

# Christ OUR Righteousness



*The story of Abraham and Isaac was a vivid prophecy of God's sacrifice of His Son in order to provide a perfect righteousness for His people.*

**T**he righteousness which every fallen, sinful soul requires for acceptance with God is to be found only in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. The words of Jeremiah 23:6 present in essence the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ: "The Lord our righteousness." The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* links Christ's righteousness and justification together in Answer 33: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." Justification is a judicial term that declares us to be accepted and accounted as righteous in God's sight, on the ground of Christ's righteousness imputed (or made over) to us and received by saving faith alone.

## **The righteousness implied— The LORD our *righteousness***

This rightness, or righteousness, is measured by the standard of the just and holy law of God. The law of God sets an exceedingly high standard, a standard that unregenerate sinners cannot even attempt to reach. God's word demonstrates the problem we have. Galatians 3:10 declares that it is not some, not many, but all things written in the book of the law that we must keep. The law of God must be kept perfectly. The truly honest man will confess his total inability at this point. But many will say, "Well, I know that I am not perfect, but I do the best I can. Is this not sufficient?" Again the teaching of God's word must disappoint such unfounded hope. James 2:10 reminds us that we have only to offend in one point and we are counted guilty of all. This is clearly illustrated in the life of Adam. Adam and Eve committed high treason against God and fell from the estate in which they were

created. How did they fall? They fell by offending in one point and thus becoming guilty of all (Genesis 3:6). Adam immediately lost his original righteousness and felt that loss sorely; he knew that he was naked and required a covering. God had to teach him His way of righteousness and acceptance by providing a covering through the shedding of blood and the death of a substitute (Genesis 3:21).

Adam, however, was not alone in his fall and loss of perfect righteousness (see the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Answer 16). We are all as guilty as he. Some foolishly seek to establish their own righteousness by personal effort, but it is all in vain (Romans 10:1–4; Philippians 3:3–9). Blinded, darkened man believes he can do the impossible, but a holy God rejects the sum total of man's righteousness (Isaiah 64:6; cf. 1:5–6; Romans 3:10–31). So the more we know of ourselves, the more we are shut in to the truth that this perfect righteousness we need in order to be accepted by God must be found outside ourselves. We must find it in someone else.

### **The righteousness supplied— The LORD our righteousness**

This needed righteousness is found in the Lord of the text. Who is this person in whom this immaculate righteousness is found? The context confirms who He is: He is the “Branch” (Jeremiah 23:5), the Messiah, the Christ. He is called Jehovah in verse 6. It is as God and man that He is made unto us righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). But how is Christ made unto us righteousness?

Christ was made unto us righteousness by meeting all the precepts of the law. The justice and truth of God require the sinner to keep the law perfectly. As we have seen, no person can come even close to that. The Lord Jesus Christ, however, was born under the law in order that He might fulfil its every demand and keep perfectly its every precept in the place of His people (Galations 4:4). Christ not only died for us, but He lived for us.

This life that Christ lived is known as His active obedience. It was a life of perfect obedience. Not only did Christ not sin, but He could not sin. His was an impeccable humanity. Not only was Christ able not to sin, but Christ *was not able to sin*. There is a vital difference here. In the first, “able not to sin,” there is a potential possibility to sin. In the second, “not able to sin,” there is no possibility of sinning. This is the highest view of Christ's sinlessness, and we should always maintain it. As the God-man He could not sin. The divine nature in Christ so supported the human nature that it was impossible for Him to sin. So we have an impeccable, immaculate righteousness before us in Christ.

Christ was also made unto us righteousness by meeting the just penalty of the law. The law pronounces condemnation upon the lawbreaker, who breaches its commandments. The consequence of sin is encapsulated in Ezekiel 18:4: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” The sinner is condemned to die, but Christ the spotless Lamb stands as our surety. He died for His people under the curse and condemnation of the broken law. The wrath of God fell on Him as our sacrifice and substitute. This is known as His passive obedience: “He was obedient unto death even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

So the law, both in precept and in penalty, is perfectly satisfied by Christ. Every believer is free, in Christ, from its curse and condemnation (Romans 8:1). Our search for righteousness ends with Christ (Romans 10:4).

### **The righteousness applied— The LORD our righteousness**

How important it is, then, that this righteousness become mine and that I be justified in the sight of a holy God! Look at this wonderful text. At its entrance stands the Lord in all His immaculate righteousness. At its exit stands the sinner with all his need for an acceptable righteousness. But in between stands the covenant word *our*. This word is the connecting link binding both together in indissoluble union. It points to the imputation of righteousness to the sinner. Christ's righteousness is made over (accounted) to me for righteousness, and I receive it by faith in Him (Romans 4:3–5, 23–25). This is what the catechism states: “[God] accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone (cf. Romans 5:1). It should be noted that it is not faith itself that justifies. Rather, it is that upon which faith rests that justifies the soul and accounts the soul acceptable at the bar of God—that is, the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How wonderfully God, in His inscrutable wisdom, has provided in Christ a perfect righteousness! It is righteousness suitable to the sinner's desperate need and received by faith in Christ alone. ■

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