

GOD!  
Message 17  
Romans 3:21-26

INTRO: God! The God of the Bible! The only true God, that is our subject. Let your mind dwell on Him and it will meet a new challenge at every turn of thought. Never will it dwell on a greater subject, not even in eternity! In these messages we have looked at a number of impersonal attributes of God and we are in the process at looking at the major personal attributes. We considered that God is a Person, as we are persons and I think therein lies the image of God in man. That is man's likeness to God.

In these personal attributes we considered first that He is good. It is my view that God's overriding attribute is His goodness. He is holy because He is good, He is just because He is good etc... Then we saw that He is holy. He is absolutely entirely apart from anything bad or evil. He is so holy that anyone that would come too close to Him would not be able to bear His presence.

This morning we want to consider that He is just, or entirely righteous. Oh, blessed righteousness. In that great sermon on the Mount, the first recorded sermon of the Lord Jesus, in the beginning of the message Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled!" You see, our trouble is that we are so 'unlike' God in such respects as holiness or righteousness.

After I preached the message on holiness I had such a burning hunger to live right that I thought, "Tomorrow I will try to live right all day. I will make a concentrated effort to do so." And that day it was not noon and I had been irritated and frustrated. And I wondered, "Would I even have noticed this if I had not so wanted to do right?" But God has no trouble with doing right all the time, that is 100% of the time. He is fully righteous. He has never even had a bad thought!

So we want to consider God in His righteousness this morning.

4. Justice/Righteousness

As ever, our first task is to define what the word righteousness means. Correct definition is the key to accurate understanding. So our question is: What is righteousness. Righteousness is one of the words we use to describe words or thoughts or actions. And these words or thoughts or actions can be classed as right or wrong or indifferent. And when we describe a word, thought or action as right, we have righteousness. So we say that speaking the truth in love is good. It is right to do that. Speaking lies is bad. It is wrong to lie. The one is righteousness; the other unrighteousness.

Now, in the Bible, the words translated justice and righteousness have the same root and are actually the same word. As I see it, our English word 'justice' has to do with right actions with regard to people. When a person lies about another, that is an injustice. A just person is one who does right toward others. Righteousness describes doing right with regard to all other situations. For example, we say he did right in reading his Bible or in going to Church. That is righteousness. But we might say, "The judge did right in requiring that man to do 40 hours of community work for the damage he did." That would be justice.

Righteousness describes deeds that are being or have been done. Everything we do that is right, becomes our righteousness. Now for man, there are two kinds of righteousness. We have spoken of the one already and that is actually doing right. Let me show you this kind of righteousness in the Bible. When the tribulation comes to a close, the Lord Jesus is going to come down from heaven with His saints. All of this is pictured as a marriage. Christ has been married to the Church and He and the Church, now His wife, are going to come down out of heaven on white horses and there the marriage supper will take place (read 19:7-8). Now I want you to notice carefully what the fine linen, clean and bright represents. Notice it in verse 8, it is the righteous acts of the saints. The word translated 'righteous acts' has been translated by the word 'righteousness' in

the KJV. From that translation you cannot tell which of the two kinds of righteousness it is, but in the original the translation 'righteous acts' is better. This speaks of all the right things these saints have done.

There is another kind of righteousness for man and that is imputed righteousness. When Christ died, He died for our sins. If we meet His conditions of repentance and faith, then His righteousness is added to our account and our sins are added to His account. Now we receive His righteousness. This is imputed righteousness. For example, when you earn money and put it in the bank, it is money you actually earned. But if someone else deposits money to your account out of their good will, that money is not earned by you but imputed to you. When we trust in Christ His righteousness is added to our account and the Bible calls that 'imputed' righteousness.

I have not time to explain this in this message but when we have trouble reconciling Paul's teaching on righteousness and that of James, it is these two kinds of righteousness that must be distinguished and explain the apparent discrepancy.

