

Praise to the Father for His Righteousness

- 1 God our Father, we adore Thee,
For the sake of righteousness;
Thou in Christ hast justified us,
Who our conscience can depress?
Thou art righteous, and art faithful,
On Thy righteousness we stand;
No unrighteousness is in Thee,
None can turn Thy righteous hand.
- 2 Thou hast laid our sins on Jesus,
By Thy justice He was killed;
All Thy holy law's requirements
For Thy justice He fulfilled.
Recompense from Him receiving,
Thou art fully satisfied;
How couldst Thou, O God most righteous,
Claim it once more from our side?
- 3 Father God, Thou hast accepted
Jesus as our Substitute;
Judged the Just One for the unjust,
Couldst Thou change Thy attitude?
As a proof of perfect justice,
At Thine own right hand He sits;
He, as Thy full satisfaction,
Righteously Thy need befits.
- 4 Father, through the blood of Jesus
We possess Thy righteousness;
By Thy righteousness protected,
None can shake our steadfastness.
Righteousness of Thine Thou mad'st us,
None can ever us condemn;
We'll forever testify this
In the new Jerusalem. (*Hymns*, #20)

The above hymn, written by Witness Lee, is a contemplative and worshipful expression of appreciation to our Father God for His righteousness through which He has planned and worked out the redemption of His chosen people according to His righteousness in His righteous actions in and through Jesus Christ His Son. As we consider this hymn, our thoughts are first directed to the facts of God's righteous dealings with and upon Christ as our Substitute resulting in His justification of us in Christ. God is righteous and faithful to now deal with us as those who are no longer under condemnation. Because our case has been fully dealt with in Christ, we have confidence to stand before God with a clear conscience. Thus, we are

called to come forward to God with a call similar to the call in the book of Hebrews:

Let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope unwavering, for He who has promised is faithful. (10:22-23)

As we sing this hymn on the righteousness of God, we are brought into the realm of His righteousness as the base of His faithfulness. We stand with boldness before Him on the firm foundation of His righteousness. Praise ascends to the throne, which has as its sure foundation the righteousness and justice of God (cf. *Psa.* 89:14; 97:2). The divine righteousness is the central and the fundamental factor of God's redeeming grace.

The Unveiling of the Righteousness of God for Man's Justification

In its consideration of the righteousness of God, the above hymn begins with praise to the Father "for the sake of righteousness." In context, *for the sake of* should be understood as equivalent to *on account of* or *because of*. Praises are elicited from the writer based on the righteous act of God in applying His righteousness to sinners who in faith rely on the shed blood of Jesus Christ for their pardon and approval before God. It may be common practice to praise God for His passing over of our sins or for the forgiveness of sin based on the mercy or grace of God, but here the striking thought is that *for the sake of righteousness* we lift our voices in praise to the Father. The motive for this praise must be understood in the light of how Christ has become our righteousness in God's economy. We must first realize that there is no possibility for us in ourselves to establish a relationship with the righteous God—we stand eternally condemned because of our unrighteousness in person and action. We are utterly bereft of righteousness and are powerless to establish our own righteousness. Even if we somehow were able to manage a human living above the reproach of others, we would still be absolutely unclean and unqualified to stand before God. His standard is much higher than ours. Isaiah 64:6 declares, "All of us became like him who

is unclean, / And all our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment." God in righteousness has dealt thoroughly with Christ to pass judgment on our sinful nature and condition. God's standard has been met in the Son. When, before God, we acknowledge our sin and receive the provision of God's full salvation in His Son, we are given an absolute pardon and thorough cleansing. God's righteousness is fully met, and God is absolutely satisfied according to the standard of His own righteousness. With praise and thanksgiving, we declare that God's justification erases God's condemnation!

The hymn reflects the careful argument of Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. On the one hand, God's righteousness demands judgment upon all humanity because of our unrighteousness in person and action. On the other hand, this same righteousness is the basis upon which our justification is firmly fixed. The apostle declares,

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth as a propitiation place through faith in His blood, for the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred, with a view to the demonstrating of His righteousness in the present time, so that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus. (3:23-26)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, yet the believers have been freely justified by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God demonstrates His righteousness in setting forth Christ as a propitiation place accessible to all those who believe in the effectiveness of His shed blood. In the past, before the redemption of Christ was accomplished, God "passed over" the sins of the Old Testament saints based on their faith in the effectiveness of the offerings of bulls and goats; the blood of these animals was a type of the blood of the redeeming Christ. Now through Christ Jesus, who is the fulfillment of those sacrificial types, all the sins committed in the past have been fully forgiven (cf. Heb. 8:12-13). In passing over the sins of the past and in forgiving the sins of the present, God demonstrates His righteousness. He is righteous in judging sin, which violates His person, and He is also righteous in justifying those who are of the faith of Jesus, the unique sacrifice. As the Lamb of God, Christ paid the ultimate price by dying on our behalf, thus satisfying the righteousness of God by terminating in Himself the old creation with its sin and corruption and carrying in His own body the penalty for the sins of the world. The debt having been fully paid, God in His righteousness is able to forgive and even obligated to forgive those who plead their case on the basis of the precious blood of the Lamb.

