

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS**

In the previous meetings we have seen that man has sinned and that God's salvation is based on the fact that man has sinned. If man had not sinned, there would be no need for salvation. Since man has sinned, God has given the law to show man that he has sinned. God's law came to the world to cause man's transgressions to abound. Originally, man had only sin; he did not have transgressions. But when the law came, man had not only sin, but transgressions as well. After man transgresses, he realizes that he is a sinner. Thank the Lord that though we have sin and though we have transgressed, God, who is love, purposed to give us grace and mercy. He purposed to do something for us to solve the problems that we cannot solve ourselves.

In this meeting, however, we must see something else. Although God loves us and shows mercy on us and although He fully intends to grant us grace, there is one thing that makes it very difficult for God to do this. God cannot bestow grace upon us immediately; He cannot give us eternal life directly. There is a dilemma which God must solve before He can grant grace to us. The problem, which the Bible mentions frequently, is God's own righteousness.

The phrase God's righteousness has confused many theologians for centuries. If we read the Bible without prejudice and preconceived notions, God will show us what His righteousness is. We can see this matter clearly without much difficulty. Tonight we hope to see, by the grace of God, what God's righteousness is. In other words, we hope to see the difficulty God encounters when He saves us.

### **HIS SALVATION MATCHING HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS**

If God is to save us, He must save us to a condition that matches, or measures up to Himself. If God is to give us salvation, He cannot give it in a manner that conflicts with His nature, His method, and His way. We are sinners full of transgressions and, therefore, have no thought of righteousness at all. If we wanted to be saved, we would probably use any means possible, whether straight or crooked, good or bad. We would try to be saved by any of a thousand and one ways. As long as we can be saved in some way, it is good enough for us. We do not care if the procedure is proper or if the method is right. As long as we are saved, we are satisfied. We could not care less from where the salvation comes, and whether or not it is right. In this sense, we are like thieves. All that a thief cares about is getting the money. He does not care where the money comes from. As long as he gets the money, he is satisfied. He has no concept of right and wrong; he has no concept of righteousness and unrighteousness. But we must realize that salvation is not just a matter of us getting saved, but of God saving us. Although we would be satisfied no matter how we are saved, God cannot say that all there is to salvation is getting us saved, without caring about whether the way we are saved is right or wrong. God undoubtedly desires to give us grace and to save us. Without doubt, He wants to give us His life. God is full of love, and He is more than willing for us to be saved. But if God is to save us, He has to save us in an excelling way. Therefore, God's saving us is a big problem. God desires to save men. But what method can He use so that man can be saved in a most righteous way? What method is most reasonable? What method will match His own dignity? It is easy to be saved, but it is difficult to be saved righteously. This is why the Bible speaks so much about God's

righteousness. It tells us again and again that God saves man in a way that matches His own righteousness.

What is God's righteousness? God's righteousness is God's way of doing things. Love is God's nature, holiness is God's disposition, and glory is God's own being. Righteousness, however, is God's procedure, His way, and His method. Since God is righteous, He cannot love man merely according to His own love. He cannot grant man grace merely according to what He wants. He cannot save man merely according to His heart's desire. It is true that God saves man because He loves man. But He must do so in a way that is in agreement with His own righteousness, His own procedure, His own moral standard, His own way, His own method, His own dignity, and His own majesty.

We know that it is easy for God to save man. But it is not easy for God to save man in a righteous way. Just imagine how easy it would be for God to save us if the matter of righteousness were not a problem. There would be no difficulty at all. If God had not loved us, nothing could be done for us and everything would be hopeless. But God has loved us and has had mercy on us. Furthermore, He intends to give us grace. If the issue of righteousness had not come in, God could say, "Have you sinned? All right, just do not commit the mistake again." God could then overlook our sins. He could let us go and send us away. If God forgives carelessly not judging the sinner's sin and dealing with his sins according to the law, where is His righteousness? Here is where the difficulty lies.

Some time ago, a brother got caught up in a complicated matter and was put in jail by the government. I knew that though he was not completely without fault, the mistake was really with other people. Because of this, I was willing to help him out. I went to Nanking and talked to a few of the people who were involved in the matter. I told them about the situation and asked if they could help out a little. There were nine of us there, and all of us were busy people. We held nine meetings together over a period of eleven days, trying to come up with a way to help this man. Eventually, all these people admitted that they had the way and the authority to release the man, but that they could not release him without incriminating themselves. Hence, we had to find a way to release the man that, at the same time, would be legal.

Undoubtedly, God is full of love for us. God wants to save us. But He must do so legally. If He does not save us legally, He cannot save us at all. God's love is limited by His righteousness. God cannot act contrary to Himself and irresponsibly declare that our sins are written off, that everything is fine, and that we can get off free. If God were to forgive us irresponsibly, what law, what righteousness, and what truth would be left in the universe? All of these would be through.

