

The Word of Righteousness

The Righteousness of God

God is righteous, and He is righteousness itself. Righteousness is an attribute of His being. Likewise, Christ, the person, is the righteous One (Acts 3:14), and by His one righteous act we are justified according to the standard of God's righteousness (Rom. 5:18), causing us, the redeemed ones, to become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). Now, having been clothed with Christ as our righteousness objectively, we are to present our members as weapons of righteousness to God for our sanctification (Rom. 6:13) by living out Christ as our righteousness subjectively. Concerning the righteous living and deeds of the disciples, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:20).

Watchman Nee notes, "Whether or not a person can be a proper Christian depends on whether he understands God's righteousness" (36: 195). As we shall see, the believers' being made righteous is of two aspects, or components. The first is based on the unique work of Christ on the cross and is offered to men as a free gift. The second is the issue of Christ's inward work in the believers and is a matter of exercise. The first is objective, historical, and legal; the second is subjective, present, and personal. The first deals with our position before God; the second deals with our disposition in our Christian life and work. The first issues in the salvation of the believers for their participation in Him for eternity, while the second determines their entrance into the kingdom in its reality in the present age and in its manifestation in the coming millennium. In this article we will present an overview of both aspects of the righteousness of God becoming the righteousness of the believers.

Jehovah, the Righteous One

The Old Testament declares many times that Jehovah is righteous (Deut. 32:4; Psa. 116:5; 129:4; Jer. 12:1). Ezra proclaims, "O Jehovah the God of Israel, You are righteous" (9:15). God Himself declares, "There is no other God besides Me; / A righteous God and Savior" (Isa. 45:21). Righteousness is a chief attribute of God and is manifest in His ways, procedures, methods, and actions. The psalmists declare, "Jehovah is righteous; He loves

righteous deeds" (Psa. 11:7); "Your right hand is full of righteousness" (48:10); "Your righteousness, O God, is so high" (71:19); "Jehovah is upright; / He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (92:15); "Jehovah executes righteous acts" (103:6); and "Jehovah our God is righteous in all His ways" (145:17). The prophets likewise say, "The ways of Jehovah are right, / And the righteous will walk in them" (Hosea 14:9). Those who remember God's deeds are able to "know the righteous acts of Jehovah" (Micah 6:5). "Jehovah our God is righteous in all the deeds that He has done" (Dan. 9:14). The heavens declare His righteousness (Psa. 50:6). This righteousness is eternal and endures forever (119:142; 111:3; 112:3, 9). Righteousness is an attribute of God's person; hence, He is the righteous One (2 Chron. 12:6; Lam. 1:18).

According to His divine nature, God in His ways, actions, and deeds is righteousness. The Hebrew word for *righteousness* can also be translated "right," "righteous deeds," "honest evidence," "integrity," and "judgment." It is often paired with *justice*; the two words denote a proper order and conduct among God's people resulting from God's action, in which His glory is found (Scullion 724-725, 727). Zephaniah says, "Jehovah is righteous in the midst of her; / He does no wrong; / Morning by morning He brings His justice to light" (3:5). Indeed, "righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Psa. 97:2; 89:14). God's righteousness and justice, two of the main attributes of His divine nature, are the foundation, the certain and solid ground, the "fixed or established place" (Brown 467) of God's throne. "This corresponds with the fact that the foundation of God's throne in the New Jerusalem is pure gold, signifying God's nature in the attributes of righteousness and justice" (Lee, Recovery Version, Psa. 89:14, note 1). Christ as the precious cornerstone is laid as the foundation of Zion with the line of justice and the plummet of righteousness (Isa. 28:16-17). When the Spirit is poured upon Israel from on high, justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field (32:15-16).

Righteousness is the condition of being right, whereas justice is righteousness with a judgment. Hence, righteousness is often mentioned with regard to God's judgments in His government and rule. The Psalms declare, "God is

a righteous Judge” (7:11); “The judgments of Jehovah are truth / And altogether righteous” (19:9); “You are righteous when You speak; / You are clear when You judge” (51:4); “I know, O Jehovah, that Your judgments are righteous” (119:75); and “You are righteous, O Jehovah; / And Your judgments are upright” (v. 137).

The Prophesied Christ as Our Righteousness

The Old Testament reveals Christ in many types, figures, shadows, and prophecies. The prophets’ speaking concerning Christ as the Servant and Shoot of Jehovah testifies of the saving righteousness of God. Isaiah tells us, “By the knowledge of Him, the righteous One, My Servant, will make the many righteous, / And He will bear their iniquities” (53:11). Likewise, Jeremiah proclaims,

Indeed, days are coming, / Declares Jehovah, / When I will raise up to David a righteous Shoot; / And He will reign as King and act prudently / And will execute justice and righteousness in the land. / In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness. (23:5-6)

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Witness Lee notes, “*Jehovah our righteousness* refers to Christ in His divinity, and a *righteous Shoot* (v. 5), to Christ in His humanity...Christ came as a Shoot who is Jehovah Himself to be the righteousness of God’s chosen people” (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 1). Moreover,

Christ is made our righteousness based on His redemption. As the righteous Shoot, Christ came in the flesh as the descendant of David to die on the cross and shed His blood in order to wash away our sins and accomplish redemption (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). With His redemption as the basis, we can believe into Him to receive God’s forgiveness (Acts 10:43), and God can justify us (Rom. 3:24, 26), make Christ our righteousness, and clothe us with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10). (Lee, Recovery Version, Jer. 23:6, note 2)

Zechariah 9:9 says, “Exult greatly, O daughter of Zion; / Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! / Now your King comes to you. / He is righteous and bears salvation, / Lowly and riding upon a donkey, / Even upon a colt, the foal of a

donkey.” In His first coming, the redeeming Christ came in a righteous way with salvation for God’s people, presenting Himself as a lowly, humble King, riding not on a majestic horse but on a donkey, even a colt of a donkey. This was fulfilled when Jesus Christ came into Jerusalem the last time (Matt. 21:1-11). Malachi 4:2 says, “Unto you who fear My name will the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” In His second coming, Christ will come as the healing of God’s people and of the nations.

The word *Sun* indicates life (cf. John 1:4), and the word *righteousness* indicates justice. The whole earth is filled with death and injustice, but with the healing Christ there is life and justice. Today we, the believers in Christ, enjoy Christ’s shining as the Sun of righteousness for our growth in the divine life in the dispelling of darkness, and also for our healing in life in the effacing of unrighteousness. Our hope, our expectation, is that Christ is coming as the Sun

of righteousness with healing in His wings to heal the nations from darkness and unrighteousness. (Lee, Recovery Version, Mal. 4:2, note 1)

Isaiah prophesies, “Indeed a King will reign according to righteousness, / And the rulers will rule according to justice” (Isa. 32:1). This will transpire in the coming age, which will

be ushered in by Christ’s second coming. At that time, by His appearing, Christ will bring in “the righteousness of the ages” (Dan. 9:24).

