

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

PART ONE

By Roy Key
Juneau, Alaska

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At times one is almost fearful to write on a topic such as “The Righteousness of God” lest he give rise to misunderstandings. There are many who have given the subject but little attention. Others attempt to develop the theme in what they consider a logical manner, but pay no attention to the discussion of this matter given by Paul in the early chapters of the Roman letter. While one hesitates at times to say anything concerning it, yet at other times he cannot refrain from speaking, for this is the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I say this thoughtfully: the man who does not know what the righteousness of God is cannot really appreciate the gospel of Christ or the grace of God.

I. THE UNIVERSAL NEED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Unrighteousness is incompatible with the nature of God, and against it in all its forms is the wrath of God revealed (Rom. 1:18). However, all men have been caught in the meshes of unrighteousness; none has escaped of either Jews or Gentiles {Rom. 2:9-19}. The Gentiles are without excuse, for the natural creation of God gives evidence of his everlasting power and divinity, but they have simply refused to have God in their knowledge (Rom. 1:19-32). Though they had a nature a law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15), they have violated it, disregarded it, and have not one thing of merit on which they can stand before God in judgment.

The Jews are in no better condition than the Gentiles, so far as being able to stand before God is concerned. They have had a special revelation from him in the law of Moses that is not common to the Gentiles, but it is actually the means of their condemnation, for they have not kept it (Rom. 2:17-29). The Jews have thought to be saved by the law; they have come to trust in it, but their trust in the law for salvation, rather than in him who gave it, made them debtor to keep it in its entirety. For these people circumcision profited nothing, unless they kept the law (Rom. 2:25). The Jews had entirely misunderstood the law’s purpose. They had thought it a means of salvation, though it had never been intended as such.

The law entered in that it might reveal the enormity of their transgression, that it might disclose their moral bankruptcy and dire need of God and his grace. “Now we know that what things so ever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19, 20).

On the purpose of the law, note also that it served to increase sin (Rom. 5:20, 21; 7:7-11); to reveal in so far as possible, the true nature of sin (Rom. 7:13); and thus to lead to Christ as Savior from sin (Gal. 3:21-29). It is readily seen that righteousness is in the possession of none and the need of all.

II. A RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED

We need to understand the implications in the fact that law as such could not reveal God's righteousness. It could assert that God himself is righteous, and it could demand that man be so. All this it did, but it could not reveal the righteousness of God. This revelation is made only in the gospel.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, ...for therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16, 17).

“But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction” (Rom. 3:21,22).

Paul cannot mean, therefore, that the gospel is a set of heavier and more stringent demands. The old law, law by itself, had made demands that men by their own power could not fulfill. Men did not need heavier statutes of more binding nature; they needed new strength, they needed help divine, they needed forgiveness for their iniquity. All this the “good news” of Christ as Savior brought.

This is not to say that the Bible revealed God's righteousness in word by giving a law through which men could attain righteousness. Paul made it very clear that no law as such can offer righteousness (Gal. 3:21). The Bible and the gospel are not synonymous. The redemption of Calvary and the preaching of its significance existed for years before the New Testament was written. The gospel is the actual happenings of redemptive significance that have been witnessed to in the New Testament. In reality, the gospel is act, not word; it is deed, not language (I Cor. 15:1-4). By metonymy the account may well be called by the name of the actual occurrence. Only in the redemption centered in the cross is the righteousness of God truly disclosed.

The righteousness of God is given, rather than attained; it is of faith, rather than of the keeping of the law (Rom. 3:21-30). Many Christians still have the Old Testament conception that righteousness comes from fulfilling the commandments, but any careful reader can see that Paul sets the two conceptions over against the other and states that righteousness comes as a result of relying upon Christ, rather than through the keeping of the commandments.

The righteousness of which Paul speaks is not simply a personal attribute of the Father, but it is a gift of which God is the author and man is the recipient. Isaiah, the

prophet, presented it as active (Isa. 51:5, 6; 45:21-25; 46:13). It is a method, process, or activity of God which he bestows upon unrighteous men. Righteousness and justification are from the same root, and it is quite apparent that Paul means by righteousness justification or free forgiveness. Lard does not employ the word "righteousness" at all, but always renders "dikaiosune" by the term justification.

