on God's righteousness. A *true* righteousness has to be a righteousness that only comes from Him—which means, through the Cross of Christ. Here, we are *created* (new at salvation) in true righteousness. This is more than a declaration of righteousness and more than justification or forgiveness. There is a sense in which Christ is the pattern, we are then formed new after Him [Romans 8:29]. This is the result of Calvary's justice (understood). On the Cross Jesus defeated Satan and dealt judiciously, finally, decisively, completely, and irrecoverably with sin. He not only addressed sin in terms of providing a complete, once for all, forgiveness, but, as Paul wrote, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" [Romans 6:2]. All this should come to mind with this one word *righteousness*! The sin in our lives has been dealt with

Ephesians 4:24

and Satan defeated, now God can create a new you and me in righteousness.

To make this point clear Paul added the word “holiness” which means to conduct oneself as a faithful follower of our Lord’s interests in the world: “*serv*ing God without fear *in holiness*” [Luke 1:74-75]. A synonym might be “piety” after the Old Testament idea of dedicated service to the traditions of the Mosaic Law but this tends to associate more with religious practice rather than a calling into service to Christ. As Paul explained to the Galatians, “For neither is circumcision anything [of any importance], nor uncircumcision, but [we are] a new creation [which is the result of a new birth—a spiritual transformation—a new nature in Christ Jesus].” [Galatians 6:7 AMP].

The general understanding is that this is not us; for we are yet spiritually imperfect and given to temptation and sin. The doctrine of many is that Christ, alone, in us is our hope [Colossians 1:27] of being accepted by God. Because Christ is without sin and He lives in me, I can be found acceptable by God who looks on Christ and not me.

Some would interpret this to mean that we are hiding behind the Cross or behind Christ: “Not I but Christ ... in me” [Galatians 2:20]. This view, though worthy as truth, is more theological than practical, however, because it, in essence, describes our Savior’s work on Calvary but not the subsequent manifestation or demonstration of that work *in us*. It was not only James [James 2:24] but Paul, as well, who pointed out the practical side of grace. “Work out your own salvation...” [Philippians 2:12], he encouragingly wrote. Paul also testified of himself and his co-laborers to the Thessalonians that he was “holy and righteous and blameless [in] *conduct*.” The problem is not with *who* we are [born again believers] but what we *do*. Paul admonishes us to “put on” like a garment “the new man.”

There can be little wonder why some might interpret this divine act to mean: We are *made* righteous, because even if we must understand this as a process—we are *being* made righteous or being transformed into His image [2 Corinthians

3:18] Paul and the other New Testament writers are describing something real occurring within a believer in Christ.

Eschatology

There is an eschatological [end of time] aspect to the righteousness from God in terms of its ultimate completion. Much of what God is doing in us in this life is only “the earnest” (NLT: the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us) of the Spirit’s work. [2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5]. John recognized our adoption in Christ and then alluded to the completion of our transformation into Christlikeness at the Savior’s return: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” [1 John 3:2]. Paul agreed, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” [1 Corinthians 13:12].

But, no where are we allowed, as followers of Christ (this very designation informs us), to live the life we lived before salvation as if all the changes in us provided by the Savior’s death and resurrection await us at His return. A salvation by faith alone might suggest to some that since now I believe the doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection I am saved and now wait only for His coming to reap the eternal benefits of that salvation. But faith means also *faithfulness*. I point this out multiple times in my writings because it is absolutely scriptural.

If N. T. Wright is correct in representing “The Righteousness of God” as God’s covenant faithfulness to us, how dare we say we are in covenant agreement with this same God and we are not also faithful?! When my bride and I wed, we entered into a covenant agreement to be faithful to one another. How is that marriage not applicable both ways? Oh, Paul clarified, “but I speak concerning Christ and the church” [Ephesians 5:32].

Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

For me, the study of righteousness—which by definition is a righteousness *from* God (for we have none in ourselves), this study, began here as Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus tied all happiness to a driving hunger to obtain it and live by it. The Bible actually designates us here, if we are His followers, as “the hungry and thirsty ones.” Interpreting this translates as “those who hunger and thirst” or who crave ardently,¹ are in desperate need of, and have a “suffering thirst² for, God’s righteousness.