When Christ returns and the age is consummated, there will be no more unrighteousness on the earth...Beginning with the millennium there will be the eternal kingdom of Christ with His righteousness, which is the righteousness of the ages, the eternal righteousness. In the millennium Christ will be the righteous One (Jer. 23:5), and He will rule the thousand-year kingdom in righteousness (Isa. 11:4-5). Ultimately, in the age of the ages, righteousness will dwell in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (2 Pet. 3:13). (Lee, Recovery Version, Dan. 9:24, note 3)

In Isaiah 56:1 Jehovah declares, “Preserve justice and do righteousness, / For My salvation is about to come / And My righteousness is about to be revealed.” Witness Lee notes,

In its Old Testament usage, the word *justice* means the verdict of God’s judgment. Justice plus righteousness equals salvation. As the result of Christ’s death on the

cross for us, God's verdict concerning us, the believers in Christ, is the justice that causes us to be justified, to be made righteous (Rom. 3:24). This justice that makes us righteous is God's salvation coming to us. (Recovery Version, v. 1, note 1)

The Righteousness of God and of Christ

In the New Testament, the Greek words δίκαιος ("righteous"), δικαιοσύνη ("righteousness"), and their derivative forms occur two hundred thirty-three times, sixty-four times in Romans alone (Reumann 746-747). God the Father is righteous (John 17:25). The overcomers on the glassy sea sing, "Great and wonderful are Your works, Lord God the Almighty! Righteous and true are Your ways, O King of the nations!" (Rev. 15:3). Likewise, Christ the Son is the righteous One. Peter declared, "You denied the holy and righteous One and asked that a man who was a murderer be granted to you" (Acts 3:14; cf. 7:52; James 5:6). Paul testified also, "The God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth" (Acts 22:14). Paul quotes the psalmist concerning Christ: "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness" (Heb. 1:9; Ps. 45:7).

As One whose ways are righteous, God judges righteously (Rom. 1:32; 2:5; 2 Thes. 1:5). Paul again quotes the psalmist: "That You may be declared righteous in Your words and may overcome when You are judged" (Rom. 3:4; Ps. 51:4). The martyred saints testify, "Your righteous judgments have been manifested" (Rev. 15:4). The voices in heaven proclaim likewise, "You are righteous, who is and who was, the Holy One, because you have judged these things" (16:5, 7), and "True and righteous are His judgments" (19:2). In this light, Noah is called a "herald of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5).

Whether one is righteous and godly or unrighteous and ungodly is crucial in regard to God's governmental judgment (vv. 5-9). To be righteous is to be right with man before God, and to be godly is to express God before man. This was the manner of life that Noah and Lot lived, a manner of life that spared them from God's governmental judgment according to His righteousness. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 5, note 1)

In His human living, Christ fulfilled all righteousness (Matt. 3:15); that is, He was right by living, walking, and doing things in the way God had ordained. While suffering slander and opposition, He "did not threaten but kept committing all to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). As the One to whom all judgment has been given by God, Christ the Son judges righteously (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42). Paul declared to the Athenians, "He has set a day in which He is to judge the world in right-

eousness by the man [Christ] whom He has designated, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead" (17:31). As our Advocate with the Father, He is Jesus Christ the Righteous (1 John 2:1). In His second coming, Christ will be the righteous Judge: "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sits on it called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war" (Rev. 19:11). "Christ is faithful and true both to God and to His believers, and He is righteous to those who oppose and rebel against God. In righteousness He will defeat Antichrist and judge the rebels who follow him" (Lee, Recovery Version, Rev. 19:11, note 3).

The Righteousness of God in His Salvation

The concept of righteousness in the Old Testament (*tsedeq, tsedaqa*), beyond its strictly forensic, legal usage, carries the sense of a right order, a situation that is according to God's will, design, plan, way, and ordination. In such a right order God is expressed. Isaiah says, "Jehovah of hosts is exalted in judgment, / And the holy God shows Himself holy in righteousness" (5:16). God's righteousness is the base upon which His holiness is exhibited; that is, with His righteousness as the base, God shows Himself and is exalted as the holy God.

In this sense, a righteous action is one that either maintains or restores the right order. In the latter sense, that of restoration, the righteousness of God is salvific; thus, *tsedeq* and *tsedaqa* can be translated as "deliverance," "righteous help," "salvation," "saving help," "victory," and "vindication" (Scullion 724-725). God's righteousness is linked to the salvation that He renders, in His faithfulness, to His people in order to restore them to a right situation. The concept of righteousness as God's saving action on behalf of His people is found particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets (Reumann 748). The psalmists speak for Christ, proclaiming, "I have not hidden Your righteousness / Within My heart; / I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation" (Psa. 40:10); "Jehovah has made His salvation known; / In the sight of the nations / He has revealed His righteousness" (98:2). Jehovah declares, "I will bring My righteousness near—it is not far off; / And My salvation will not delay" (Isa. 46:13). Again He says, "My righteousness is near; My salvation has gone forth...My salvation will be forever, / And My righteousness will not be abolished...My righteousness will be forever, / And My salvation from generation to generation" (51:5-6, 8). Again He says, "Preserve justice and do righteousness, / For My salvation is about to come / And My righteousness is about to be revealed" (56:1). Concerning Christ in His kingdom, Jeremiah says, "In His days Judah will be saved, / And Israel will dwell securely; / And this is His name by which He will be called, / Jehovah our righteousness" (23:6). All these verses place salvation and righteousness in parallel.

The Righteousness of God in Expiation and Atonement

The righteousness of God is what God is with respect to justice and rightness, which is reflected in His way of acting and His characteristics of working. The justice of God, with its negative effect on sinful man, is seen from the beginning of the Bible. After man sinned and took death into him, God expelled him from the garden and cut him off from the tree of life. Genesis 3:24 says, “He drove the man out, and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned in every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.” “Cherubim signify God’s glory (cf. Ezek. 9:3; 10:4; Heb. 9:5), the flame signifies God’s holiness (Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29), and the sword for killing indicates God’s righteousness (cf. Lam. 3:42-43; Rom. 2:5)” (Lee, Recovery Version, Gen. 3:24, note 1), which is seen here as a slaying instrument wielded in every direction in a rapid, constant, and cutting way to execute divine wrath and judgment upon sin (Keil 107-108). Thus, God’s glory, holiness, and righteousness—the leading attributes of His person—testify against sinful man and keep him from partaking of God as life.