The signal manifestation of God's righteousness is seen in its enveloping of sinful man as he receives the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26). God shows his righteousness in forgiving or counting righteous the one who has faith in Jesus. There is no antagonism here between God's grace, mercy, or love on the one hand, and his righteousness, justice, or holiness on the other. It is a strange picture of God that is often presented by representing him as in conflict, for the moment puzzled as to which side of his nature will triumph, but finally the better element (presumably) comes out victorious over the other, and God decides to forgive.

This is by no means the picture that Paul presents. He is not attempting to show how God can be just and yet be the justifier of the ungodly believer, but he is showing God to be just by his justifying the believer. God is just and the justifier of them that believe. To interpret God's righteousness in the passage as his personal attribute is to give it a construction that Paul has not at all placed upon it before and is to posit a monstrous conflict in the nature of God of which the Scriptures know nothing.

(Continued in next issue)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Due to the length of these articles it will be necessary to cover them in three parts. We would suggest that brethren keep these articles together for additional study and for future reference. The subject is that important. As bro. Key suggested in the beginning, unless one understands the righteousness of God there is no way for him to have a full comprehension of the Christian system, nor will he fully appreciate the grace of God.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

PART TWO

By Roy Key
Juneau, Alaska

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III. FAITH - RIGHTEOUSNESS VERSUS WORKS - RIGHTEOUSNESS: AS SEEN IN THE CASE OF ABRAHAM.

Sometimes we are able to see through exemplification what we have not comprehended in the principles set forth. For this reason Paul chooses the example of Abraham with which to illustrate the righteousness of God bestowed through faith. Here is the case of one who was counted righteous or justified because of his belief, and not because of a perfect obedience to God's commandments.

Abraham might have pled his merit if any could; and if he had done so, he could have boasted before God. Perhaps he might be able to boast before men, but he could not glory before the Father. How do we know? If he could have boasted before God, he would have been saved by his works, but the Scripture says that it was his faith that was reckoned him for righteousness (Rom.4:1-3; Gen. 15:b). The righteousness which God bestows is not based on moral achievement; such is the righteousness of the Pharisees. God's righteousness does not come as a reward to one who has done the work outlined. There is no grace in paying an honest debt. Yet God's righteousness is so much of grace that he gives it to the man who has not kept the law, who has not done the prescribed work, but who has trusted in the Savior for forgiveness (Rom. 4:4, 5).

The scheme of debt and payment does not describe God's righteousness. It is properly presented by David, who "pronounceth blessing upon the man, unto whom God reckoneth righteousness apart from works, saying, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin" (Rom. 4:6-6). The man whose sins are not counted by the Lord, who has been forgiven, is the man who, not having kept the law has believed on Christ and has been reckoned righteous anyway. This, says the apostle, is the real description of God's gift of righteousness.

The Jews were ready to reply that Abraham kept the law by anticipation, and was for that reason justified, but Paul makes the matter as clear as possible by reminding them that Abraham was justified before he was ever circumcised, previous to his reception of the rite that signified the covenant with God. Justification does not rest in the category of a covenant, but of a promise, and it was because of the promise, and not the law, that Christ came to save the world (Gal. 3: 18).

Abraham trusted in the God that called those things that were not (his descendants) as though they were, and this faith was reckoned for righteousness. God did not have the record read that “it was reckoned unto him for righteousness” simply for his benefit; that was written for us also, because it describes the result of our believing “on him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:23, 24). When one understands the story of Abraham and God's dealing with him back before the time of his circumcision, then he can understand how God bestows his righteousness upon the believer today. This is the great divine illustration.

IV. WHY DOES GOD CONDITION RIGHTEOUSNESS UPON FAITH?

That is all that man could give. Righteousness is simply free forgiveness. It is not moral attainment, but right relation with God. It is certain that sin cannot be adequately dealt with through works. Suppose that a man has proved unfaithful to his wife, can he undo the act by making \$300 a month now, whereas he had formerly made only \$150? There is nothing he can do that will reverse time and make what is so not so. What is needed is a restoration on the old relationship, not just more labor by him on her behalf. If that relationship is ever restored, it must be done by the offended one freely forgiving the offender. The offender cannot atone for his wrong; the sin must be borne by the one offended, wounded, and bruised.