Now, for God, there is only one kind of righteousness. That is actual righteousness. God only does right because He is righteous in character. His very character does not allow Him to do wrong. You will remember when God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Turn with me to read this in Genesis 18 (read 23-25). Abraham was had a hard time reconciling God as being righteous if He would destroy a city if there were 50 righteous people in it. And Abraham was counting on God's righteousness or His justice to not destroy this city that had his nephew in it. So he said to God, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

And God said, "You know Abraham, you are right. If there are 50 righteous in Sodom I will not destroy it." Now let me stop and make an observation. What is it that keeps God from

destroying this ever increasing sinful world? It is nothing but the righteous in it. I have said before that God's greatest work on earth today is the Church. That is how important the Church is. All the living righteous are part of the Church. It is the Church that keeps the world from destruction every moment.

But the day is coming when God will take the Church home and then the saying we sometimes use, 'all hell will break loose' will come true. As believers, our righteous lives are very important to the whole world, though they do not realize it. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth..." and "...you are the light of the world."

When God said He would not destroy Sodom if there were fifty, Abraham said, "Well, suppose there are five less." God said, "I would not destroy it if there were forty five. Then Abraham went down to 40, and then 30, then 20 and then, knowing he was really pushing things, Abraham said, "Let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: suppose ten should be found there?" And God said I will not destroy it for ten. Is God gracious or what? If there were 100 people there, that is a mere %10. If there were 1000, that would have been 1%. Now there were likely far more than that and if so, the percentage is under 1%.

My wife pointed out Isaiah to me in this connection. In Isaiah 1 Isaiah bemoans the backslidden state and the ungodliness of Israel at that time. And Isaiah said, "Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah." If it had not been for that tiny remnant of faithful in Israel, God would have destroyed them too!

What we learn from this passage as far as Abraham is concerned the judge of all the earth does right. And if God always does right, that raises for us some very interesting questions. A.W. Tozer quotes a very ancient writer by name of Anselm. And Anselm asked this question: "How dost

thou spare the wicked if Thou art just, supremely just?" Do you get that question? A God who is supremely just, should He not execute anyone who sins right on the spot? How can God be just, or righteous and allow evil of all kinds to continue? And then Anselm asked this question: "How canst Thou justify a wicked man and still be just?" Now those questions are worth pondering.

A while ago I read Romans 1:16-17, and as my mind sought to grasp the truths there stated. Listen to it: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Now listen to these words that follow: "For in it..." That is in the Gospel, "...the righteousness of God is revealed..." Now ponder that. How is the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel?

I have said it before and say it again: When we exalt one attribute beyond measure and focus on that one alone, we can go astray. We have done so in our day with the attribute of God's love. We have exalted it so high that we have forgotten that God is just and righteous and holy and angry with sinners all day long. If we should focus on God's righteousness and justice alone, we might well despair. But you see God is not only just. He is merciful and loving and kind and compassionate.

So when man sinned, though God's justice and holiness remained unchanged, His mercy and love called for Him to seek some way to rid man of his sin and justly bring man back to Himself. So His righteousness or justice is only part of the story. Now let me take you to a passage so incredible, once you begin to study it, that the mind staggers and struggles to comprehend the massive truths contained therein (read Romans 3:21-26). Notice the words 'righteousness', 'justified', 'just' and 'justifier' in this passage. All have the same root word. Then notice that this is not a NT truth alone, but the OT prophets witnessed to it too. Then notice that the doctrine of sin and God's glory, and

redemption, and grace and propitiation and forbearance are all touched on in these verses.

You see, in Christ, the justice of God was satisfied (propitiation), so that He could justify man, that is declare him to be righteous even though he is still a sinner and all the while remain perfectly just Himself! In the Gospel is revealed the righteousness of God!

Again, some have exalted the truth of imputed righteousness out of measure and now fail to see that those who name the name of Christ should depart from iniquity and if they do not, they are again in danger of hell fire. We will see later that actual righteousness is very important to God.

