

# Apprehending Righteousness

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Since moving to the states, I've met a lot of disappointed believers who say that they are experiencing a feeling of immense lack and sorrow. This is especially found in those who have gone to conferences with great expectation. Oh, there's been a lot of activity, a lot of noise and hoopla - but somehow an emptiness remained -- an indescribable loneliness. Many wondered where God had gone. "Just where are the good ol' days when something spectacular happened... once, a long time ago?" Paul talked about that problem when speaking about the Israelites, (Romans 10:2) "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."

Paul explained that even though they have "zeal" (fervent ardor), nothing happens --because their actions are not according to knowledge (full discernment). What's the problem?

Verse 3 "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and "seeking to establish their own righteousness," have not submitted to the righteousness of God."

We watch those who struggle to endlessly die to self. Their faces have lost the luster of their once found joy. Oh, the agony of having to be so pious! They plead with God to appear and to manifest Himself in their midst. They are so desperately dissatisfied that they believe that THEY can DO something to move Him. Maybe if they are quiet something will happen. Well, maybe if they yell for hours God will come. Oh... maybe if they have intercession around the clock - maybe, if they leap and dance, have banners, wave flags, and exhaust themselves - then maybe God will mercifully show His presence. These well-intentioned believers are unknowingly "SEEKING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS." They hope that because of their sacrificial actions, God will respond.

Galatians 2:21 warns us that our righteousness only comes because of Him... "For if righteousness could be gained through the law, (our fastings, our works, our pleading, our efforts, our struggles, or our sincere need) Christ died for nothing!" NIV. But, He alone is righteous - We don't have to DO anything. We'll never deserve any gift from God. We'll never be good enough to receive the Holy Spirit or to operate in the Gifts of God. But, we can rest knowing that we are covered over with a robe of righteousness (Is. 61:10). We must not strive (2 Tim. 2:24).

Those of us who have reckoned ourselves dead to that carnal Adamic mentality are in a position to believe that we are already righteous because of Him! We are already acceptable in the beloved (Eph. 1:6). It's only through faith that we can grasp the Truth -- that God is already in our midst. He's here. Our citizenship is already in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

RIGHTEOUSNESS means having a purity of heart or being and doing right. God's righteousness is essential in His nature -- as He is the righteous governor of all creations, He is the administrator and just dispenser of rewards and punishments. He alone is pure of heart. He alone does right. The Old Testament term "righteousness" (sedeq) designates His holiness, justice, and faithfulness (Gen 18:25; Deut 6:25; Ps 31:1; 119:137,142; Is 45:23; 46:13; 51:5-8).

Our modern ideas vastly differ from the conceptions of righteousness held by the Old Testament Hebrews. These people viewed God as a stern and vindictive Ruler who exhibited meticulous moral wrath against all manner of abominations, deviation, and sin. This Hebrew God focused on having a people "separated" from anything that would detract from living His laws of morality - to the letter! (i.e. Lev 20:22).

As we look at the law, we can clearly define the Hebrew ideal. First, there was an increasingly precise discernment of immorality (for example Deut 24:1-2, etc.) Then there was a strong perception of man's moral obligation toward others (Is 5:8,23). Burdensomely, the hope of individual salvation rested upon the righteous obedience of each individual.

If they lived unworthily, this ruthless God would punish them; but if even an insignificant remnant were faithful, God would show favor to them alone. This legalistic lifestyle led to barrenness. This conception of a fierce and demanding God profoundly influenced the later interpretations of God's character.

The New Testament shows us how the death and LIFE of Christ established the believer's freedom from bondage to this legalistic lifestyle. Through Christ's perfect obedience, He obtained righteousness for us -- in our stead. His purpose is to restore us to the likeness that Adam forfeited in the Garden. Romans 10:4 "For Christ is the END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES." "End" is the important word "telos" which means to set out for a definite point or goal to arrive at a point aimed at as a limit. The death and resurrection of Christ became the definite goal, the limit of the law.

The "righteousness of the law" refers to the obedience that the law required (Rom 3:10, 19, 20; 8:4). The death and life of Jesus totally redeemed us from the futile works of self -- trying to please God. Jesus pleased God for us. With His

perfectly effective self-sacrificing love (John 3:16), He fully accomplished our righteousness for us. It is a finished work.

However, over the centuries, we have once again returned to the belief that some of our actions are righteous and will appease an angry God. These negative concepts grew into the ideals of virtuous and vicarious suffering. Saints throughout the ages believed that self-inflicted suffering would somehow impress their God. Therefore, they beat themselves, fasted until near death, and lived in austere remote caves. Extreme poverty was just another way to show their works of righteousness.

Some present-day activities (endless rote prayers, ritualistic warfare, obvious self-dying, etc.) "seem" righteous but they're really just religious. In interpreting truth, we must remember that the greatest surrender is to attain God's image in our daily life. By the surrender of religious notions, we attain our highest destiny.

Having the faith to believe ourselves to be righteous maximizes our lives.

This means that expectantly embracing the righteousness of God becomes the central definition of our self-worth. We are no longer bound to legalism; but rather, our transformed NEW CREATION now brings the life of God out into the world.

Not only is our realization of our righteousness developing, it is also maturing. This present world will only be redeemed by the manifested life-giving forces of transformed believers. Our present sphere of influence is where we display that God is real.

Righteousness is the concept that we receive for ourselves -- by faith as a finished work. 1 Corinthians 1:30, "Christ Jesus...has become FOR US wisdom from God-that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" NIV. This perfect righteousness is imputed to us when we accept Christ as our savior.