One elder once accused me of being psychological when I preached, and soon after I was dismissed from that church as pastor. At the time, I passed it off as a theological disagreement that perhaps this elder wasn’t prepared to speak to. He worded his complaint in the best way he could, I thought. But recently upon reflection I find myself in a grateful mood for his astute observation. He was wrong about the psychology part because modern psychology was never my interest. Since then I have been often and deep into studying the words of the Bible (as this book attests) and have discovered that God’s Word has great psychological value, but in an eternal and spiritual sense, because it speaks to our relationship with God and our following Christ.

1. Joseph Thayer. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody MA.: 14th printing, 2019) page. 498.

2. *Ibid.* page 153.

Matthew 5:6

Scriptures that bring us to conviction, repentance, or forgiveness; and that speak to our anxieties, fears, and worries are examples of a deep psychological insight into our human experiences as believers. With God every instruction has eternal worth. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul famously wrote (and this is my translation), “The entire Old Testament Scripture is the inspired message of God’s righteousness to be used effectively for teaching [Truth], to bring conviction by the Spirit, to restore us to God, and for training to mature the young believer in Christ.” The very presence of the Holy Spirit is proof that God isn’t going to wait until we get to heaven to begin the healing process [1 Corinthians 12:7], spiritually, emotionally, physically, or psychologically.

What is unsettling for some, perhaps, is that I have minimized a systematic study of theology which offers little instruction for living for Christ. When one is grieving over the loss of a loved one, a study of God’s omnipotence, or whether or not we are liable for Adam’s sin, cannot replace the message in a Davidic Psalm which speaks of the comfort of God in times of intense sorrow or fear [Psalm 23].

Theology, also, can be used by some to keep an emotional distance from the Biblical message by discussing matters of no importance to God. The entire modern theory of how we got our Bible and whether or not it is genuine and authentic is a scholarly study into the origin of Scripture that fails to pass the 2 Timothy 3:16 test and should not be of primary concern to most believers. It might even be a waste of time unless there are nuggets of archeological significance that can expand our understanding of the message of the Cross [Philippians 3:7-8]. Scriptures need to be studied with the Cross in mind and heart, and it should be impossible to study God’s Word without sensing a deep hunger for its message.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount where Jesus outlines the character of a follower of His is an example—especially since the fourth Beatitude speaks of His righteousness. When I studied the

Matthew 5:6

Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes, in particular, I was somewhat flummoxed to read Matthew 5:6 about the place a hunger after righteousness held in the scope of the Savior's message. If we say that righteousness means God's justice or our justification or even, God's acceptance, our interpretation would fail to make any sense: Hunger after justification! Thirst for God's justice!

Preceding this verse, Jesus talks about a humility, meekness, and willingness to accept hardship as prerequisites qualifying a follower of His for ministry. And He said you need to accept these conditions "happily"! This makes a hunger and thirst for God's acceptance a meaningless pursuit. Of course, He accepts all who are humble and meek before Him and willing to follow Him in suffering! [Philippians 3:10]. "Righteousness" must mean something else.

If righteousness means being right with God, perhaps, we might say that we should hunger and thirst to be right with God—not in terms of our salvation, but—in terms of our calling and ministries. Psalm 37:23 reads, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way." Perhaps, we are in constant prayer that we might fit into this verse—a noteworthy interest. Said another way: we crave ardently to do His will. We are possessed of a suffering thirst that His desire for our life would be perfected and fulfilled in us [Philippians 1:6]. No believer would challenge such an interpretation but this describes "meekness"³ more than righteousness.

3. "[meekness]... is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God (Matt. xi. 29; Jam. i. 21). It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting;" [Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the The New Testament* (London) 1880. p. 153].

The Righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven

Dr. Lange calls God's righteousness, "The righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven ... a gift... of the inner life."⁴ He added, "This promise applies neither exclusively to justification by faith, nor to final acquittal in judgment; but includes both justification and sanctification, and final acquittal,—all of which are inseparably connected with justification."⁵ Limiting the meaning of God's righteousness to one idea—no matter how theologically significant—limits, in turn, our understanding of the scope of this most sacred of Biblical words. And even if one meaning seems to speak louder or more emphatically to us in a given verse or context, this might only be our limited effort at understanding that verse or context.