Some time ago I did a few messages in Mexico. And I shared with the folk what Christ endured for our sins. And after the service the pastor's wife said, "The picture you drew with words was so graphic my stomach is still turning." If we got a glimpse of the price Almighty God paid for our sins, our stomachs would all be churning and we would praise and thank Him day in and day out. You see He is just. Our sins have received their punishment, if we will but repent and believe.

And so I want you to notice in this passage that this imputed righteousness of God comes on all who BELIEVE. It comes by FAITH through the GRACE of God. And when that filthy sinner stands there, cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, he sparkles with imputed righteousness and God's righteous character shines forth brighter than the noon day sun. He is just and justifier all at the same time. Glory to God.

I want to insert here another thought from Tozer in order to keep us from another possible error in our thinking about God. Listen to this thinker: "Sometimes when I preach evangelistic sermons I fall into the same semantic error. We think of God as presiding over a court of law in which the sinner has broken the law of justice. We imagine that justice is out there somewhere,

outside of God. The sinner has sinned against that external justice, and he is put in handcuffs and brought before the bar of God. Then we think that God's mercy wants to forgive the sinner, but this external justice says, 'No, he has broken my laws. He must die.' And so we picture dramatically God sitting tearfully on His throne passing a sentence of death upon a man that His mercy wants to pardon but can't because His justice won't allow it."

And Tozer goes on like this, "We might just as well be pagans and think about God the way the pagans do. That's not Christian theology - never was and never can be. It is erroneous to think this way, for we are making a man out of God" (I:66). He then quotes Psalm 50:21, "Thou thoughtest" 'says God,' "that I was altogether such an one as thyself."

Now that picture he gave, for the most part, is right. What he points out that is not right is that God's justice is out there somewhere. And His mercy and love and kindness are in Him. And that justice, which is somewhere out there, that He has to remain true to, seems to stand in opposition to God who is loving and kind and merciful.

Then he talks about some human judges whose knuckles turn white when they sentence a man to die. Their hearts cry, "Spare him. Give him a chance." Justice, out there, in the law book says, "He must die." And justice and mercy are at odds with each other in that judge.

Now here is what we must get right, and you may not like me for saying this. When man has spurned the love of God, or others have failed to bring him the message of the love of God, and God's justice demands that He condemn to eternal hell that person, His justice says, "He is wicked. He must go to hell." And His love agrees and says, "He is wicked. He must go to hell." And His mercy says, "He is wicked. He must go to hell." And His goodness says, "He is wicked. He must go to hell." There is no division in God between His

love and mercy and justice. They all agree and cry out, "Let him die!"

You see, for a person with regard to a person who goes to heel, all God's attributes are in perfect agreement. The day of mercy is past. The day of love is past. The day of grace is past. There is no more mercy. There is no more love. There is no more grace for people like that. This person has sinned away the day of grace and mercy and everything in God agrees he is worthy of eternal death.

I wonder, are you here today and you have spurned the call of God to salvation? He has called again and again, and you have said, "No" or maybe, "I'll do it later." Let me warn you this morning, that all unexpectedly death may come and God's mercy will say, "Send him to hell." And His grace will say, "Send him to hell." And His justice will say, "Send Him to hell." And His compassion will say, "Send him to hell. That is the place he fully deserves."

Now you say, "How is that a God of love?" Well, that is a God whose love and mercy and compassion are all in full agreement with His justice or righteousness! That is the God of the Bible. Read the Bible and that is the God you will find!

But every moment you live, He says, "I have paid for your sins. Repent, and believe in My Son." Every moment you live, you live by the very grace of God which you are spurning. As the message, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" says, you hang over the flames of hell which are reaching their fiery tongues out at you to have you and you hang there by a very thin thread. At any moment that thin thread may be singed, and down you will go. And God will not wipe away His tears. Every attribute of God will be in full agreement about you and will say, "Let this man suffer for ever and forever. There is no payment for a man like that. Let him burn and let the fire never be quenched and the worm never die." Maybe you say, "I can't believe that. Those were your words, weren't they?" Well, let me give it



to you in the words of Scripture, "Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25).