The cherubim are seen again in Exodus 25, in the construction of the Ark of the Testimony. Within the Ark was the tablet inscribed with the Testimony, the two tablets of the Ten Commandments (v. 16), testifying of the holy God and His righteous ways. God is love and light, and He is holy and righteous. The testimony of the Ten Commandments exposes man as unholy and unrighteous, showing the problem between man and God. Upon the Ark was a cover, over which were placed two cherubim of gold, constituting a base, or throne, upon which the glory of Jehovah appeared and from which He spoke (vv. 17-22; Num. 7:89; Brown 500). The cherubim testified of the glory of God, watching over and guarding the testimony of the law to ensure that God’s relationship and dealing with man was strictly according to His divine attributes. These golden figures—with outspread wings, face to face, and spanning the cover of the Ark from end to end—signify the cherubim that were stationed at the east of Eden to prevent the return of the first man to the garden after his expulsion (Keil 170). Thus, above the Ark were the guarding cherubim, and within the Ark was the law, both testifying that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

Because of the negative situation of God’s people, according to God’s concept and in His divine economy there is the need of redemption. Because the Old Testament time was not the time for redemption to take place, a type, a shadow, of the coming redemption was needed. This shadow is the expiation revealed in Leviticus 16. Verse 6 says, “Aaron shall present the bull of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make expiation

for himself and his household.” To expiate is to appease, to make reparation between two parties, to satisfy both parties and make them well disposed to one another. Through expiation God was appeased concerning man’s condition. The Hebrew word for *expiation* (*kipper*) is from the root signifying “cover.” Thus the cover, the lid, of the Ark of the Testimony was called the expiation cover (Heb. *kapporeth*). Verses 13 and 14 say,

[Aaron] shall put the incense upon the fire before Jehovah, that the cloud of the incense may cover the expiation cover that is over the Testimony, so that he does not die. And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger upon the expiation cover toward the east, and before the expiation cover he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

On the Day of Expiation (Heb. *Yom Kippur*) the blood of the sin offering was brought into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the expiation cover, signifying that the sin of the ones coming to contact God had been covered. Under the cover was the law, exposing and condemning the people as they approached God, and above the cover were the cherubim of glory, observing the situation between the people and God. As the blood of the expiation was sprinkled upon the cover, it satisfied the righteous requirements of God’s law and fulfilled the demands of His glory. Therefore, upon the expiation cover of the Ark, God could meet with man, speak to man, and fellowship with man in a lawful way without contradicting His righteousness or glory. It was in this place and in this way that God and man were made one; that is, man was atoned before God. To atone is “to set at one, bring into concord, reconcile, unite in harmony...to conciliate, propitiate, appease” (*OED* 135). The English word *atone* is derived from the phrase *set at one* and from the earlier form, *at onement*, and appears in use as early as Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament (135). Thus, *atone* is “at-one,” and *atonement* is “at-one-ment.” In type, sinful man was atoned upon the expiation cover of the Ark.

The Righteousness of God in the Propitiatory Sacrifice of Christ

The righteousness of God resulting in His salvation is developed fully in the New Testament. The expiation accomplished through the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament is a type pointing to the redemption accomplished by Christ in the New Testament. Paul writes,

Now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, witness borne to it by the Law and the Prophets...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. (Rom. 3:21, 24-26)

Witness Lee states,

Justification is God's action whereby He approves people according to His standard of righteousness. God can do this on the basis of the redemption of Christ...To redeem is to purchase back at a cost...We originally belonged to God but became lost through sin. The requirements of God's holiness, righteousness, and glory were so great that it was impossible for man to fulfill them. However, God paid the price for us through Christ, repossessing us at a tremendous cost. Christ died on the cross to redeem us (Gal. 3:13; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18); His blood obtained eternal redemption for us (1 Pet. 1:18-19). (Recovery Version, Rom. 3:24, notes 1 and 3)

The Old Testament word *kapporeth* ("expiation cover") is translated in the Septuagint as *ἱλαστήριον*, indicating the place of propitiation. Concerning the expiation cover of the Ark, Keil notes,

The ark of the covenant together with the *capporeth* became the throne of Jehovah in the midst of His chosen people...The ark, with the tables of the covenant as the self-attestation of God, formed the foundation of this throne, to show that the kingdom of grace which was established in Israel through the medium of the covenant, was founded in justice and righteousness...Thus the footstool of God became a throne of grace (Heb. iv. 16, cf. ix. 5), which received its name *capporeth* or *ἱλαστήριον* from the fact that the highest and most perfect act of atonement under the Old Testament was performed upon it. (169)

Paul also uses *ἱλαστήριον* in Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5, where it is translated as "propitiation place" and "expiation cover." In the Old Testament type, God could meet upon the sin-covering lid of the Ark with the people who broke His righteous law,

and He could do this without, governmentally, any contradiction to His righteousness, even under the observing of the cherubim that bore His glory and overshadowed the lid of the Ark. Thus, the problem between man and God was appeased, enabling God to forgive and be merciful to man and thereby to give His grace to man. (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 3:35, note 2)

In the Old Testament, however, the sins of the people were not taken away but were only covered with the blood of the animal sacrifices.

The situation of fallen man in relation to God was appeased but not fully settled, until Christ came to accomplish redemption by offering Himself as the propitiatory sacrifice to take away man's sin (Heb. 9:12; 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; John 1:29). (Lee, Recovery Version, Lev. 16:1, note 1)

The Old Testament sacrifices were a prefigure of Christ as the Lamb of God taking away the sin that caused man to have a problem with God (John 1:29). By His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood for redemption, He carried away all the sins that had been previously covered and passed over. In this way all the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory were satisfied, and the relationship between man and God was fully appeased. This is a full, completed redemption that solves the entire problem of sin. That Christ Himself is not only the *ἱλασμός*, the propitiatory sacrifice, but also the *ἱλαστήριον*, the propitiation place upon the Ark, indicates that the highest and most perfect act of atonement was carried out by Christ upon the foundation of God's justice and righteousness. Thus, the righteousness of God is fully manifested in Christ's redemption. God's forgiveness of our sins is righteous forgiveness, and our justification is right before God, before man's conscience, and before Satan, the accuser of the brothers (Rev. 12:10).

The Righteousness of God out of Faith to Faith

The economy of God in His salvation is revealed particularly in the Epistles of Paul, beginning from Romans, which Paul calls "my gospel" (2:16; 16:25). Paul writes, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, both to Jew first and to Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it" (1:16-17). Witness Lee notes,

The gospel...is powerful because the righteousness of God is revealed in it (1:17). According to John 3:16, salvation is out of God's love. According to Ephesians 2:8, salvation is by God's grace. But here Paul does not say that salvation is out of the love of God or by the grace of God; he says that it comes by the righteousness of God. (*Romans* 27)

God's love is the source and motive of His salvation, His grace is the means of His salvation, and His righteousness is the power of His salvation. Henry Alford adds,

Not only is the gospel the great example of divine Power; it is the *field of agency* of the power of God, working in it, and interpenetrating it throughout. The bare substantive *δύναμις* [power] here (and in 1 Cor. i. 24) carries a *superlative* sense: the *highest and holiest vehicle* of the divine Power...And the *direction in which* this power acts

in the gospel is εἰς σωτηρίαν [to salvation]—it is a *healing, saving power*. (2: 318-319)

Romans 1:17 tells us that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel “out of faith to faith, as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall have life and live by faith’” (cf. Hab. 2:4; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). “*Out of faith* indicates that faith is the source and the foundation of the revelation of God’s righteousness; *to faith* indicates that faith is the receiver and container that receives and retains God’s righteousness” (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 1:17, note 2). God’s righteousness is made visible to and laid hold of by those who have this faith. Thus, it is the “righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13), the “righteousness which is out of faith” (9:30; 10:6), the righteousness that is apprehended through believing (v. 10), and the “righteousness which is according to faith” (Heb. 11:7).

Paul goes on to say that the righteousness of God is manifested “through the faith of Jesus Christ” to all those who believe (Rom. 3:22). “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; Phil. 3:9” (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 3:22, note 1).