Perhaps, Righteousness is an attribute of *Heaven*—an idea that sounds strange to English ears. Hungering and Thirsting after righteousness is a longing for the purity of heaven where only God's love rules among us, where justice is no longer decided by written law codes or cultural standards but by holiness alone. What Dr. Lange called, "The Law of the Spirit,"⁶ Dr. Henry Alford called, "conformity to the perfect will of God."⁷ In the language of the apostle, "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" [2 Peter 3:13 NKJV - Italics & underline added]. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, They will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." [Italics & underline added].

Righteousness Centered in the Beatitudes

Jesus' list of the Beatitudes can't be incidental, nor should we think it incomplete. Centered between the poor in

4. John Peter Lange. *The Gospel According to Matthew Epistle General of Peter* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI: 7th printing, 1980) Vol XII, Page 102.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*. (Moody Press. Chicago, IL. 1958), [sorry 'bout this] vol I. page 38.

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spirit (the humble), the mournful, and the meek (the first three) and the merciful, the pure of heart (morally and ethically) , and the peacemakers (the last three) we read of an unquenchable thirst for righteousness that awaits Jesus' return to finally satisfy it..

We seem to pivot from how we treat our Lord (first three) to how we treat one another (last three). Then Jesus talked about being persecuted—not because we are humble or meek, or pure in heart but “*for righteousness; sake*” [Matthew 5:10]. We crave the very thing that could get us killed, or at least ridiculed and persecuted, as we follow our Lord into an increasingly dangerous world. “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” [Romans 8:36]..

In all of this I might be stretching the text a bit in my attempt at a quest for the deeper meaning in these qualities (I call them the Beautiful Attitudes). Deeper, because Jesus taught that our *happiness* depended on them—all of them together not separate. And in this quest for happiness, which defines the human journey, Jesus draws His follower's attention to these spiritual qualities that describe the kind of person they must be—not only to be happy in this life; but, because this is the kind of person they must be and shall be who will inherit the Kingdom” [Matthew 5:10].

Righteousness in Community

In western cultures like the country I am from, the U.S.A., we tend to think of ourselves as individuals and not in community. We go to school to better ourselves and not the larger family circle or group we are in. We even prize competition in which one person comes out on top—or in a team sport—*my* team. But heaven is built on community! No one is alone there. No one will ever again be alone or lonely there. No one will ever be marginalized or ostracized or neglected or shunned there. Heaven is a realm of total acceptance because we are all there by invitation of the King of Heaven and that invite has brought us together. Since we are new persons in Christ, (the

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old self is no longer in charge) there is no reason to delay introducing all this to us through the Holy Spirit's work in our fellowship meetings, prayer times, and Bible studies together.

Righteousness just might be center in the Beatitudes because it alone looks back at the qualities that precede it and ahead at the qualities that follow and embraces them all. The verbal abuse and persecution, then, that comes cannot extinguish the glow of our witness nor snuff out the zeal of our love for our Lord, no matter where He leads [Romans 8:35-37]. Here is one interpretative application:

Selfish behavior, like rage, greed, or promiscuity, will always surrender the high moral ground in an argument: For Believers who cherish God's Righteousness above all else, your response needs to be viewed through this lens of the Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Be:

1. Poor in Spirit: Humble instead of proud, (Mt 5:3)
2. Mournful: Empathetic instead of critical, (Mt 5:4)
3. Meek: Willing to listen instead of self-willed (Mt 5:5)
4. Righteousness Glorifying God instead of self-promoting, (Mt 5:6)
5. Merciful: Be a contributor to the well being of others instead of what you can get from them for yourself [Don't use people, help them], (Mt 5:7)
6. Pure of Heart: Always speak truth instead of using deception and lies for personal advantage, (Mt 5:8)
7. Peacemakers: Strive for reconciliation instead of division, (Mt 5:9)
8. If persecuted: Be content in your faith trusting God instead of living with high anxiety, (Mt 5:10)
9. When verbally abused for your convictions: Stay loving instead of bitter (Mt 5:11) and ultimately,
10. As a witness: Keep your smile and remain joyful, instead of living outside your Faith in unhappiness (Mt 5:12).