I ask you, is the God I am talking about a strange God to you? I ask of you but one thing: Study the God of the Bible, and believe it, and you will find this God. Yes, surely you will find a God of love and mercy, but just as surely you will find a God of justice and wrath and anger. And you will find that every attribute of God is perfectly in tune with all the other attributes. There is no division in Him.

But let me give you a picture of stark contrast to what we have just seen. When the vilest, the dirtiest, the darkest sinner repents of his sins, and though he has but moments to live, and he recognizes and receives Christ as his Savior, God's mercy and love and grace and justice and righteousness all agree: He shall live forever! God's entire being says, "He is worthy, he shall be with me for all eternity!"

Beside Christ, two men, also both on a cross, spoke their last words before pain and death overtook their being. One of them blasphemed Him and said, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." But the other said, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we indeed, JUSTLY, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." What a picture of the words *justice* or *righteousness*!

And then this second criminal, this ungodly man who was receiving what he deserved, turned to Christ and said, "Lord..." I wonder how many times both of these men heard of the miracles of Christ and how He went about healing people, and yet they spurned the love of Christ. Now on the cross, the one is still blaspheming but the other, at the end of his life says, "Lord."

Are you here, and you are not saved? I wonder how many times you have heard about Christ and His goodness. Could you say, "Lord"? One cannot

address Him as Lord, unless one sees Him as 'Lord'. Would you say this morning, "Lord." "Lord, I am the sinner. I have turned from you again and again. Lord, remember me."

Now let me tell you the Gospel; the good news. When a sinner truly calls Him "Lord", and a person dies as shortly after as this man on the cross did, still Christ's words will be true, "Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." You know why He could say that? Because His mercy would say, "He has the righteousness of Christ and his sins are gone, he deserves to go to heaven." And His love would say, "He has the righteousness of Christ and his sins are gone, he deserves to go to heaven." And His justice or righteousness would say, "He has the righteousness of Christ and his sins are gone, he deserves to go to heaven." And God's whole being will be in agreement when He says, "Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Let nothing ever make you question that. When God condemns to hell, the nicest of sinners or justifies the worst of them, He is altogether righteous. And when we say, "I do not understand that", then we have just diagnosed our own case. We don't understand it. God is above and beyond us so far, that we don't understand it all, but it is still true that the judge of all the earth will do right!

CONCL: So, in closing I ask, "What is righteousness?" It is simply doing right. For man, there is imputed righteousness and actual righteousness. When we get saved, Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us in order that we might become actually righteous in life.

I have long pondered 2 Corinthians 5:21 in this connection. Most seem to think it speaks of imputed righteousness. I think it speaks of actual righteousness. That is a righteousness accomplished in sanctification, whereby we become actually righteous in our lives by faith. Adam Clarke, one of few commentators seems to agree when he

says, "*The righteousness of God* signifies here the *salvation of God*, as comprehending *justification* through the blood of Christ, and *sanctification* through his Spirit..." What kind of righteousness does sanctification produce? Actual righteousness.

In closing, I want to ask you this question: The God you know, is He a just or righteous God? Is He a God that is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11)? Is He a God that will send people to hell for all eternity without remorse? Or is He a God whose love and mercy and compassion are so out of balance with His righteousness and justice and anger, that He weeps over those who go to hell, but justice shakes its ugly finger and says, "You have to. You have to do right"?

Now I remind us that we do not desire to live righteously in order to attain to salvation by living a good enough life. We ought to desire to live righteously because we are saved and our Lord and Master gave His life for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 says we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. For, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared before that we should walk in them.

Let me ask you another question: Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? You want to be like Christ. You are grieved over your bent to sin and you want to overcome sin. I propose to you that when the Bible says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" it is speaking about actual righteousness, not imputed righteousness. You see, He imputes Christ's righteousness to us in order that we might in actual life become righteous. That is why the angel said to Joseph that He was to call Mary's son's name, Jesus, because He would save His people from their sins, not in their sins.