Faith in (or, of) Jesus Christ denotes an organic union with Him through believing.

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 within 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. (Note 1)

The righteousness of God is revealed out of faith, taking faith as the source of its revelation, and it is also revealed to faith as the container of God’s righteousness; that is, righteousness comes out of faith, and faith issues from righteousness. Peter writes, “Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted faith equally precious as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1).

Our God is righteous. Through His righteousness He has allotted the precious faith as a divine portion equally to all believers in Christ, both Jewish and Gentile, without

respect of persons. And now He is not only our God but also our Savior. Thus, His righteousness now is not the righteousness only of God nor only of Christ, but the righteousness of both our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. In that the Lord is our Savior, His righteousness is His righteous act, His death on the cross in absolute obedience (Phil. 2:8), by which He accomplished redemption for us (Heb. 9:12), enabling us to be justified by God (Rom. 5:18). In that the Lord is our God, His righteousness is His justice, since, based on the righteous act, the redemption of our Savior Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24-25), He justifies all the believers in Christ (Rom. 3:26), both Jewish and Gentile (Rom. 3:30). In and by such a twofold righteousness, the righteousness of both our God and our Savior, Jesus Christ, the precious faith, the precious substantiation of the New Testament blessing, has been allotted equally to all believers among all nations. (2 Pet. 1:1, note 9)

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS
REVEALED OUT OF FAITH, TAKING FAITH
AS THE SOURCE OF ITS REVELATION,
AND IT IS ALSO REVEALED
TO FAITH AS THE CONTAINER
OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The Righteousness of God Accounted through Faith

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 accounted as righteous

before God; that is, God reckons this faith as his righteousness. Accounted, or imputed, righteousness is a crucial component of Paul’s soteriology. It is through God’s reckoning, His accounting, that we are counted righteous before Him. Paul illustrates accounted faith with the record of Abraham: “Abraham believed God, and is was accounted to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). Concerning *account*, Joseph Thayer notes that it is “a favorite word with the apostle Paul, being used (exclusive of quotations) some 27 times in his Epp., and only four times in the rest of the N. T.” (379). It is “to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over”; hence, “to take into account, to make account of...to pass to one’s account, to impute...A thing is reckoned as or to be something, i.e., as availing for or equivalent to something, as having the like force and weight” (379). “Faith sets one right with God, and it is God who reckons this internal act to Abraham as *tsedaga* [righteousness]” (Scullion 727).

Paul continues in Romans 4,

To the one who does not work, but believes on Him who

justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted as righteousness. Even as David also speaks blessing on the man to whom God accounts righteousness apart from works... Faith was accounted to Abraham as righteousness. (vv. 5-6, 9, 22)

Moreover, Abraham “received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all those in uncircumcision who believe, that righteousness might be accounted to them also” (Rom. 4:11). Through the redeeming death of Christ, all who believe in Him are counted righteous with God’s own righteousness. Therefore, our righteous standing before God is steadfast and firm. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

God is faithful in His word (v. 10) and righteous in the blood of Jesus His Son (v. 7). His word is the word of the truth of the gospel (Eph. 1:13), which tells us that He will forgive us our sins because of Christ (Acts 10:43); and the blood of Christ has fulfilled His righteous requirements that He might forgive us our sins (Matt. 26:28). If we confess our sins, He, according to His word and based on the redemption through the blood of Jesus, forgives us because He must be faithful in His word and righteous in the blood of Jesus; otherwise, He would be unfaithful and unrighteous. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1 John 1:9, note 2)

Christ died on the cross so that we might obtain the righteousness of God. God has put His righteousness upon us, just as the father put the best robe on the prodigal son who returned (Luke 15:22). Indeed, God has clothed us with the garments of salvation and wrapped us with the robe of Christ as our God-satisfying righteousness (Isa. 61:10).

The Subjective Result of Objective Righteousness

The righteousness imputed to believers for their justification through faith in Christ is legal and forensic. It does not originate with man, and it is apart from any work, action, or condition of man (Rom. 3:21; 10:4; Gal. 2:21; 3:11). “*Justificatio* must be taken as the old protestant dogmatists rightly took it, *sensu forensi* [in the forensic sense], i.e. *imputatively*” (Alford 2: 319). It is the judgment and pronouncement of God declared upon men, as Kenneth Wuest says, a “divine fiat” (25). However, the righteousness of God manifested in justification is not only juristic but also participatory (Reumann 759). Paul says, “So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men” (Rom. 5:18). Justification is of and unto life, the divine life, the eternal life of God that is God Himself in Christ (John 1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 14:6; 1 John 1:2;

5:11-12). Justification is not an end in itself; rather, life is the goal of God’s salvation. Through justification we have come up to the standard of God’s righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can impart His life to us.

In Romans 1:17 Paul draws from Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous shall have life and live by faith.” The verb here in the future tense is the same as in John 11:25: “Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live.” Here *live* does not denote merely to have the continuation of the human life. Rather, it is in the context of Jesus’ self-declaration as the divine, eternal life embodied in the person of Christ. Hence, to live is to possess Christ, who is our life (Col. 3:4). “Christ IS personally Himself that life, and we possess it only by union with Him and His resurrection” (Alford 3: 232). The righteous not only live by faith but also have life, the divine life, by this faith.

We further see the subjective issue of objective righteousness in 1 Corinthians 1:30. Paul says, “Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” “On the one hand, we have to know that Christ is our objective Justifier, Sanctifier, and Redeemer, but on the other hand, we have to go on to know that Christ is our subjective righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” (Nee 45: 1036). Christ became wisdom to us from God as our righteousness, by which we have been justified by God, that we might be reborn in our spirit to receive the divine life. Paul attests that the righteousness we received in justification is not merely a judicial decree but the person of Christ Himself.

Paul also says, “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). Sin came from Satan, who rebelled against God. This sin entered into man, making man not only a sinner but sin itself under God’s judgment. Hence, when Christ became a man in the flesh, He was made sin on our behalf to be judged by God (Rom. 8:3) that we might become God’s righteousness in Him. This righteousness is Christ Himself as our righteousness.

Through Christ’s redemption, man, who is a sinner and is even sin, is made God’s righteousness. This is similar to Paul’s word in Romans 5: “Just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous” (v. 19).

Whether we are sinners or are righteous depends not on our actions but on our inward constitution. Through his fall, Adam received...the sinful satanic nature, which became the constituting essence and main element of fallen man...

In contrast, Christ constitutes us righteous. When He, the living God, comes into our being as grace, we are constituted righteous. He becomes the constituting essence and element in us. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1)

As a spontaneous issue of the life we have received through justification, we can present ourselves as alive from the dead and our members as weapons of righteousness to God, as slaves for obedience to righteousness unto sanctification (6:13, 16, 18-19).