God wants to save us, and we need to be saved. The question is whether or not there will be unrighteousness in our being saved. There are many today who accept bribes from others and are partial because of private relationships. They often help others out, and others often receive benefits from them; but we all agree that these people are not proper. They are not righteous but corrupt. They may have much love, but what they do is not righteous. God cannot save us at the expense of involving Himself in unrighteousness. God must save us while preserving His

righteousness. It is important for God to save us, but He must do so according to His righteousness. God could save us immediately with His love. But He must also save us very righteously.

How can this be done? It is not an easy matter for God to save us without violating His righteousness. How can God justify sinners without getting into unrighteousness? How can God save sinners without involving Himself in unrighteousness? How can God forgive sins in a righteous way? God is willing to save us, but He wants us to be able to say, at the time we receive His life and are saved, that He has justified us in a most righteous way.

## **GOD'S SALVATION FOR THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS**

There is one book in the Bible, the book of Romans, that tells us how God deals specifically with this one problem. Let us read Romans 3:25-26, beginning with the second part of verse 25: "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." Here I must add a word. Some versions make a mistake in translating verse 25. They translate: "To declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." But the word "for" should not be used in this verse. Instead it should read: "For the demonstrating of His righteousness, in that in His forbearance God passed over the sins that had previously occurred." Further, in verse 26 the word "and" should be understood as linking two things that occur at the same time. Hence, this clause should be understood in this way: "that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus." While God justifies those who believe in Jesus, He is shown to be righteous, and man is to acknowledge Him as being righteous.

Verse 25 deals with the problems in the past, and verse 26 deals with the problems in the present. The problems in the past relate to the people of the Old Testament times. The problems in the present relate to the people of the New Testament times. Verse 25 deals with an Old Testament issue. Verse 26 deals with a New Testament issue. Those in the Old Testament times transgressed the law for four thousand years. They were full of sins and transgressions. But God did not send them into perdition or destruction immediately. During those four thousand years, day by day God forbore and passed over the sins previously committed. We do not see the lake of fire immediately after the garden of Eden. Although God told man that in the day that he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he would surely die (Gen. 2:17), when Adam did eat of the fruit, he did not go immediately into the lake of fire. Why not? Because God passed over the sins of the Old Testament times; He exercised His forbearance over them. God exercised forbearance and passed over the sins committed by man in the past. But a question arises immediately. Was God righteous in exercising forbearance and passing over man's sins in the Old Testament? What was God's purpose in doing this? Actually, in passing over man's sins and in exercising forbearance, God was declaring His righteousness.

God does not want us to think that after we are saved our salvation is an illegal one. God would not have man harbor such criticisms. God wants to show us that there is nothing illegal or

unrighteous in His ways. Concerning the sins of the Old Testament times, He says that His forbearance and His passing over were for the demonstrating of His righteousness. Concerning the sins of the present time, He says that what is done is also for the demonstrating of His righteousness. He desires that in justifying those who believe in Jesus He would be known as the righteous One.

God's salvation is not some "backdoor merchandise." God wants our salvation to be one that comes from the "front door." Our salvation has to be right and proper. He will not allow anyone to say that our salvation is improper. He does not offer a fraudulent salvation. A fraudulent salvation is rejected by God. God's intention is to save us, but He will do so in a way that is related to His nature, His moral standard, His dignity, His law, and His righteousness. God cannot save us lawlessly.

Here we have a problem. If God were willing to use whatever means possible to save us and if He were to ignore the matter of righteousness altogether, He could say to anyone, "Go; you are free." There are men who are foolishly good. If God were to say this, He would be a foolishly good God. God would never be like this. If God did not love you, it would be easy—He would just let you die and perish when you sin. But He cannot allow this to happen because He loves you. The problem is that the sin of man and the love of God are together. When the righteousness of God is added to these two, salvation becomes the most difficult thing on earth. If man had not sinned, everything would be fine; and if God had not loved, there would be no problem either. If someone commits a crime and must die, it has nothing to do with me if I do not love him. Today many are taken from prisons to be executed. The matter concerns me little if I do not love them. It is difficult only if I love them and if I want to rescue them. If they have not sinned, the matter would be easy to deal with. And if I do not love them, the matter is also easy to handle. Further, if they have sinned and I love them but have no righteousness, the matter can still be taken care of easily; I can handle the matter irresponsibly through bribery. But if I am a righteous person, I cannot resort to such fraudulent and improper methods. I would not let them go illegally. If I am to rescue them, I have to rescue them righteously. To carry out such a salvation becomes the most difficult task on the whole earth. These three matters—love, sin, and righteousness—cannot easily coexist. Love is a fact; sin is also a fact; and righteousness is a necessity. Because these three are together, God must come up with a way to save us and to satisfy His heart of love, while at the same time preserving His righteousness. Accomplishing such a work would be a masterpiece indeed. Hallelujah! The salvation which God has prepared for us in His Son Jesus is such a masterpiece. He is able to save us from our sins and demonstrate His love, and He is able to do so in a most righteous way. This He does through the work of redemption by the Lord Jesus.