God "set forth" Christ, His Son, as a propitiation place through faith in His blood. The place of propitiation in the Old Testament tabernacle was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Once a year, the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the covenant for the sins of the people of Israel upon the cover of the Ark. Based upon this blood, God was able to righteously pass over the sins of the people. Particularly striking is the fact that God not only could pass over the people's sins because of the blood, but that in order to demonstrate His righteousness, He was required to do so. God's righteousness requires Him to forgive the sinners who come to Him on the basis of the blood of Christ; and Christ Himself is the very propitiation cover where God meets with His people in His forgiving grace.

Propitiation is not only an action; it is a place. Propitiation is a place where God can meet with man. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was bold to say that this propitiation place is Jesus Christ. God has set forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation cover (3:25), and this pro-

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pitiation cover is the propitiation place where God can meet with man. This place is the Person of Jesus Christ the Lord. Although many Christians love the Lord Jesus and realize that He is so much to them, they may not know that Christ is a propitiation place where God can meet with us and where we can contact God. Before we knew of this place, we were frightened by the thought of approaching God, but now we are no longer afraid of Him. Upon Christ as the propitiation cover we can meet with God. This is the meaning of Paul's writing in Romans 3. He used the type of the ark with its cover to show the meaning of justification." (Lee, *Life-study* 59)

The Gospel—the Power of God— Revealing the Righteousness of God

The righteousness of God is highlighted in the book of Romans especially in two portions of the book. First, Romans 1:17 shows that the righteousness of God is revealed out of faith to faith. The righteousness of God is manifested through the gospel out of our faith and to our faith. Then 3:21 says that without law, or apart from the law, the

righteousness of God has been manifested. The gospel that Paul announced and of which he was not ashamed is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (1:16). Paul was full of confidence in preaching the gospel; he was not ashamed, because the gospel he proclaimed not only pointed to the way of salvation, but it also conveyed that salvation into the believers: it is “the power of God unto salvation.”

The righteousness of God is revealed in this gospel. Paul declares that every human being, without exception, is unrighteous: “They are all under sin, . . . there is none righteous, not even one” (3:9-10). But the gospel conveys to the believers a righteousness that has nothing to do with their comportment according to the law—a righteousness that is fully approved by God. It is essential that we have such a righteousness with which we are qualified to appear before God. The good news is that there is a righteousness prepared and approved by God through which those who believe will be saved—fully forgiven and even justified before the righteous God. This is the righteousness of God. This righteousness of God is the person of God in Christ given to us who believe. When we believe and receive the gospel, Christ is conveyed into us through faith.

**“Thou in Christ Hast Justified Us, /
Who Our Conscience Can Depress?”**

The hymn continues: “Thou in Christ hast justified us, / Who our conscience can depress.” The phrase *in Christ* introduces a thought of great magnitude: God has given Christ to us as our righteousness—our acceptance by God is safe and secure not only through the substitutionary death of His Son but in the person of the Son transmitted into us to become our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). Thus, God has given us Himself, embodied in Christ, as the righteousness that fully qualifies us before God according to God’s standard. In God’s economic move, Christ becomes our acceptance before God; not only is it impossible for us to establish our own righteousness, but now our own righteousness is unnecessary and irrelevant. Christ is our righteousness! Therefore, our conscience is clear, and we are able to come boldly into the Holy of Holies, where we may freely fellowship with God. The blood of Christ purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14). The Son has been made our righteousness; we boldly proclaim this with hearts and voices full of praise and thanksgiving.

**“Thou Hast Laid Our Sins on Jesus, /
By Thy Justice He Was Killed”**

God has fully satisfied the righteous demands of His own nature through exacting upon the Lord Jesus the penalty for our fallen, corrupted, and obdurate condition and nature; God made Christ sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21).

To fulfill God’s righteousness, the Lord Jesus was put to death. As He hung on the cross, God judged Him, executing on Him the penalty for all the sins of mankind for all time and space. Some may question: “How can God at the same time be fully righteous and yet without contradiction fully pardon, forgive, cleanse, and declare to be righteous sinners who have no possibility of establishing their own righteousness or of living blamelessly before a holy God?” The second stanza of this hymn addresses this question: “Thou hast laid our sins on Jesus, / By Thy justice He was killed; / All Thy holy law’s requirements / For Thy justice He fulfilled.” The mystery of God’s salvation is the incarnated and crucified Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The second stanza concludes: “Recompense from Him receiving, / Thou art fully satisfied; / How couldst Thou, O God most righteous, / Claim it once more from our side?”