Righteousness ushers us into sanctification. If we present ourselves as slaves to righteousness and our members as weapons of righteousness, Christ as the eternal life within us will have the ground to work in us and saturate our inward parts with Himself. Thus we will be sanctified spontaneously; we will be made holy spontaneously in our inward parts by Christ's saturating. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 19, note 1)

Christ is not only the propitiatory sacrifice for us and the propitiation place, but He is also our subjective faith, our indwelling life, and our living and constituting righteousness. To Paul, the righteousness of God for our justification is to be received not only in the *sensu forensi*, the objective and legal sense, but further, Christ Himself, the living person, becomes righteousness to us through a mystical, organic union in which He becomes our constituting element and essence. This is why righteousness, in Paul's view, is "unto justification of life" (5:18), spontaneously issuing in a living and practical sanctification. It is by this subjective issue of objective righteousness that we share in God's attributes and partake of His divine and holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

The Practical Righteousness of the Kingdom of the Heavens

Christ as subjective righteousness lived out of the believers is seen most clearly in the Gospel of Matthew. After Romans, *righteous* and its derivatives occur more times in Matthew and Luke than in any other New Testament book (Reumann 747). Matthew's view of Christ and His ministry is focused on "the kingdom of the heavens" (e.g., Matt. 3:2; 5:3, 10, 19-20), a term used exclusively in this Gospel. In this book the gospel is called the "gospel of the kingdom" (24:14). It includes not only the forgiveness of sins and the imparting of life but also the kingdom of the heavens.

The kingdom of God is God's general reign from eternity past to eternity future. It comprises eternity without beginning..., the chosen patriarchs..., the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the church in the New Testament, the coming millennial kingdom..., and the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem in eternity without end. The kingdom of the heavens is a specific section

within the kingdom of God, a section composed only of the church today and the heavenly part of the coming millennial kingdom...In the Old Testament the kingdom of God, generally, already existed with the nation of Israel (21:43); the kingdom of the heavens, specifically, had still not come, and it only drew near when John the Baptist came (3:1-2; 11:11-12). (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 5:3, note 4)

It was not fully established until the day of Pentecost, when the church was formed. Subjective, lived-out righteousness is a key component of the kingdom of the heavens.

The practical righteousness that is emphasized in Matthew, as a book on the kingdom of the heavens, differs from the legal, forensic, objective, and positional righteousness found in Romans 3 and 4. In justification, it is God's righteousness that is revealed. In Matthew, it is the subjective, present, and dispositional righteousness of the believers that is in view. This is seen most clearly in Matthew 5 through 7, which may be considered as the "constitution" of the kingdom of the heavens (Lee, *Matthew* 161-162).

According to Matthew, there are three aspects concerning the kingdom of the heavens: the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the inward content of the kingdom of the heavens in its heavenly and spiritual nature, as revealed by the new King on the mountain in chs. 5—7. The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is the outward state of the kingdom in name, as revealed by the King on the seashore in ch. 13. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens is the practical coming of the kingdom of the heavens in power, as unveiled by the King on the Mount of Olives in chs. 24—25...The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly part of the coming millennial kingdom,...in which the overcoming believers will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6). (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 5:3, note 4)

It is the kingdom of the heavens in its reality that the believers seek today, and it is the kingdom of the heavens in its manifestation that will be given to the faithful seekers as a reward in the coming age.

The Surpassing Righteousness of the Kingdom of the Heavens

In Matthew 5 through 7 we see a revelation of the spiritual living and heavenly principles of the kingdom of the heavens, which is a matter of practical, subjective, lived-out righteousness. The emphasis of these chapters is strongly on "your righteousness" (5:20; 6:1), that is, the righteous deeds and living of the believers. Verses 1 through 12 of chapter 5 speak of nine aspects of the nature of the

people of the kingdom of the heavens. The people of the kingdom are poor in spirit, mourning for the present situation, meek in suffering opposition, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful toward others, pure in heart, making peace with all men, suffering persecution for righteousness, and suffering by being reproached and evilly spoken of because of the Lord.

Verse 6 says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied,” and verse 10 continues, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.” Righteousness here denotes our being right in our behavior as the expression of our inward being. The kingdom people need to hunger and thirst for this righteousness and seek after it, that they may enter into the kingdom of the heavens. In order to be born anew and to see the kingdom of God, in a general way, it is sufficient that we receive imputed righteousness through believing in the Lord Jesus (John 3:3). To enter into the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, however, we must hunger and thirst for righteousness in our behavior. Matthew 5:12 says, “Rejoice and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens.” The concept of reward is consistent with Matthew’s emphasis on practical righteousness. If we hunger and thirst for the highest righteousness and seek after it even under persecution, God will grant us to be satisfied with the very righteousness that we seek. In this way we will enter into the kingdom of the heavens today and will be rewarded with its manifestation in the coming age.

Verses 13 through 16 speak of the influence of the kingdom people, which issues from their heavenly nature. The people of the kingdom are the salt of the earth to kill and eliminate the germs of corruption from the earth, and they are the light of the world to enlighten the people in darkness. In verse 16 Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.” The shining of the kingdom people is manifested in their works, which are “beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy; morally good, noble” (Thayer 322). Through such works men can see God and be brought to Him.

Verses 17 through 48 concern the law of the people of the kingdom. This section is particularly important toward the understanding of the Lord’s teaching on the mount. In verse 17 Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

For Christ to fulfill the law means (1) that, on the positive side, He kept the law, (2) that on the negative side, through His substitutionary death on the cross He fulfilled the requirement of the law, and (3) that in this section He complemented the old law with His new law, as

repeatedly expressed by the word “But I say to (or tell) you” (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). (Lee, Recovery Version, note 2)

The Surpassing Righteousness in the Resurrection Life of Christ

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (v. 17). Christ’s keeping of the law qualified Him to fulfill the requirement of the law through His substitutionary death on the cross. After dying to terminate the law so that He may replace it (Rom. 10:4), Christ resurrected, and in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Now as the Spirit, the law-keeping Christ indwells the believers to be their life, bringing the reality of His resurrection into them (Rom. 8:9-11; Col. 3:4; John 11:25). As the people of the kingdom of the heavens, the New Testament believers must take Christ as life and live by Him so that all He is and has attained and obtained will not remain objective but will become their subjective experience for their living a life of surpassing righteousness.

It is the resurrection life of Christ that complements the law, filling the law to the full. The old law, the lower law, with the demand that it be kept and the requirement that man be punished for not fulfilling it, is over. The kingdom people now need to fulfill only the new law, the higher law, by the resurrection life. This life is much higher than the natural life, for it is the divine life, the eternal life, the life on the highest plane. By the resurrection life within us, we are able to be kept not only from murdering others but also from being angry with them, not only from the outward act of adultery but also from the lustful motive of the heart (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28). The resurrection life of Christ as the highest life can fulfill the requirements of the highest law. It is in this light that we can see that the decree of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens with its demand for the highest righteousness is altogether consistent with and a part of God’s New Testament economy for the church.

The people of the kingdom of the heavens do not strive to keep the old law, the lower law. Rather, they keep the uplifted, higher law through the highest life that is in them. Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (v. 20).