God offers his forgiveness, and man must respond. Forgiveness can be only accepted or rejected. The gospel is presented by Paul as the promise (Gal. 3). A promise can be bestowed only in the form of a gift. The gift must be either accepted or rejected. God's gift is his grace, his redemptive love, his free forgiveness, and there are but two possible reactions or responses to that gift of grace. One is positive, the other negative; one is faith, the other disbelief.

Faith is the natural condition of righteousness or justification, not an arbitrary one. Justification is by faith that it may be according to grace (Rom. 4:16). God wanted to freely bestow forgiveness upon man, to give him his righteousness; but he cannot force it; it must be accepted, personally responded to. Therefore, God conditioned it on nothing but man's acceptance of it. In this way, Paul says, it could be of grace, and in no other. It is conditioned solely on acceptance that it may be a gift from God. God's grace is his hand reaching down, and man's faith is his hand reaching up. The offer is universal the bestowment is not, for not all respond positively, not all will accept or believe.

V. RIGHTEOUSNESS CIRCUMSCRIBED

It has been pointed out that justification, forgiveness, or righteousness, is bestowed conditionally; but that condition is the natural one of acceptance, and, viewed in this light, hardly appears as a condition in the ordinary sense at all. However, we continue to speak of righteousness as conditioned that we may escape the weakness of Calvinism in having God arbitrarily bestow his gift through absolutely no perceivable reason.

To say that righteousness is circumscribed is nothing but to say that it is conditioned. Since it is conditioned on faith, it is circumscribed by it, and exists only in the church, which is the fellowship of the believers. Righteousness and salvation go hand in hand. Where there is no salvation, righteousness has never been; and where there is no righteousness, salvation can never go. The Lord has placed salvation in Zion; and if we desire it, we must seek it there. "I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (Isa. 46:13). "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 2:32).

Logically, righteousness would first be imputed, then salvation. Actually, they come together, for they are but two terms used to indicate the same process or experience. They are contained or operate in a definite sphere or realm. Righteousness is placed in Zion; and if we desire to be clothed upon with it, let us go to Zion, the great storehouse of righteousness. All this is but stating a personal truth in impersonal terms. To go to Zion is, as Joel declared to "call on the name of the Lord."

Zion is the church of Christ, the body of the Lord, the kingdom of our God. "But ye are come unto mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:22, 23). 1 Pet. 2:6 is a quotation from Isa. 28:16: "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Peter regards the church as a house built of living stones, having Christ as the chief of the corner. Then righteousness and salvation are to be found in the church. The Old Testament Scriptures testified to that effect, but it remained for the gospel to reveal the righteousness of God as a relationship attainable now to all who will accept it.

VI. LET US BEWARE OF THE MISTAKE OF THE JEWS

The Hebrew nation rejected God's righteousness. Though they were seeking for it, they did not attain it; for they sought it by works rather than by faith (Rom. 9:21,32). They thought their salvation was to be earned by keeping the law. That was not so then, nor is it any more true today. Man cannot keep the law in the manner necessary to be saved by it. Many disregard Christ and his body, thinking that they will be saved by their good works.

Works cannot save us, or else Christ died in vain. If anything can save but the blood of Christ, the gospel is God's great tragedy! By faith let us take hold of the atonement, which provides a righteousness of God for unrighteous men. Human righteousness is attained by works; God's righteousness is received through faith. The Jews sought righteousness by the law, thus cutting themselves off from the sacrifice of Christ. Human weakness prevented their attaining it in this fashion, and ignorance made them disregard that which was provided through faith. Left alone, man has no hope of standing before God. Only in pleading the atonement of Jesus is there hope.

The Israelites rejected the righteousness held out to them by God and substituted their own in its stead (Rom. 10:4). This does not at all mean, as some appear to think, that they rejected God's law and made for themselves another law. Their rejection of God's righteousness consisted in their trust in the law for salvation. It is entirely possible for us today to reject the righteousness that God offers through faith in Jesus as Redeemer and look to a plan or system for justification, rather than to the one who died on our behalf.

I am firmly persuaded that more ought to be said concerning faith in the atonement of Jesus and the gracious redeeming love of God than about “the plan of salvation” and the “scheme of redemption.” One great reason that church members are not more consecrated and devoted is the fact that they have been converted to a plan or scheme, rather than to a Savior. One can be convinced on a point without being converted to Christ, but he cannot really believe on the Lord without changing his mind concerning life and God.

