

A Word concerning Righteousness

What is the difference between the righteousness of Christ and Christ as righteousness? *Christ as righteousness* is found in 1 Corinthians 1:30. "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." This verse tells us that God has made Christ our righteousness. The righteousness of Christ is the good conduct performed by Christ when He lived on the earth as a man. It is the personal virtue of Christ while He lived on earth. Christ becoming righteousness means that God gives Christ to us, making Him our righteousness. The righteousness of Christ refers to the goodness of Christ, whereas Christ becoming righteousness refers to Christ Himself. A saved person should know a few things. First, he should know that he is a son of God. Second, he should know God's righteousness. Third, he should know the righteousness of Christ and that Christ has become the believers' righteousness. Now we want to consider the difference between the righteousness of Christ and Christ as our righteousness. There is a big difference between these two things, and we must differentiate them clearly.

The Righteousness of Christ

Most people think that after we become a Christian, everything of Christ becomes ours. But the Bible does not say that we are saved by the righteousness of Christ or that the righteousness of Christ has become our righteousness. The phrase *the righteousness of Christ* is only used in 2 Peter 1:1, in reference to Christ's own righteousness. Without the righteousness of Christ, we cannot have a Savior. Christ is the Savior because He is righteous. But His righteousness is only related to Him. The righteousness of Christ qualifies and enables Him to be our Savior.

When we read the Bible, we should not change what we read. We should not be satisfied with vague concepts and answers. During the past ten or more years, I have often asked others two questions: By what righteousness are we saved? By whose righteousness do we come to God? Many people could not give the proper answer. They would say that they are saved by the righteousness of Christ and that they come to God through Christ's righteousness. This is absolutely wrong. Let me put it this way: The righteousness of Jesus was the qualification which the Lord had before God when He was a man. This righteousness has

absolutely nothing to do with us. We are not joined to the Lord in His walk in this world; we are joined to Him on the cross. Everything that the Lord did on earth has nothing to do with us. We must remember that a grain bears many grains only after it has fallen into the ground. Christians were joined to Christ at His death, not at His birth. When Christ was born in Bethlehem and lived on the earth, men could only follow Him from afar. They could only say, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29). Only when we come to Romans 6 do we see that we are joined to Him in the likeness of His death and resurrection (v. 5). Therefore, a Christian does not become righteous in the eyes of God through the righteousness of Christ but through Christ Himself. We are saved through receiving Christ Himself.

Christ Becoming Our Righteousness

Once I was talking to a theological student. I said, "The Bible does not say that we have put on the righteous garment of Christ. It only says that we have put on Christ." Galatians 3:27 says that we have put on Christ. Today we have put on not the righteousness of Christ but Christ Himself. The righteousness of Christ is something that is in Christ Himself, and it is history. Today Christians come to God through putting on Christ. Christ Himself has become our righteousness, and we can come to God at any time because Christ lives forever.

How do we come to God? First Corinthians 1:30 is a great verse in the New Testament. This verse reveals that a Christian does not come to God through his own righteousness. Neither does he come to God with his many sins. Rather, he comes to God through Christ alone. A Christian's access to God is not based on his righteousness or his unrighteousness. This verse shows us clearly that Christ has become the righteousness of the believers. It is not something about Christ that has become our righteousness; rather, Christ Himself in His entirety has become our righteousness. Something of Christ can never be as absolute and perfect as Christ Himself. When Christ Himself becomes our righteousness, God receives us.

The experience of many Christians follows a certain pattern: If they read the Bible in the morning and manage to control their temper during the day, they can pray in a strong way at night. But if they fail during the day, their

prayer at night is very weak. Actually, even when we sin, Christ is still our righteousness. The fact has not changed, because we are in Christ. If we behave well today and think that we are more qualified to come to God, we are coming to Him by our own righteousness. This is a wrong concept. God does not receive us based on our righteousness, much less on our unrighteousness. His receiving is based on Christ. A Christian does not become more unrighteous through sinning, nor does he become more righteous through doing good. Sin does not diminish a Christian's righteousness, nor do good works increase his righteousness. Our righteousness before God is not dependent on our conduct but on Christ Himself. Our righteousness before God never changes. Righteousness is a person; it is not a thing. The righteousness that a Christian has is the living Christ; it is not some dead object. Even if we committed all the sins of the world, our righteousness is still Christ Himself. Sooner or later every Christian must realize who this One is who is his righteousness.