Righteousness here does not refer only to objective righteousness, which is the Christ whom we receive when we believe into Him and are thus justified before God...; it refers even more to subjective righteousness, which is the indwelling Christ lived out of us as our righteousness that we may live in the reality of the kingdom today and enter

into its manifestation in the future. This subjective righteousness is obtained not by merely the fulfilling of the old law, but by the complementing of the old law through the fulfilling of the new law of the kingdom of the heavens... This righteousness..., which is according to the new law of the kingdom, surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, which is according to the old law. It is impossible for our natural life to gain this surpassing righteousness; it can be produced only by a higher life, the resurrection life of Christ...

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of letters, which they practiced by their own natural life according to the old law of letters; the surpassing righteousness of the kingdom people is the righteousness of life, which they live out by taking Christ as their life according to the new law of life. Both in nature and in standard, the righteousness of life far surpasses the lifeless righteousness practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1)

Moreover, this surpassing righteousness is the condition of entering into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the millennium. By keeping the highest law to the highest standard, the kingdom people fulfill the requirement for entering into the coming manifestation of the kingdom.

Jesus told His disciples, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 5:44-45). "The title *sons of your Father* is a strong proof that the kingdom people, who are the audience here for the new King's decree on the mountain, are the regenerated believers of the New Testament" (Lee, Recovery Version, Matt. 5:45, note 1), whose God is their Father by the new birth. By virtue of the divine life that they have received, the believers in the church can call God their Father and Christ, the firstborn Son of God, their Brother (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:12). At the conclusion of Matthew 5, Jesus said, "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 48). According to the context, this is to be perfect in the Father's love. The disciples are the Father's children; they have the Father's divine life and divine nature. With the Father's perfect life, they can be perfect as their Father is.

The higher demand [of the new law of the kingdom] can

be met only by the Father's divine life, not by man's natural life. The kingdom of the heavens is the highest demand, and the divine life of the Father is the highest supply to meet that demand... The demand of the new law in chs. 5—7 is actually the expression of the new life, the divine life, which is within the regenerated kingdom people. This demand opens up the inner being of the regenerated people, showing them that they are able to attain to such a high level and to have such a high living (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1).

The Surpassing Righteousness for an Approved Life and Work

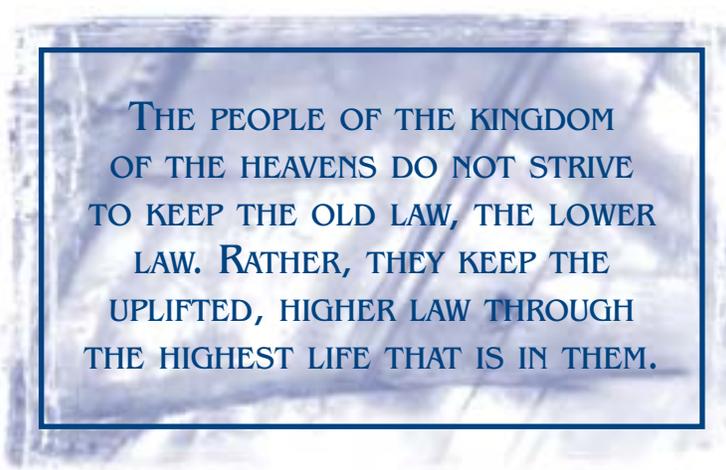
In Matthew 6, verses 1 through 18 concern the righteous deeds of the kingdom people, particularly with regard to giving and fasting in secret and praying in private according to the Father's name, kingdom, will, and glory. Verse 1

says, "Take care not to do your righteousness before men in order to be gazed at by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens." Again Jesus reminded the disciples that God is not only their God but also their Father. Thus, they have not only the created, natural human life but also the uncreated, spiritual divine life. The

new law of the kingdom was being given to them with the intention that they should keep it not by their fallen human life but by the eternal, divine, and hidden life of the Father, not to gain man's glory but to receive the Father's reward.

Verses 19 through 34 are concerning the material riches of the kingdom people. Verse 33 says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Reumann states that, strictly speaking, this is the only mention of righteousness in Matthew that refers to God's righteousness and not that of His believers (755). However, Henry Alford discerns the sense of the word that is more suitable to the context of Matthew. He notes,

Not here *the forensic righteousness of justification*, but the *spiritual purity* inculcated in this discourse. τὴν δικ. αὐτοῦ [His righteousness] answers τὴ τελειότης αὐτοῦ [His perfection], spoken of in ch. v. 48, and is another reference to the being as our Heavenly Father is. In the Christian life which has been since unfolded, the righteousness of justification is a *necessary condition* of



likeness to God; but it is not the δικ. αὐτ. [His righteousness] *here* meant. (1: 68-69)

Witness Lee expands this understanding, stating,

The Father's righteousness is the righteousness expressed by the keeping of the new law of the kingdom as mentioned in 5:20. This righteousness is Christ, who is lived out by the kingdom people. Since the kingdom people seek first the kingdom and the righteousness of their heavenly Father, not only will His kingdom and His righteousness be given to them, but also all that they need will be added to them. (Lee, Recovery Version, 6:33, note 1)

Verses 1 through 12 of chapter 7 concern the principles of the kingdom people in dealing with others. As those who live in a humble spirit under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, the believers must care for others in whatever they do. To this end they must ask of the heavenly Father by praying in a general way, seek by supplicating in a specific way, and knock at the heavenly door by demanding in the most intimate and most earnest way, for the Father will give good things to those who ask Him. This corresponds to the believers' seeking the kingdom and God's righteousness in 6:33. Because the Father cares for and supplies His seekers, the kingdom people are well able to fulfill the new law of the kingdom and live in the kingdom's reality that they may enter into its manifestation.

Last, verses 13 through 29 of chapter 7 concern the ground of the kingdom people's living and work. Jesus said, "Enter in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter through it. Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way that leads to life, and few are those who find it" (vv. 13-14). "The gate [of the kingdom] is narrow and the way is constricted because the new law of the kingdom is stricter and the demand of the kingdom higher than the law and the demand of the old covenant" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1).

This word of the Lord is the conclusion of all His foregoing speaking. The narrow gate deals not only with outward conduct but also with inward motive, as brought to light by the new law of the kingdom. Moreover, the old man, the self, and the flesh are terminated, as required by the kingdom people's dealing with righteous deeds, and the world with all its glory is excluded, as indicated by their dealing with material riches. Correspondence with God's will is the necessary condition for entering in the narrow gate and constricted way that lead to life, the ever-blessed condition of the kingdom, which is filled with the eternal life of God. This life is in the reality of the kingdom today and will be in the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age (19:29; Luke 18:30). As the

issue of entering through the narrow gate and walking on the constricted way, the believers have an approved living and work that is founded on the wise word of Christ for the accomplishing of the will of the heavenly Father, as denoted by the house built upon the rock, which was able to endure the testing of the rain, the rivers, and the wind (Matt. 7:24-27).

