

## Christ Our Righteousness

*“In the inspired Scripture,”* Rev. Tozer 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.”**<sup>1</sup> So, was the word Paul used “justice” or “righteousness”? We need to ask. The CSB says, “righteousness” but Godet says “justice.” What does *“for the demonstration of His justice”* signify? Prof. Godet thinks that had Paul meant by “demonstration” a “compensation,” he should have written *“a satisfaction of His [God’s] justice.”* Again: justice or righteousness? Godet admits that each commentator has taken the term *“..as expressing the special attribute which agrees best with his system [theology] in regard to the work of redemption.”*<sup>2</sup> Some scholars translate the word “justice” as God’s holiness, or goodness, or fidelity, or sanctification, but none of these words are here!

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- ◆ The Jewish law is now replaced by a new life in Christ. This needs to be heralded as a public proclamation in the town square. *“For Christ is the **end** of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”* (Romans 10:4) *“The law, then, was our guardian **until** Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.”* (Galatians 3:24)
- ◆ *“For four thousand years,”* Godet reminds us, *“the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgment, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep.....”* Our verse confesses, *“God passed over the sins “* But now, Hear ye! Hear Ye!! He that hath an ear , let him hear! *“Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God **now commands all people everywhere to repent.”*** (Acts 17:30)

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It is no surprise to discover that the family of words that speak of *justice* or *right* take on an entirely new set of meanings in the Pauline Epistles. What I might have stuck in a footnote deserves here to be part of the main story. The lesson is worth our time. There are five terms that all stem from the idea of justice or *right* in which the spelling tells us part of the story.

- ◆ The word righteousness ends in ‘ness’ which means the ‘quality’ or ‘trait’ of righteousness. Righteousness, in other words, is an attribute of God. When you have Him, you have it! To be declared righteous we only need to believe in Christ *“who of God is made unto us ...**righteousness**”* (1 Corinthians 1:30)

### God’s Righteousness

*“In the writings of Paul,”* Joseph Thayer writes, *“‘righteousness’ has a peculiar meaning.”*<sup>3</sup> For Paul, the hope of salvation was not dependent on keeping the Mosaic law, which proved

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1. Tozer. 86

2. Godet. *Epistle to the Romans*. 154

3. Thayer. 149

impossible, nor living in harmony with nature,<sup>4</sup> or according to some social order. Paul revisited the Old Testament concept of God “imputing” righteousness, declaring us justified by a faith in Christ’s expiatory death on the cross. *“The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”* (Romans 3:22) This idea is not Paul’s alone but it reaches back into the writings of Moses, *“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”* (Genesis 15:6) and the Psalms, *“It was credited to him as righteousness throughout all generations to come.”* (Psalm 106:31). This is a point of seminal import: *“Paul thus makes the most frequent use of this whole word-group.... Of all the New Testament writers ...he establishes the closest connection with the Old Testament.”*<sup>5</sup>

Righteousness is an attribute of God. *“Your righteousness reaches the heights, God, you who have done great things; God, who is like you?”* (Psalm 71:19) His righteousness, redeems and saves. In the truest sense of a ransom, when God declared us free from sin, and through Christ’s death that provision was offered as an empowering grace to **walk in newness** of life. We could say, we now belong to Him, *“as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God ... having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. just as you offered ... yourselves as slaves to impurity, and ... lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness... you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God”* (Romans 6:13, 18-19, 22) Said more succinctly: *“Righteousness ... is not a matter of ... conforming to a given set of ... legal standards, but of behavior which is in keeping with the two-way relationship between God and man.”*<sup>6</sup>

*“Righteousness is a term of relationships”*<sup>7</sup> Righteousness, as such, denotes a covenant relationship between the Lord, our Redeemer, and us. *“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other. “By myself I have sworn; truth has gone from my mouth, a word that will not be revoked: Every knee will bow to me, every tongue will swear allegiance. “It will be said about me, ‘Righteousness and strength are found only in the LORD.’ ”* (Isaiah 45:22-24)

So, our righteousness, which is solely imputed by faith and not earned by merit, is more than a status or a declaration of forgiveness of sin. Righteousness is godly living. *“...training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17) *“to live in a ... righteous, and godly way in the present age.”* (Titus 2:12)<sup>8</sup> .

**The righteous are those who**, in humility and faithfulness, **trust in the Lord**, who seek to live uprightly and without pride of heart, depending on the Lord for His protection and salvation. Righteousness here is not ethical perfection, but that obedience and uprightness of the faithful who seek Him.

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4. The word for sinning or committing wrong-doing based on living in harmony with nature is found only in the Old Testament. cp. the chapter on Theories of Atonement, The Moral Influence Theory.