Apprehending this perception of righteousness is an ongoing process - the more we access Truth, the more we proceed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). Rom 1:17 "For in it (the Gospel of Christ) the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God is revealed from FAITH TO FAITH; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." NKJV

It's a done deal!!! We are righteous. Rom 3:22-25 "This righteousness from God COMES THROUGH FAITH in Jesus Christ TO ALL who believe. There is NO DIFFERENCE...24 and (we) are justified (acquitted to obtain righteousness) freely by his grace (the divine influence on the heart) through the redemption (ransom in full) that came by Christ Jesus." NIV

Additionally, please notice that when we "WORK" (toil, strive), our wages are credited not of grace but out of "OBLIGATION" (a debt). But for those who "trust God," their faith is "credited to as righteousness" (Rom. 4:4). Romans 4:18-25 tells us that Abraham in hope believed, against all hope ... and without weakening in his faith, he faced the FACT that his body was as good as dead... Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God ... being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised... This is why his faith "WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Romans four goes on to say (vs. 23), "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but ALSO FOR US, to whom God will credit righteousness-FOR US WHO BELIEVE in him who RAISED Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Take note of this two-step process: (Step one) 25 "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was (step two) raised to life for (literally BECAUSE of) our JUSTIFICATION (the act of pronouncing righteous, or acquittal from guilt)."

1. He died for our sins
2. He rose for our justification of righteousness.

Paul spends more time writing to believers about how to obtain this new LIFE in God than any other subject. In Ephesians 5:14 He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead..." NKJV.

It is imperative that the Church stops being obsessed with dying to self. This self-absorption is becoming a false religion of its own. Stop desiring to centralize upon the carnality of our wretched lives. It's time to wake up and LIVE in His sight. We can do nothing on our own. We can only apprehend the inheritance by believing the word.

Now, let's notice those two steps again in Romans 4:25, "He was delivered (surrendered) (step one) over to death for our sins (paraptoma, past wrongs -- both unintentional error and willful transgression) and ...

(Step two) was RAISED to LIFE for (literally because of) our JUSTIFICATION." Everything that was necessary on God's part to obtain our forgiveness from sin was accomplished in the death of Christ. But, it was the resurrection into God LIFE that completed the propitiation. Resurrection was the counterpart action that produced our JUSTIFICATION.

This same 2 step truth is brought forth in Romans 5:10. (Step one), the death of Jesus reconciled us to God (in the Spirit man), (step two) and His LIFE saves us (causes our soul to become WHOLE).

That God "justifies" the believer because of Christ's free gift of LIFE. Romans 5:17-19, "How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the GIFT of righteousness REIGN IN LIFE through the one man, Jesus Christ." Our purpose is to reign in life - not just to always try to die to that old carnal nature. (I already died with Him and have risen with Him by faith. Col 2:12) 18 "Consequently... so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that BRINGS LIFE FOR ALL MEN...

2 Corinthians 5:21, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD." NIV

Now that we understand that it's up to the believer to accept righteous as part of his/her new lifestyle character, let's return to our beginning chapter of Romans 10 - and re-look at some of the Scriptures we've known from early salvation that now mean so much more.

Romans 10:5, "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." In other words, if we obtain our righteousness according to the law, it is determined by our own works and we'll never arrive... and we'll live in failure. If it is up to us, we'll never find it.

Verse 6, "But the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH speaks in this way, "Do NOT SAY in your heart (cardia, thoughts, feelings, mind), 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above)" Don't look for Jesus to suddenly arrive from heaven so that you can escape -- and someday - in that great rocking chair in the sky - then, you'll finally find righteousness.

And DON'T say, (verse 7) " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." Those who have the faith to know they are already righteous don't say that Jesus will imminently return in the flesh to make everyone righteous.

Verse 8, "But what does it (THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH) say? "The word is near you, in your MOUTH and in your HEART" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):"

1. The word (rhema) is near you (closer than arms length).
  - a. The word is in your mouth
  - b. The word is in your heart (cardia, thoughts, feelings, mind).

(Step one --verse 8) "That if you CONFESS (homologia, speak the same thing as God) with your MOUTH the Lord Jesus." (vs. 10) "And with the MOUTH CONFESSIO (homologia) is made unto salvation (soteria, delivered, be in health, be rescued by the deliverance of Christ)."

(Step two -- verse 8) "And BELIEVE in your HEART (thoughts, feelings, mind) that God has RAISED Him from the dead, you will be SAVED (# 4982 sozo to be "safe," protected, and made whole). (Verse 10) For with the HEART (thoughts, feelings, mind) one believes unto RIGHTEOUSNESS.

We see here a consistent theme that the believer decides with his soul realm thoughts, feelings, and mind to "Believe unto righteousness." That means I believe what the Word says about me. I am righteous. That's not arrogance, a lack of humility, or putting myself above another... believing God's word that is near is the only way for me to succeed.

Verse 11, "For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (A hallelujah shout goes here!) When I know who I am in Christ, He'll not embarrass me. I don't have to grovel for His approval. I don't have to beg for Him to show up... He's right here. Obedience is no longer an arduous task, but a passionate desire of a righteous person.

Verse 12, "For there is NO DISTINCTION between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is RICH to all who call upon Him." It doesn't matter who you are (Gal. 3:28), the Lord is "rich" (wealthy) to all.

Verse 13, "For whoever (that's you and me) calls (out loud with a word of understanding) on the name of the LORD (kurios supreme in authority) shall be saved (sozo, made WHOLE)" NKJV. Now, we are no longer without knowledge (Rm. 10:2), we have understanding in our words.

Attaining righteousness consciousness becomes the vehicle to achieving the replication of God's likeness -- our wholeness.