We must be deeply impressed with the fact that the Lord Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5 through 7, as the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens, is based upon the divine life and nature of the kingdom people. The basic concept of this constitution is that the people of the kingdom should be righteously strict with themselves, mercifully kind toward others, and secretly pure toward God. In order to be those who fulfill the requirements of this constitution, we must be regenerated to possess the life and nature of the heavenly Father, and we must live according to the spiritual, heavenly, and divine life and nature within us. As a consequence, our life and work will be known, that is, acknowledged and approved, by the Lord at His judgment seat in "that day" (7:22-23; 25:12; 2 Cor. 5:10). First Corinthians 3:12 through 15 says,

If anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

In principle, the fire of God's judgment in verse 13 corresponds to the rain, the rivers, and the winds that test the living and work of the kingdom people in Matthew 7:25 and 27. The work that remains will be rewarded by the coming and judging Lord, but the work that burns He will not acknowledge, and the one whose work is denied will suffer loss before Him.

The Righteousness of the Believers in the Epistles

The teachings of Jesus in the Gospels concerning righteousness do not differ in any dispensationally significant way from what was written after His resurrection. This is fully testified by many passages in the Epistles that speak of the subjective righteousness of the believers. In Romans Paul says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17).

Righteousness denotes that which is right and proper. Those who live in the kingdom of God should be right and proper toward others, toward things, and toward God; with them there should be nothing erroneous,

improper, crooked, slanted, or biased. This requires that they be strict in dealing with themselves. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 17, note 2)

In 2 Corinthians Paul says, “In everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God,...through the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left” (6:4, 7). “The apostles’ life for their ministry was a life in the battle, fighting for God’s kingdom. Weapons of righteousness are used for fighting that we may be right with God and men according to the righteousness of God” (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1). Paul also says, “Now He who bountifully supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and cause the fruits of your righteousness to increase” (9:10). Righteousness here refers to the Corinthians’ giving of what they had to meet the needs of others. Generous giving is not only a blessing to the receivers but also righteousness in the eyes of both God and man.

In Ephesians Paul says, “Put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality” (4:24). Here “righteousness is to be right with God and with man according to God’s righteous way, while holiness is godliness and devoutness before God” (Lee, Recovery Version, note 4). Outwardly everything related to the church as the new man is righteous, and inwardly everything related to the new man is holy. In chapter 5 Paul continues, “The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (v. 9). “Goodness is the nature of the fruit of the light; righteousness is the way or procedure to produce the fruit of the light; and the truth is the reality, the real expression of the fruit of the light” (Lee, *Ephesians* 426-427).

In Philippians Paul says, “Being filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (1:11; cf. Heb. 12:11; James 3:18). “The fruit of righteousness is the living product of the believers’ living a proper life by the element of righteousness, with a righteous standing before God and man” (Lee, Recovery Version, Phil. 1:11, note 1). This fruit is “the whole purified moral habit of the regenerate and justified man” (Alford 3: 157). “Such a life can be lived not by the believers’ natural man for their boast but through Jesus Christ as the believers’ life, experienced by them to the glory and praise to God” (Lee, Recovery Version, Phil. 1:11, note 1). In Philippians 3:9 Paul speaks of being “found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith.” Righteousness here is not simply the objective righteousness of God. It is the righteousness that is God Himself lived out of us to be our righteousness through our faith in Christ. Such righteousness is the practical expression of God, who lives in us.

To the Thessalonians Paul says, “You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe” (1 Thes. 2:10). Here Paul speaks of the conduct that the apostles maintained with the young believers through strict self-control. “*Holy* refers to conduct toward God, *righteous* to conduct toward men, and *blameless* to conduct toward all—God, men, and Satan” (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1).

To Timothy Paul writes, “You, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness” (1 Tim. 6:11). To have righteousness is to be right with others before God according to His righteous and strict requirements. In order to carry out God’s economy (1:4) for the building up of the churches as the expression of Christ, the laboring believers must pursue righteousness, that is, seek to be right with God and man. Later, Paul exhorts, “Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22). As part of Paul’s inoculation of Timothy against the decline of the church, Paul charged him to avoid not only outward corruption but also inward lusts and to pursue righteousness. *Pursue* is stronger than *follow* in the King James Version. It is a “favourite word with Paul to denote the pursuit of moral and spiritual ends” (Vincent 307). “Righteousness is toward oneself, faith is toward God, and love is toward others; peace is the issue of these three virtues” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 22, note 2). For the antidote of the inoculation, Paul says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (3:16). Instruction in righteousness is discipline or chastisement according to righteousness and by the element and condition of righteousness (Lee, *Timothy* 51).

In 4:1 Paul provides an incentive for Timothy’s inoculation against the decline of the church, saying, “I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.” “The Lord’s appearing will be for judgment, to reward each one [according to his work] (Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12), and His kingdom will be for His reigning with His overcomers (Rev. 20:4, 6)” (Lee, Recovery Version, 2 Tim. 4:1, note 2). It is a matter of great significance to be charged by the Lord’s appearing and kingdom. Paul testifies, “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing” (v. 8).

The crown is a symbol of glory given as a prize, in addition to the Lord’s salvation, to the triumphant runner of the race (v. 7; 1 Cor. 9:25). This prize is neither of grace nor by faith as salvation is (Eph. 2:5, 8-9), but of righteousness through works...Such a reward will be awarded

the believers not according to the grace of the Lord but according to His righteousness. Hence, it is the crown of righteousness. The One who awards it is the Lord as the righteous Judge, not as the merciful God or the gracious Redeemer. (Lee, *Timothy* 62)

Paul tells Titus that an overseer must be a lover of good, of a sober mind, righteous, holy, and self-controlled (Titus 1:8) and that the grace of God has appeared to train us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age (2:11-12). In Hebrews he says, "Everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant" (5:13).

Milk in verse 12 refers to the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God, and *the word of righteousness* in verse 14 refers to solid food. The latter is deeper than the former "because it embodies the deeper thought of God's justice and righteousness in His dispensational and governmental dealings with His people." (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1)

Peter, writing on the Christian life under the government of God, has much to say concerning the practical righteousness of the believers. In 1 Peter 2:24 he says, "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose bruise you were healed." "Righteousness is a matter of God's government. We were saved so that we might live rightly under the government of God, that is, in a way that matches the righteous requirements of His government" (Lee, Recovery Version, note 5). Peter also tells us that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous (3:12) and that if a believer suffers because of righteousness, he is blessed (v. 14). Peter also speaks of the righteous man who is saved only with difficulty (4:18) and of the practical righteousness of Noah and Lot (2 Pet. 2:5, 7-8). In verse 21 Peter mentions the way of righteousness.

To take the way of righteousness is to live a life that is right with both God and man...This is the way of living a life according to God's righteousness, a way that can receive His governmental judgment...for His kingdom of righteousness. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1)

Eventually Peter says, "According to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (3:13).

Righteousness is the main factor based on which God's governmental judgment is meted out to all creatures in His old creation. Hence, [in Peter's two Epistles] concerning God's government, this matter is stressed repeatedly...The main matter...in Peter's writings [is] the righteousness of God maintained in His government...This righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and new

earth, saturating God's new universe prevailingly and thus maintaining it absolutely under God's righteous order, so that no further judgment will ever be needed. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 3)

John writes, "If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness also has been begotten of Him" (1 John 2:29). To practice righteousness

is not to do righteousness occasionally and purposely as some particular act but to practice righteousness habitually and unintentionally as a common daily living...This is a spontaneous living that issues from the divine life within us, with which we have been begotten of the righteous God. Hence, it is a living expression of God, who is righteous in all His deeds and acts. It is not just an outward behavior but the manifestation of the inner life; not just an act of purpose but the flow of life from within the divine nature, of which we partake (Lee, Recovery Version, note 6).

