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Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreek.church)
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Romans 1:18, 28-32; 2:5-6; 3:10, 21-26 “The Righteousness of God”

Intro. I suggest to you that the mental image of God found in the Bible is far different from the mental image of God found in the popular religious culture of today. Yet in this series of sermons I will strive to present a true, biblical picture of God, as seen in His attributes. Today I will talk about the righteousness of God.

How often would you hear of the righteousness of God in secular society? Almost never, though our American founding fathers spoke much more of the righteousness of God. How often would you hear of the righteousness of God in the typical church service? Only occasionally at best. Of all the songs we sing I found no songs that are about the righteousness of God as the primary theme, and only 5 songs that include it as a secondary theme. You would think that the concept of the righteousness of God is not important at all. Yet some form of the word “righteous” is found 38 times in the book of Romans. The word “grace” is found about half as much and the word “love” is found about 1/3 as much. Clearly, God’s righteousness, and His demand of righteousness in our lives, is a major theme of the book of Romans. In the entire Bible some form of the word “righteous” is found 540 times, far more than the word “love.”

So this morning I am going to present the theological truth that God is righteous, and the corollary truths to the fact that God is righteous. You would do well to listen to these important truths about God, for they are important aspects of our relationship to Him. So let’s see first of all the important truth that:

I. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

Psa. 11:7 says, “...the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness....” Psa. 145:17 says, “The LORD is righteous in all His ways....” Righteousness connotes what God is in the very core of His nature. The concept of God held by the psalmists and prophets of Israel was that of an all-powerful, righteous ruler. Psa. 97:2 says, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.” In the Bible world, the King was always the supreme judge, because his was the supreme ruling authority. Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the righteous nature of God and evil as it fails to do so.

The fact that God is righteous means that He always does what is right and just. His moral law is a reflection of His righteousness. He determines what is right and wrong.

In my title screen I used the image of a carpenter’s square to represent the righteousness of God. How do you know a board is truly upright? You use a carpenter’s square. How do you know a window or door header is truly level, the way it is supposed to be? You use a level.

Yet it seems that most people in American society live like the Israelites during the days of the judges, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 21:25). The fact is God is over us as a righteous Lawgiver and Judge, and He is the One who sets the standards of right and wrong. Do you believe that? The Supreme Court can legalize abortion, but God says, “You shall not murder.” The Supreme Court evidently can change the marriage laws of the states but they cannot change the marriage laws of God, for He is absolutely righteous!

Now since God is righteous:

II. THEREFORE, GOD JUDGES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

The fact that God is righteous means that He is also just. One expression of His justice is wrath and judgment against sin. Psa. 11:6-7 says, “Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous....” Many people today seem to reject the idea of divine judgment, but there are few things stressed more strongly in the Bible than the reality of God’s work as judge. “Judge” is a word often applied to Him. Psalm 75:7 says, “God is the Judge.” Hebrews 12:23 calls God “the judge of all.” Since God is righteous, He must judge, for He cannot ignore or condone evil. His righteousness demands that He judge and punish sin in all its forms, including injustice. In fact, in the inspired Scriptures justice and righteousness are scarcely to be distinguished from each other. The same word in the original is translated both justice and righteousness. Because God is righteous, He executes justice. Rev. 16:5 says, “You are righteous, O Lord, ... because You have judged these things.” Do you see the connection between the righteousness of God and His judgment? You cannot separate the two concepts.