These are a few of the many words that can begin to explain such a heavenly idea.

The Sun of Righteousness

In an almost poetic sense God's Glory shines brightly because it represents the healing rays of His Righteousness. Malachi prophesied, "The Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings" [Malachi 4:2]. The "wings" are the rays of light surrounding it. C. F. Keil wrote, "[Righteousness] is here what it frequently is in Isaiah ...in its consequences and effects, the sum and substance of salvation."⁸ It is no wonder Paul

8. Keil-Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament - Malachi*. (Eerdmans Publishing,, Grand Rapids, MI. 1980), vol X, page 467.

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simply concluded “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us ... righteousness...” [1 Corinthians 1:30].

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“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Abraham interceding in prayer for his nephew, Lot, humbly and respectfully enquired of the Lord, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Abraham was drawing God’s attention to the righteousness for which God was known; for, one cannot interpret the words “Judge” and “right” in the same sentence any other way. In one question Abraham referenced God as Judge and Savior—and because this prayer involved a rescue mission for Lot and his clan, God’s creative genius was commissioned as well to tear a God-fearing but foolish man from the clutches of the evil that, like a fly caught in the spider’s web, had made him a captured part of their world [“toward Sodom” Genesis 13:12; “in Sodom” Genesis 14:12; “in the gate”¹ 19:1].

All this sounds eerily reminiscent of the nightmare of sin God found us in and from which through the Savior’s death and resurrection rescued you and me. It would not be difficult at all for the evangelist to use this story as a Salvation text. We are led to consider in this way the Righteousness of God as not just an act of God as Judge [Romans 8:1], but Savior [Romans 10:9-10] and Creator [Ephesians 4:24] as well.

1. “The messengers sent by Jehovah to Sodom, arrived there in the evening, when Lot, who was sitting at the gate, pressed them to pass the night in his house. The gate, generally an arched entrance with deep recesses and seats on either side, was a Place of meeting in the ancient towns of the East, where the inhabitants assembled either for social intercourse or to transact public business.” - Keil-Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament - Genesis*. (Eerdmans Publishing,, Grand Rapids, MI. 1980), vol I, page 232. Compare Psalm 1:1

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Christ's Work on the Cross can be seen from all three of these perspectives, as noted in my writing, "The Cross: Why Jesus Had to die,"² He took our place as Savior; He defeated Satan as Judge; and He gave us newness of life as Creator. Reverend John Stott wrote, "All three of the major explanations of the death of Christ contain biblical Truths and can to some extent be harmonized, especially if we observe that the chief difference between them is that in each God's work in Christ is directed toward a different person."³

As Savior, He reconciled us to the *Father*; as Judge He fought and won victory over *Satan*; as Creator, He made *us* new creatures in Christ.

The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit [John 16:8-11] presents the same outline: "Sin" was dealt with because it stood between God and us. In this regard Jesus's death was for the Father's desire to reconcile with us. "Righteousness" because God provided the Spirit for our sanctification in Jesus' physical absence. "Judgment" in Jesus' death was how God dealt with, as the Scripture says, "the prince of this world."

Interconnectivity

Interconnectivity is: the overlapping nature of social categories as they apply to a given individual or group. All this means is that any person is in more than one category. A man is not only masculine, but he may reference his class status if, for example, he is very poor, or he wants to talk about his ethnicity if the country of his nativity bears upon his interest in sharing about himself. Nobody is ever just one "thing."

For God, the categories are not class and gender, but Judge, Savior, and Creator, as we have already noted. We can understand His righteousness in this way, as well. When Jesus went to Calvary to save us, He didn't separate out who He was

2. Copyright 2022 from Lulu.com publishers.

3. John Stott. *The Cross of Christ Centennial Edition*. (:InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, IL 2021), page 226.

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as Savior from all else that He is. We say that He has simplicity⁴ (as we referenced in the Chapter on Philippians 3:9). Perhaps, the best example in song might be the Carmichael hymn: “He’s Everything to Me:”⁵

Now He walks beside me day by day,
Ever watching o'er me lest I stray,
Helping me to find that narrow way,
He's Everything to me.