5. Brown. vol III. 363

6. Ibid. 355

7. Ibid. 357

8. The distinction between righteousness (serving God) and sanctification (God only) is one of perspective

## Of

- the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance Romans 2:4
- the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption Romans 8:21
- The fear of the LORD *is* the instruction of wisdom; Proverbs 15:33

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The phrase “the righteousness of God” carries a two-fold meaning—brought to us by the word ‘of.’<sup>9</sup> Because this biblical truth is written in what we call “the possessive case” (for all those who remember grammar school English) it may have a double meaning. Only the context knows for sure. What is “the righteousness of God”?

- ◆ “The love of God”, for example, is this *God’s love for us*<sup>10</sup> or the *love we have for God*?<sup>11</sup> Or both. In Greek or Hebrew or English, the syntax is the same and both meanings are possible. “*God’s love has been poured out in our hearts*” (Romans 5:5)
- ◆ “The peace of God.” Is this peace we have *from* God or peace *with* God? Or both?<sup>12</sup> “*the God of love and peace will be with you.*” (2 Corinthians 13:11) I cannot choose between the ideas. I choose both meanings for both words “love” and “peace”
- ◆ “The truth of God.” Paul also referenced the truth of God. The best understanding is the truth which God gives us by revelation but God is the content or subject of this same truth: “*For I say that Christ became a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises to the fathers,*” (Romans 15:8) Jesus was born Jewish by divine design that He could guarantee the Father’s promise of salvation given to Jewry for all nations.
- ◆ “The faith of Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:22) speaks both of the faith or trust we have *in* Jesus and *His* faith or faithfulness in submitting unto the death of the cross.

The righteousness of God, is it God’s justice (His act of righteousness toward us) or the righteousness that comes to us from God (we have been declared righteous)? He is both a just God and the God who justifies!

Righteousness is, therefore, a moral goodness expressed in terms of a divine holiness in relation between God and mankind,<sup>13</sup> and, specifically, among believers. Righteousness

9. Robertson, page 499

10. subjective genitive. cp Robertson, page 499

11. objective genitive. cp Robertson, page 499

12. Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

cp. 2 Corinthians 13:11 Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Become mature, be encouraged,<sup>[fn]</sup> be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

13. “... before “justice” was thought to be a quality that applied to God, it wasn’t even a clear concept. The great Hellenist scholar Eric A. Havelock points out that ... until Greek culture matured, justice was not objectified, or reified.... “Just and justice ...connote ‘rights’ rather than ‘righteousness’; they were indexes of a purely external behavior, whether of gods or of men. With the appearance of

becomes a trait<sup>14</sup> or natural expression of Godliness. So, the beatitude *“Blessed on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness”* is a hunger after God but expressed in relational terms. *“If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:7) Our fellowship is a provision of our salvation because of the righteousness of God.

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### A Beatitude

Does the Lord mean something different when using the word *“righteousness”* instead of *“godliness”* or *“holiness”*? When Jesus declared happy those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, could He have meant hungering and thirsting after godliness, i.e, *“the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that promotes godliness.”* (1 Timothy 6:3) or did He mean: hungering after holiness? *“For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness.”*(1 Thessalonians 4:7)? Are they not the same?

No. These are not all the same although all three statements would make great sermon themes. *Holiness* is the nature of God in relation to Himself. It speaks to His own integrity, being true to Himself. Hungering for more holiness is hungering for more of God. We all should seek this.

*Godliness* is living life with “one eye on God.” Holiness or saintly is how we should be on the inside, godly is how we live on the outside; holy in character, godly in reputation. “It is clear,” Peter cautioned since time is winding down, *“what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and [even] godliness”* (2 Peter 3:11)

Righteousness, as noted already, is a term of relationship. To Hunger for more righteousness is to desire to be more Christ-like in our relationship with others.

We also, learn something from the word justice. The Greeks saw justice as living an orderly life in compliance with social norms and customs. But our allegiance is not to society. The Jews saw justice as living in conformity to Torah Law, but our allegiance is not to law. Righteousness cannot be legislated, Our relationship is to God, in communion to one another, and through our testimony to our world. For this the “blessed” hunger and thirst.

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2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, 6 knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, 7 godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

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*[righteousness], it occurred to some that this kind of reciprocal propriety corresponded to personal virtue, the property of an individual. ... justice internalized as a virtue of the soul.”* - Adonis Vidu

14. The greek ending *ουνη* (ness) indicates quality or trait. In Paul’s epistles righteousness becomes a divine attribute and is descriptive of God’s holiness. (Romans 3:5, 25) Righteousness *“denotes a state by which a [believer] embraces the grace of God....”* - Thayer. 149. c.