The reality of divine judgment is set forth on page after page of Bible history. God judged Adam and Eve, expelling them from the Garden and pronouncing curses on their future earthly life (Genesis 3). God judged the corrupt world of Noah’s day, sending a flood to destroy mankind (Genesis 6-8). God judged Sodom and Gomorrah, engulfing them in a volcanic catastrophe (see Gen. 13:13; 19:24). God judged Israel’s Egyptian taskmasters, just as He foretold He would (see Genesis 15:14), unleashing against them the terrors of the ten plagues (Exodus 7ff). Moses warned Israel, “be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23), and so it was. God judged Israel for unfaithfulness to Him after their entry into Canaan, causing them to fall under the oppressive dominion of other nations (Judges 2-4, etc.). The northern kingdom of Israel fell victim to the Assyrian captivity, and the southern kingdom (Judah) to the Babylonian captivity. The New Testament also illustrates the reality of the judgment of God. Judgment fell on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God (Acts 5), and on King Herod for his pride (Acts 12:21ff.). Jesus predicted divine judgment on Jerusalem in the Olivet discourse, and it happened about 40 years later when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, the Jewish temple and the Judean nation.

My friend, you ought to show some fear and reverence for God, for He is righteous, and He judges those who violate His standards of righteousness.

Now let me share with you some truths about the judgment of God. First, consider:

A. The Righteousness of God’s Judgment – Unlike human judges, God’s judgment will be absolutely right and without flaw. Romans 1:32 and 2:5 speak of “the righteous judgment of God.” Abraham rightly asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Jesus said in John 5:30, “...My judgment is righteous.”

One reason you can be sure that God’s judgment is right is because He knows all things. He even knows our innermost thoughts. God will judge all “according to their works” (Matthew 16:27; Revelation 20:12-13), and the evidence against sinners will be clear and convincing. Jesus said in Rev. 2:23, “... I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” God will see that each man sooner or later receives what he deserves if he doesn’t find mercy and forgiveness in God.

So don’t think for a moment that you can fool this righteous Judge by an outward show of righteousness. You can be sure that His judgment will be just.

B. The Expression of God's Judgment - Wrath is the primary expression of God's righteousness upon those who sin. Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." His righteous nature causes Him to have and express holy anger and wrath against all that is sinful and wrong.

God has ordained that one of the primary roles of human government is to execute judgment and wrath upon those who do evil. Rom. 13:4 says that the law enforcement officer "is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil." Yet especially since the 1960's the anti-God forces of society have been chipping away at this fundamental role of government, and we are increasingly witnessing lawlessness in our society.

C. The Sentence of God's Judgment - Death, both physical and eternal, is the primary judgment of God upon sin. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Romans 1:32 says, "who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death...."

The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unregarded. As responsible moral beings we dare not so trifle with our eternal future.

D. The Day of God's Judgment – Even the New Testament looks on to "the day of judgment," "the day of wrath," and "the wrath to come." This day is also known as "the Day of the Lord." For example, in the last of Romans 2:5 Paul mentions "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Acts 17:31 says that God "... has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Notice that God the Father has assigned Jesus, His Son, the responsibility of being the Judge and the One who executes judgment. Jesus Himself says in John 5:22 that God that Father "has committed all judgment to the Son" This will take place when Jesus returns. Not to judge the world would be to show moral indifference, which is contrary to the nature of a righteous God.

This coming day of judgment answers the problem of evil. Psa. 94:3 says, "LORD, how ... long will the wicked triumph?" The character of God is the guarantee that all wrongs will be righted some day. The Christian view of judgment means that history moves to a goal. Judgment protects the idea of the triumph of God and of good. Contrary to the Star Wars sage, it is unthinkable that the present conflict between good and evil should last throughout eternity.¹ God has appointed a Day when evil will be judged and vanquished forever! Just read the last chapters of the book of Revelation.

So make sure you have thought about the fact that God is righteous, and He judges righteously, and you are accountable to Him.

Now let's move on to another corollary truth. Because God is righteous:

III. GOD DEMANDS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN US

¹ Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment*, p. 72.