So when Abraham addressed our Lord as “Judge,” he could of just as easily called Him Creator or Savior, because—if you prefer the word “role”—no role that God takes in relation to us is ever dormant and set aside when His acts on our behalf. A personal God is always active, always involved, on every level because, His omnipotence needs to rescue us; His omniscience needs to create a “way” out or through; and His omnipresence needs to lead us out—of whatever the situation, temptation, trial, need, is we are praying about. And why is this so? Because He is a *righteous* God! Because He is a *just* God! “You are complete in him” [Colossians 2:10].

Righteousness—a New Definition

Reflecting back on everything that was written in these pages, we can appreciate the profundity as well as simplicity in a study of God’s Righteousness. Hopefully, we have discovered that what we did know about our Lord, and what Righteousness means to us, has not been challenged. We just needed to dig deeper. As we noted in “Essays of Grace,”⁶ about God’s grace, and as Solomon wisely said, “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honor of kings is to search out a matter” [Proverbs 26:2]. And we are a royal priesthood! [1 Peter 2:9].

4. The “Simplicity” of God teaches that *all* God’s attributes are expressed in every act.

5. <https://youtu.be/SpPh9d2TpHs?si=GiLkWuP8cvPWh0ZJ>

6. Copyright 2024 from Lulu.com publishers.

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When I use the analogy of a spaghetti dinner, which is only as good as the sauce, the ultimate meaning is that our justification or the punitive justice offered in the death of the Savior is only meaningful to the believer who accepts and lives its provision. N. T. Wright calls this the covenant faithfulness of God. Since the salvation offered through the Savior's death and resurrection is part of the New Covenant, it has to be agreed to by us, if it is in effect in our lives. I like Paul's illustration of the marriage in Ephesians 5:31-32. Marriage is a covenant, an agreement between 2 to be faithful whatever comes. But Paul used it to define the relationship Christ has with His church—us.

When we view the Righteousness of God only in judicial terms (the spaghetti without the sauce), as Biblically sound as this is, we are not challenging ourselves to apply its meaning to how we live. We could be like some in Ephesus or Colossi who never "put on the new man" [Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10]—never owned and practiced their faith, and had no prayer life significant enough to allow the Lord to lead them past a whole array of carnal interests which we know tempt all of us [Matthew 6:13]. It's the *sauce* that makes the spaghetti so delicious! It's the message of the Cross *practiced* in following the Savior that brings the Savior's words to life.

Some say that on the Cross Jesus did not ratify a new covenant, He is the New Covenant. Paul wouldn't have any difficulty with this distinction since he called Jesus our Redemption and not our Redeemer. So, accepting the Covenant is accepting *Him* in our lives, and this makes sense. Or we might say, when God offered us His righteousness, He offered us His Son, in relation. There is no sense in which God declared us righteous and then walked away, as if His righteousness was a spiritual elixir that we take 3 times a day to stay spiritually healthy or that the christian life now can be reduced to a weekly religious festival to celebrate the moment He gave it. There is no "it." There is only *Himself*.

One more time, let me quote the good Bishop on Paul's letter to the Philippian church: "Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral

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results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a *Person* and a *Life*."

And it is here we must talk about more than Christ accepting the penalty for sin at Calvary, but also the power of that message unleashed in us [Romans 1:16]. Let's map this truth out:

1. Our Lord became sin for us [2 Corinthians 5:21].
2. So, when Jesus died, sin died [Romans 6:10 NLT: "to break the power of sin"].
3. When sin's power was broken, the old us died with it [Romans 6:6].

So in summary: "if Christ be in you, the body [carnality] is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" [Romans 8:10]. The word "if" in this verse is not an "if ever" or an "if when" but a simple recognition of truth: Those who are dead to sin (having appropriated the message of the Cross) are now alive in Christ because they have accepted His righteousness— they are living now in covenant relationship with Him.

A Final Comment

"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: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" [Romans 8:3-4].

The righteousness of the law, Torah Law, is more than a legal document. The Law is Holy [Romans 7:12] because it encapsulates in written form the heart, the desires, the wisdom, and the plan of God, regarding our salvation. Ultimately a righteous life is one lived under the Spirit's guidance as we follow Christ. The Holiness of God codified in Torah Law, taught by the Spirit of God, and written in covenantal form upon the heart of each believer, is lived out in Beatific simplicity as we follow Christ.

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