If we place our trust in the plan or the scheme, we are ignoring in the same manner as the Jews the righteousness of faith, and we are adulterating both law and grace. We cannot even begin to stand before God on the basis of law keeping, for this “plan” or “scheme” is not law at all in its true sense of a moral code of righteousness; It is God's revelation of man's true way of responding to the offered grace. To so regard these gracious rays of light as “law” proper is to confound law with grace and to come dangerously near to vitiating (debase) the grace of God. If this “law” becomes foremost in our minds and affections, then true faith as personal reliance upon Christ is weakened. This leads more and more to legalistic Pharisaism. Let us beware of the mistake of the Jews!

VII. DISSECTING THE FAITH THAT APPROACHES RIGHTEOUSNESS

I am quite certain that Paul was not nearly so anxious as are we to show that God's righteousness is accepted through the four items: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Today we almost miss the glory of God's grace bestowed freely upon the believer by using most of our time to show the “steps” in the “plan.” The personal element becomes overshadowed by the legal.

Nevertheless, we need to realize that the faith which accepts Christ as personal and individual Savior is more than an acknowledgement of him, or that he can save. It is an actual reliance upon him - a reliance in his appointed way. Any other reaction is unbelief. One must accept the “word of faith!”

“Thy word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is the word of faith, which we preach: because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved...For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be put to shame” (Rom. 10:8-11).

Here we have presented what we sometimes term two “steps” into Christ, but Paul could not absolutize them and entirely separate them. Confession is nothing but faith

spoken. These are not simply in the direction of salvation without reaching it, as may be clearly seen from verse 11. It may be that the faith of verse 9 is not the comprehensive term of verse 11; but if not, this is the sole occurrence of the restricted use of the term by Paul, and the very nature of verse 11 throws some doubt upon such a conclusion.

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34,35). In the account of Cornelius' conversation we find that baptism is a part of the method by which he was reckoned righteous, the process as a whole being called repentance. When Peter was thoroughly convinced of the fact that God had accepted the Gentiles, “he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” When he related the entire matter to the critical Jewish brethren, they “glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). “Eis” in these instances has exactly the same force and meaning that it has in Acts 2:38.

The entire process of constituting men righteous is here designated as repentance, which in its broadest and deepest sense cannot be entirely separated from faith. Nor can baptism be so separated. It is no “work” of faith or expression of the faith that is already complete. It is faith actually reaching out and appropriating the atonement, relying upon Jesus in his way.

Baptism is also faith in visual form, setting forth man's trust in the Savior, rather than in himself, showing implicit trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which are symbolized by it. Jesus himself declared that the act of baptism was a part of God's way of bestowing righteousness. John was baptizing for remission of sins. Consequently, when Jesus came to him, he forbade him, doubting that he had sins to be forgiven. Jesus, however, declared: “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3: 15). He was already righteous; but since baptism was a part of God's means of bestowing his righteousness upon men, he could say: “I must fulfill all of God's way of making men righteous.”

Those who consider baptism a work of man's righteousness, a work of merit that will allow boasting, do not see the beauty of faith as it is pictured in this act of utter helplessness, reliance, and trust in a crucified Redeemer. Paul told Titus: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done (man's righteousness) but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). This is somewhat similar to John 3:5: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!”

Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are commanded in the “word of faith..” Perhaps it is all right to speak of them as individual “steps” in a “plan”, but we must realize that this is not the entire truth in the matter. Not all has been heard. When these are considered in their fullest sense, they cannot be so easily distinguished, nor does Paul take apart in such fashion the faith that receives God's righteousness. In order to prove to the Galatians that they were saved by faith, rather than works, he points to their baptism

(Gal. 3:26, 27). “You know that you put on Christ in baptism, and it is entirely of faith. Therefore ye are children of God by faith.”

Many are concerned when we give to Paul's language its full force in saying that men are not justified by works. Remembering James they insist that this has nothing to say about works of faith. Yet it is very evident that James is showing that a Christian's faith dies if it does not work. If one possesses the Spirit, he bears the fruit of the Spirit, but he cannot bear its fruit until the gift is bestowed. One does not have to work in order to become alive. He works only after life has been bestowed as a gift.