Fulfilling the Righteous Requirements of the Law

Romans 8 is crucial for the understanding of the practical, subjective, lived-out righteousness of the believers. Verses 1 through 4 say,

There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death. For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, 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.

Paul's experience of law-keeping in the flesh, as laid out in chapter 7, resulted in failure, wretchedness, and the subjective, inner condemnation of his conscience. As for objective condemnation under God's righteous law, the righteous act of Christ in the shedding of His blood is the remedy (5:16, 18; 3:25). For the subjective condemnation of the conscience, however, the remedy is the Spirit of life.

In the flesh nothing good dwells; only sin dwells in the flesh (7:17-18). Because of the weakness and utter impotence of the flesh, the righteous law of God, lacking the power of life to supply man to meet its demands, was unable to work out genuine righteousness within man's subjective being. However, God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin to condemn sin in the flesh (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:14). Moreover, in resurrection the Son was transfigured to be the life-giving Spirit who, through regeneration, has entered into and now indwells our

human spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:10, 16). As a result, those who set their mind on the spirit (v. 6) and walk according to the spirit fulfill the law with all its righteous requirements. This is not a conscious law-keeping through outward endeavor but a spontaneous and unconscious fulfilling by the inward working of the Spirit of life.

Walk denotes the general walk in our living. The requirements that we must fulfill in order that the law of the Spirit of life may work are that we walk according to the spirit, set our mind on the spirit, put to death by the Spirit the practices of the body, be led by the Spirit, cry to the Father in the spirit of sonship, witness that we are children of God, and groan in the spirit for the full sonship, the redemption of our body (vv. 4, 6, 13-15, 23) (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 8:4, note 2). As we fulfill these new, living, and spiritual requirements, it is no longer necessary to strive to fulfill the old requirements of the old law. Instead, the life of the Spirit functions as a spontaneous, inner, and organic law to deliver us from the working of the law of sin in our flesh and to enable us to know God, gain God, and thereby live Him out.

Jesus told His disciples, “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 5:20). If this is regarded as the “thematic verse” of Jesus’ teaching on the mount in Matthew 5 through 7 (Reumann 751), Romans 8:4 may be considered Paul’s thematic response to the demands of the new law and his principle for carrying out the surpassing righteousness required by the higher standards of the kingdom. By the spontaneous function and power of the Spirit of life, we fulfill all the requirements not only of the old law but also of the new law of the kingdom of the heavens with its highest morality. In response to Christ’s call for surpassing righteousness (Matt. 5:20), Paul speaks of walking according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). In response to Christ’s demand that we be perfect, Paul speaks of living Christ (Phil. 1:21). These two voices complement and complete each other, and in one accord they proclaim God’s New Testament economy. The righteous living of God’s New Testament economy is the subjective, applied living out of Christ, who, as our righteousness, dwells in our spirit and, as the spontaneous law of life, conforms us to His own image.

The Righteousnesses of the Saints

Revelation 19:7 and 8 say, “Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints.” *Righteousnesses*, in plural, is a particular and meaningful term, indicating righteous acts. It does not refer to the righteousness that we received for our salvation, which is objective and enables us to meet the requirement of the righteousness of God for our justification. The righteousnesses of the overcoming saints are subjective and enable them to meet the requirement of the overcoming Christ at His coming. Hence, it is the wedding garment of the overcomers, qualifying them to enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Verse 9 says, “Blessed are they who are called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb.”

The marriage dinner of the Lamb here is the wedding feast in Matt. 22:2. It will be a reward to the overcoming believers. Only the overcomers will be called to it; not all the saved ones will participate in it. The five foolish virgins in Matt.

25:8-13 will miss the wedding feast. However, after being dealt with by the Lord in the kingdom age, they will participate in the New Jerusalem for eternity. Hence, to be called to the marriage dinner of Christ, which will usher the overcoming believers into the enjoyment of the millennium, is to be blessed. (Lee, Recovery Version, note 1)

Psalm 45 is a psalm of love between the King and his bride, typifying the union in marriage of Christ in His fairness, victory, kingdom, and virtues (vv. 2-8; cf. Heb. 1:8-9) with the church as His bride in her beauty, glory, and honor (Psa. 45:9-14). Verses 13 and 14 say,

The king’s daughter is all glorious within the royal abode; / Her garment is a woven work inwrought with gold. / She will be led to the King in embroidered clothing; / The virgins behind her, her companions, / Will be brought to You.

“The king’s daughter is the queen, signifying the church, and her being all glorious within the royal abode is a

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picture of the glorious church (Eph. 5:27), which takes Christ as her royal abode” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 13, note 1). The bride’s raiment is described in two ways, first as a woven work inwrought with gold and then as embroidered clothing. The woven garment is a checkered or plaited work, whereas the embroidered clothing is ornamented with variegated embellishments (Brown 990, 955). Concerning the two types of garments, John Phillips writes,

In the Bible clothing is used symbolically to describe righteousness and character. This is especially true of linen. There is white linen, the righteousness of Christ, and white linen, the righteousness of saints. There is the righteousness that is *brought to us*...

But there is more to it than that; there is the righteousness that is *wrought in us*. The Holy Spirit goes to work on us to make us like Jesus—that’s the raiment of needlework, the embroidery, so to speak, the beautification of our lives and characters by the working of the Spirit of God in us. (44-45)

The woven garment signifies the Christ who was dealt with through many sufferings and through death and resurrection to become the righteousness of the church to meet the righteous requirement of God that the church may be justified before Him. This Christ, who is our objective righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30; Luke 15:22; Isa. 61:10) is the first layer of covering for the believers (Lee, Recovery Version, Psa. 45:13, note 2). That the bride wears a second garment, the embroidered clothing, signifies that the church will be led to Christ the King clothed with the righteousnesses of the saints to meet the requirement of Christ for their marriage. This is the Christ who is “embroidered” into us by the transforming work of the Spirit and lived out of us as our subjective righteousness, which is for our victory. The first garment is put upon us that we may stand in the presence of God, whereas the second garment is embroidered into our being that we may stand before Christ the King at His marriage (v. 14, note 1). This embroidered garment corresponds to the fine linen of the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 19. This is the surpassing righteousness of the overcoming believers, the subjective righteousness lived out through them as their qualification to enjoy the wedding feast with Christ.

The truth concerning the historical righteousness of Christ, with justification as its result, has become the common portion and possession of Christians throughout the earth, especially in the centuries following the Reformation. However, the full truth concerning the lived-out righteousness of Christ in the overcoming believers has not yet been grasped by Christians as a whole. This truth is the subjective, mystical, and inward aspect of the

righteousness of God. It is a matter of the indwelling Christ in the regenerated spirit of the believers, the Christ who seeks to work Himself metabolically and organically into their entire being, thus living His life through them as their surpassing righteousness to meet the highest demands of the kingdom of the heavens and to qualify them for His marriage feast, in which they, the righteous ones, will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43).

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