The death of Jesus fully satisfied God’s just requirements according to His righteousness. God has accepted the crucifixion of Jesus under divine judgment as payment in full for the sins of the world. Since Christ has paid the price for our sins and God has fully accepted this payment for our redemption, God, according to His own righteousness, must justify us. Our justification is God’s free gift of grace without regard to our qualifications according to the requirements of the law. Clearly, we do not deserve God’s gift, but God is bound by His own righteousness to justify us. Every time God forgives those who are of the faith of Jesus (Rom. 3:26), He demonstrates again His righteousness. We stand with the absolute assurance that He will not demand our work to satisfy His requirement; He grants to us redemption and justification. The required ransom has been paid, and our full salvation, apart from works, is secured.

God’s full acceptance of Christ’s offering of Himself for our sins is affirmed in the third stanza. The proof of His acceptance of the sacrifice of the Son on behalf of all who believe is the fact that the Son is now seated at the right hand of the Father in ascension. Now God can never change His attitude toward us. We are justified in the Son as our Substitute. The hymn reminds God of this fact as the basis of our assurance before Him:

Father God, Thou hast accepted / Jesus as our Substitute; / Judged the Just One for the unjust, / Couldst Thou change Thy attitude? / As a proof of perfect justice, / At Thine own right hand He sits; / He, as Thy full satisfaction, / Righteously Thy need befits.”

**“Father, through the Blood of Jesus /
We Possess Thy Righteousness”**

The final stanza progresses beyond the application of redemption for acceptance before God. We are brought

to consider that in Christ we have now actually become the righteousness of God; as the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). When we see God's incredible act of grace bestowed on us, we can sing with joyful amazement, "Father, through the blood of Jesus / We possess Thy righteousness;" then, another line, "Righteousness of Thine Thou mad'st us, / None can ever us condemn."

Righteousness is shown to be an attribute of God that is communicable to His believers through an organic union of God with man in Christ. We have been made the righteousness of God! Righteousness is no longer merely something apart from us belonging to God and Christ that has been applied to us merely as an objective attribute by the action of God. We have seen that God is not only righteous, but He is righteousness itself. God does not simply convey His righteousness to us as something apart from Himself. Rather, Christ has now mingled Himself with us so that in Him we also have been made the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God remains a person; God in Christ has dispensed Himself into us believers to constitute us with Himself as righteousness, thus making us "the righteousness of God in Him."

As a young believer I was told that *justified* means "just-as-if-I'd never sinned." This definition is not wrong, but it fails to encompass the full significance of God's organic salvation. It is true that we have been absolutely and fully exonerated in Christ. Our conscience can be unconditionally

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clear before God and man—not because of our own efforts or our own righteousness but because of the much higher and the exceedingly superior righteousness of God Himself through the faith of Christ. Our desire is to always cooperate with Christ so that He may dwell in us and live out His righteousness in us through His divine dispensing. In Him and through Him, we are learning to live in the realm of the Spirit, in an organic oneness with the Triune God: "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit" (Rom. 8:4). This is the glorious testimony in which we live today and will forever testify in the New Jerusalem!

by Gary Kaiser

Works Cited

- Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry, 2003.
- . *Life-study of Romans*. Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry, 1984.

Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, witness being borne to it by the Law and the Prophets; even the righteousness of God through the **faith** of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no distinction" (Rom. 3:21-22).

faith: Or, faith in Jesus Christ. This faith refers to the faith of Jesus Christ in us, which has become the faith by which we believe in Him, as in v. 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; and Phil. 3:9.

Faith has an object, and it issues from its object. This object is Jesus, who is God incarnate. When man hears Him, knows Him, appreciates Him, and treasures Him, He causes faith to be generated in man, enabling man to believe in Him. Thus, He becomes the faith in man by which man believes in Him. Hence, this faith becomes the faith in Him, and it is also the faith that belongs to Him.

In God's New Testament economy, God desires that man believe in Jesus, who is God incarnate. If man does not believe in Him, he commits the unique sin before God (John 16:9). However, if man believes in Him, he is righteous to the uttermost before God, and God reckons this faith as his righteousness. At the same time, this faith brings its object, that is, this One who is God incarnate, into those who believe in Him. He is God's righteousness, and God has given Him as righteousness to those who are indwelt by Him (Jer. 23:6). All this is out of, and depends on, the faith that is in Him and of Him (Heb. 12:2).