--End of article--

---G. C. Brewer comments in next issue---

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

PART 3

G. C. BREWER

Editor, Gospel Advocate March 7, 1946

Editor's Note: This is the follow-up of the article that appeared in the January 24, 1946 issue of Gospel Advocate by Roy Key, and which we ran in the February and March issues of the Ensign Fair.

LETTER TO G. C. BREWER

Olson, Texas, February 14, 1946

Mr. G. C. Brewer.

Dear Sir and Brother:

I have read many of your articles in the Gospel Advocate with both pleasure and profit; also heard you preach at Olson and Lubbock, and liked your plain way of Scripture explanations. And now I wish you would review an article, if you do not mind, that was published in the Advocate of January 24 on page 74; subject, "The Righteousness of God." I think that a fine subject, and one that has been sadly neglected. I think it is a fine article and well expressed, but he has advanced some ideas that I have not been accustomed to hearing. Really I would like to read an article from your pen of that subject. -N. F. Davis

1. THE ARTICLE COMMENDED

The article referred to was written by Roy Key of Juneau, Alaska. I do not know that I am acquainted with Brother Key, but I assume that he is one of the group that has recently gone to Alaska to establish the cause of righteousness there. If all the group are as well informed in the "word of righteousness" as Brother Key, we need not have any anxiety as to the teaching that will be done in that mission field. The article on "The Righteousness of God" is one of the best that I have ever seen on the subject. It is well written, and it is eminently scriptural. If there is an unscriptural conclusion or thought in it, I failed to see it, and I have read the article again after the letters about it began to come in. Brother Key shows a grasp on the subject that even many preachers do not seem to possess. He has, what I consider, a true understanding of Paul's teachings in Romans. I have tried to teach Romans for years, and I always tell my class to associate the two words "Romans" and "Righteousness." Paul teaches the same doctrine in all his Epistles, and gives it especial emphasis in Galatians, but in Romans he goes deeper into the principles involved than in the other letters. Brother Key set forth the Pauline doctrine in fine form. I commend his article.

2. "SOME IDEAS I HAVE NOT BEEN ACCUSTOMED TO HEARING"

It is no matter of surprise that letters of inquiry have come in since the article appeared. Brother Davis says he has not been hearing these ideas taught. They are new to others also. I have for years found many brethren who were astonished at this teaching, and I have found a few who were offended by it at fist. Brother Key indicated in his opening sentences that he feared some misunderstanding. He has probably found from experience that such misunderstandings will follow any effort to teach the truth on this subject. Since Paul sets this doctrine of God's righteousness forth in such unmistakable terms, someone may ask why it is that these misunderstandings and questions arise; and does anyone teach a different doctrine, or is it just a failure to comprehend fully and to explain clearly the teaching of Paul? It may well be both. It is certain that many have not grasped and accepted Paul's teachings; and since they do not know what he teaches, will, if they teach at all on the subject, teach something that they themselves do not understand. Men may sometimes teach things they do not understand, but they will not be very successful in getting people to understand what they themselves do not clearly see. However, it is not that there is so much false teaching on the question of God's righteousness, but that there is a lack of true teachings that gives us concern.

We could not say, though, that there is not some false teaching done. Long ago I heard a preacher, whom I respected and loved, say; "If there is any such a thing as imputed righteousness taught in the Bible, I have never seen it." Along about the same time of life I heard another preacher, regarded by me as a great man, say this:

You hear people talk of God's righteousness or Christ's righteousness being imputed to a man - of the righteousness of Christ - covering a man like a garment, etc. This is all false doctrine. The Bible says, 'He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous' (1 John 3:7); and David says, "All thy commandments are righteousness." So you see that a man who does the commandments of God is righteous - no one else is. You can have no righteousness except the righteousness that you do.

These statements impressed me, and alter I began to preach I made the same statements and quoted the same scriptures to prove them! May the Lord forgive us all and let his righteousness not only supply our lack of righteousness, but also our lack of understanding of his word.

I learned the truth on this point by studying Paul. I found it without help when I began examining Romans - not to find something to offset what someone else teaches, but to see what Romans teaches. I know other men who have had the same experience that I have had in this respect.

But lest someone draw the conclusion that all our elder brethren taught as did the two men I have quoted, I hasten to assure all our readers that such was not the case. An examination of the writings of David Lipscomb, E. G. Sewell, James A. Harding, J.W. McGarvey, and even T.W. Caskey, will show that these men - and, of course, many

others - knew the truth on this great question and taught it faithfully. James A, Harding was especially strong on this doctrine.

3. WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS ON THIS DOCTRINE?

The doctrine of God's righteousness supplied to man on account of man's faith - the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith - so preeminently scriptural, has been misapplied and abused from early ages. This perverting of the "glorious gospel" began while the apostles were still living. We read of men who "turned the grace of God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). And some argued that because we are under grace and not under law, we are free to sin (Rom. 6:15). Peter warned men against using our freedom as a cloak of wickedness (1 Peter 2:16).

There were some men in that day who were called "antinomians." The word means "against law." They taught that because we are freed from the law of Moses we are under no law at all; and since God is so gracious and forgiving, we need not fear to indulge our passions. He will forgive.

But in our times the doctrine is abused in the following ways:

1. Since our righteousness must be imputed or given from God because of his love for us and mercy toward us, and not because of our works, the whole thing is unconditional. We do nothing, obey nothing-nay, we do not even believe anything. God makes us believers by the same gift of salvation or righteousness that saves us.

2. This step comes a little nearer the truth. It teaches that salvation is conditional - faith is the one and only condition; that God's righteousness is supplied to or imputed to a man on account of his faith. (And this is the truth.) But many of those who hold to this truth teach that faith excludes obedience; that any act of faith, baptism especially, is a work of righteousness which we do and it would, therefore, contradict Paul's teaching in many places (Eph. 2:9,10; 2 Tim. 1:9,10; Titus 3:3-7).

3. Then to refute the errors listed here as 1 and 2, some of us quote James to show that we are justified by works (James 2:24). And we show that we must obey the gospel (Rom. 6:17; 2 Ths. 1:7-10), and that we must work righteousness (Acts 10:25), and that we are righteous if we do righteousness (1 John 3:7).

What a sad thing it is that men cannot see that if they make James say that we are justified by works, using the words "works" and "justify" in the same sense in which Paul uses them when he says we are not justified by works, they make the two apostles contradict each other, and, therefore, one or both of them must be rejected! How pathetic it is, too, that men cannot see that if we live by doing the things of the gospel law we are on the same principle that the Jews lived upon before Christ came! There are two methods contrasted by Paul. Under the old, they lived by doing; under the new, we live by faith - not by doing; for that would be the same method. Read what Paul says: "Now

that no man is justified by the law before God, is evident: for, The righteous shall live by faith; and the law is not of faith but, He that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal. 3:11, 12). This is about the worst perversion of the gospel that anyone can make.

4. THE TRUE DOCTRINE EXPLAINED

God's righteousness in the sense in which we are discussing it does not mean God's character; it does not have to do with his attributes. It means the righteousness which God requires in man - the degree of righteousness which man must possess in order to see God. How can man obtain this degree of righteousness? Can he buy it? Can he earn it? Can he achieve it? Can he obtain it through fraud or steal it from another? By none of these ways, nor by all of them together, could man become righteous in God's sight! How, then, can man ever be righteous? Here is the scriptural doctrine: God reckons, counts, a man righteous because of his faith in Christ! He is not righteous in his own right, but he is counted righteous, graded as righteous, because he believes in Christ and accepts him as a Savior - relies upon him, hides in him, clings to him, prays through him, and lives for him. His blood cleanses us, and his righteousness is imputed to us and placed upon us in the same way that our sins are placed upon him (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; also read Rom. and Gal.).

We obtain this righteousness by faith; hence, it is called the “righteousness of faith” Rom. 1:17; 3:22; all of chapter 4; Phil. 3:9).

We obey-yes, but our obedience merits nothing, and we are not paid off for such acts. It is only faith expressed, faith manifested. It is faith. Baptism is not a work; it deserves nothing and the physical act benefits no one. It is the faith that is thus expressed that counts. No man who expects to be saved on his own morality, or his works of charity, or his lodge or on anything other than Christ's own blood and righteousness will ever be baptized. Never! For he knows that when he is baptized he thereby acknowledges his need of a savior, and, therefore, confesses that of himself he cannot be saved; that all his works and all the devices of men cannot save him! He is in his baptism applying unto the Lord-seeking his mercy. That is just the confession and the supplication we must all make. Christ alone can save us. Trust Him, brother.

--End of article--

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