This is the problem we face. God demands righteousness from His creatures, and yet we, without exception, have sinned. Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That is a reference to His gloriously perfect attributes, including righteousness and holiness. We fall short. So how can God be righteous and just, and yet allow sinners into His holy presence? Furthermore, though God is holy and righteous, the Bible also reveals that He is merciful. The Christian philosopher Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, sought a solution to the apparent contradiction between the justice and the mercy of God. Yet we also know that God is perfect in unity. He is never at cross-purposes with Himself. No attribute of God is in conflict with another. So the answer is this:

A. He Has Provided a Way to Obtain Righteousness - The solution for the problem of how God can be just and still justify the unjust is found in the Christian doctrine of redemption. Romans 3:24-25 says, "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood..." Redemption gives the picture of setting one free through the payment of the redemption price. Well, we have seen that "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Jesus paid the wages of sin by His own death. Then Paul says that God set forth Christ "as a propitiation by His blood." Propitiation is not a word we use in normal conversation, so I feel I must explain what this word (*hilasterion*) means. It mainly refers to a sacrifice offered to satisfy divine wrath. In pagan religion propitiation was viewed as something man did. However, it is significant that it was God the Father who thus set forth Christ to be a propitiation. In Christianity the God whose holy nature required the propitiatory sacrifice is Himself the One who provided it (cf. Lev. 17:11). His sacrifice made it possible for God to do what He wanted to do, and that is extend mercy to the sinner by forgiving their sin.

The Greek word translated "propitiation" was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to the mercy seat, the covering over the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Heb. 9:5). The mercy seat covered the Law that had been broken by man. The outraged justice of God cried out for judgment upon the sinners who had broken the law. But God provided that the blood of the sacrifice could be applied to the mercy seat by the High Priest to protect the sinner from the wrath of God.

Yet God was never really satisfied with the thousands of animals slain in the Old Testament. The mercy seat with its sacrificial blood only pointed to the true sacrifice at the cross of Jesus, where He shed His life's blood. Notice in v.25 that the satisfaction of divine wrath against sin was accomplished "by His blood." The shed blood of Jesus, which resulted in His death, satisfied the justice of God. This exchange of our unrighteousness for His righteousness is marvelously summed up in 2 Cor. 5:21, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Therefore, through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied when God spares a sinner. Redemptive theology teaches that mercy does not become effective toward a man until justice has done its work. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our Substitute died for us on the cross. Look at v.26. The redemptive work of Christ on the cross was done "to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

You have sinned against a holy and righteous God. Has God's wrath against your sin been satisfied and covered by the blood of Christ? Christ is the only answer to your sin problem. God has done His part to make it possible for you to become right with Him. Your responsibility is to put your faith in Jesus. Paul says in v.22 that we can receive "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." Trust in Christ, and Him alone for your salvation. 1 John 1:9 says,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Place your faith in Jesus, and what He says in John 5:24 will apply to you, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

B. We Must Live Righteously - Since God is righteous, He expects us to live right, according to the moral and spiritual standards that He has established. 1 John 2:29 says, “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” If you have received God’s nature through the new birth, you will practice righteousness.

So the starting place to living a morally righteous life is repentance and saving faith. Millions have been morally and spiritually transformed by faith in Christ. Through Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit we have lived lives of great moral power. Romans 8:4 says, “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.”

Then we must learn God’s Word, for the righteous standards of God are embodied in commandments and principles of Scripture. Learning them will help us live right. For example, Scripture teaches us to be just and fair in our dealings with other people.

It will also help if we are thoroughly convinced that God is righteous and just, and He is the Judge to whom we are accountable to at the final judgment, not regarding our eternal salvation, but our reward. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” It is clear that the reality of divine judgment will have a direct effect on our view of life. If we know that we will face God’s judgment at the end of the road, we shall not live as we would otherwise.

Conclusion: You need to reject this modern notion that God will just overlook sin. Don’t think for a moment that you can sin, and God will just act like nothing ever happened. God is righteous and just. He is the holy Judge before whom we all must stand. Do you know for sure things are right between you and God? The good news is that you can be justified in the sight of God because of what Christ did at Calvary. And once saved, you can live right by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the influence of Scripture and other believers. And even when you sin, 1 John 2:1-2 says, “...we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

Sources: Roy T. Edgemon, *The Doctrines Baptists Believe* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1999); Stephen F. Felker (notes from his sermon on Romans 3:21-26); J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1971). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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