Putting On Christ

The robe of righteousness is a good illustration, yet it is not a perfect illustration. In the Old Testament, Jacob cheated his father in order to receive his blessing. Jacob's brother was a hairy man, but he was a smooth man. Rebekah gave to Jacob the coat of Esau and covered his hands and neck with the skin of goats in an effort to steal his father's blessing. This is a disguise; it is falsehood. This is not the way Christians come before God. We have not put on a robe of righteousness; we have put on Christ Himself. We have not put on the garment of Christ; we have put on Christ Himself. Galatians 3:27 speaks of the putting on of Christ. The righteousness which we now have far exceeds our own righteousness. It is Christ Himself becoming our righteousness. Hence, we are perfect, and God can now accept us.

What is our basis when we come to God? What is in our mind when we come before Him? Are we fearful when we think of our sin and bold when we think of our righteousness? Or do we think of Christ? Many people are occupied with either their sins or their righteousnesses. I come to God through Christ as my righteousness, not through the righteousness of Christ. Before the Lord I have my own righteousnesses as well as my own unrighteousnesses. Of course, my own unrighteousnesses cannot be reckoned as righteous in His eyes, but my righteousness cannot be reckoned as righteous in His eyes either. This has nothing to do with me loving Him but with Him loving me. I do not preserve myself; He preserves me. It is not my hands that are holding Him but His hands that are holding me. It is not a matter of my faithfulness but His faithfulness. I can be bold before the Lord because my righteousness is Christ alone.

A new believer's condition can be quite high, like Paul's experience in the third heaven. At other times it can be quite low, as if he has descended into the abyss. However, we have to realize that the problem of sin has been dealt with by Christ on the cross, and the problem of righteousness has also been settled by Christ on the throne. The righteousness that God has given us is just Christ. Once He gives Christ to us, He will never change His mind. In Christ, God cannot find anyone more advanced than He has already found. This is why our heart rejoices today. When we first believed, the basis of our coming to God was Christ. After being a believer for many years, the basis of our coming to God is still Christ. Our advancement cannot make us more qualified to come to God, and our evil cannot make us less qualified to come to God. Hebrews 4:16 says that we can come forward boldly to God at any time.

Our Righteousness and Our Conduct

I have been a Christian for over twenty years. My conduct has changed, but my righteousness has never changed. It will not change in another twenty years because my righteousness is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Even if I become as fallen as Demas or Alexander the copper-smith, I will not be more unrighteous than I already am. On the other hand, even if I suffer as much as Paul did, love the Lord as much as John did, and am as bold as Peter was, it will not increase my righteousness at all. My conduct may improve, but my righteousness can never improve. I can advance in holiness, but I cannot advance in my righteousness, because the righteousness that God has given me is already perfect. This righteousness is just Christ. I am the most righteous person on earth because my righteousness is just Christ. Just as Christ never changes and is well pleasing to God, I cannot change, and I am well pleasing to Him.

Once this issue is settled, all the problems that a Christian faces are settled. We have seen that righteousness has nothing to do with sin. Sin is one thing, righteousness is another. If our coming to God is based on this righteousness, Satan can do nothing to accuse us. I hope that we will not take these words as just a kind of doctrine. In the course of our fellowship with God, we have to see something new. We have to see that man's condition before God can be good or bad, but his position before God can never change. If our life as a Christian lasts for twenty or thirty more years on this earth, we may become more advanced, holy, spiritual, or mature, but our righteousness will not change. It will not afford us more boldness, nor will it take away any of our boldness, because our righteousness is simply Christ Himself.

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