### **THE COMING OF CHRIST BEING GOD'S REQUIREMENT IN RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth was God's requirement in righteousness; it was not God's requirement in grace. This is a very serious word. If there had been love without righteousness, the Lord Jesus would not have needed to come to the earth, and the cross would have been unnecessary. Because of the problem of righteousness the Lord Jesus had to come. Without righteousness, God could save us any way He wants to. He could overlook our sins, or He could forgive them lightly. He could take a permissive attitude toward our sins, or He could

be completely unconcerned about them. If God said, "Since all have sinned, I will let you go this time; just do not sin again," there would be no need for a Jesus of Nazareth in the first place. Apart from the requirement of righteousness, there was no need for Jesus of Nazareth to come. The coming of Jesus of Nazareth was a requirement of righteousness.

When sin entered the world, God's government was damaged. His prescribed order in the universe was broken; His glory was trodden under; His holiness was profaned; His authority was rejected; and His truth was misunderstood. When sin entered the world, Satan laughed and the angels testified that man had failed and had fallen. If God were to judge sin mercilessly, He would be without love. But if He were to let man's sins go without judging them, He would be without righteousness. Because God loves the world and, at the same time, He is righteous, He had to send the Lord Jesus to us. Because He is righteous, He had to judge sin. Because He is love, He had to bear man's sins for him. I must emphasize these two statements: God must judge because He is righteous. And God bears man's judgment and punishment because He is love. Without judgment, we see no righteousness; with judgment, we see no love. However, what He did was to bear the judgment on our behalf. In this way, He manifests both His love and His righteousness in Jesus Christ.

### **THE CROSS MANIFESTING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LOVE**

Hence, the cross is where God's righteousness is manifested. The cross shows us how much God hates sin. He is determined to judge sin. He was willing to pay such a great price as to have His Son nailed on the cross. God was not willing to give up His righteousness. If God were willing to give up His righteousness, the cross would have been unnecessary. Because God was not willing to give up His righteousness, He preferred to have His Son die rather than give up His righteousness.

The cross is also the place where God's love is manifested. The burden for our sins should be on us. If we do not bear it, it is unrighteous. But to bear such a burden is too much for us. For this reason, He came and bore it for us. That God was willing to bear the burden shows His love. That God actually did bear the burden shows His righteousness. For God to have us bear the punishment is righteousness without love. For God to have us not bear the punishment is love without righteousness. Because He takes away the punishment and bears it for us, there is both righteousness and love. Hallelujah! The cross meets the requirement of righteousness and the requirement of love. Our salvation today is not "backdoor merchandise"; we have not received it fraudulently or improperly. We have not been saved illegally. We have been saved in a clear and definite way through judgment.

For us forgiveness is free, but for God there is no such thing as free forgiveness. For Him, forgiveness comes only after the redemption from sins. For example, if you break the law and the court requires you to pay a thousand dollar fine, you must pay the fine before your case will be dismissed. In the same way, we are saved only after being judged on the cross. Our salvation comes after we suffer the judgment for sin in Christ. It is a salvation that comes only through

judgment. Hallelujah! We are judged; then afterwards we are saved. God's love is here, and God's righteousness is also here.

Let me give an illustration. Suppose that there is a brother who is a millionaire, and suppose that I am one of his debtors. Let us say that I owe him a big sum of money, an amount as large as the ten thousand talents mentioned in the book of Matthew (18:24). When I borrowed the money from him, I signed a promissory note. On the note the amount that I owe him and the date and month that the amount must be repaid in full was listed, together with the terms and conditions of penalty. Suppose that now I go to him and say, "I spent all the money that I borrowed from you, and it is impossible for me to earn this money back and repay you at such a time as this, when the economy is slumping. I even have a problem taking care of my food and living. Please have mercy on me and let me go. Let me have the promissory note back." If I implore him this way, can he return the note to me? The promissory note clearly records the amount that I borrowed from him and the period of time in which I must repay him. This is a contract not only for me to keep, but one that he has to abide by as well. As the debtor, I have the responsibility to repay him the money within the set time. As the creditor, he also has a responsibility to fulfill, which is to return the promissory note to me only upon receipt of the money. If he returns the note to me before receiving the money, even though he does this out of his love and concern for me, he is not being righteous. Because we human beings are simply unrighteous and are used to unrighteous acts, it seldom occurs to us that free forgiveness is a form of unrighteousness. But God cannot do something unrighteous. If God forgave us freely, He would be unrighteous. Furthermore, going back to the illustration, let us suppose that this brother returns the note to me without receiving the money. This will affect me in a negative way. The next time I have money I will be indiscreet in using it. I have found that I can use others' money easily and loosely. Hence, this brother's free forgiveness is unrighteousness with him and a bad influence on me.

Now suppose that this brother is righteous, but does not want me to repay. What can he do? Let me tell you what I once did in a similar situation. Someone once came to my home to borrow money. He was a nominal Christian, so I told him that according to the Bible Christians should not borrow money. But he begged me to loan him the money all the same. Originally I considered simply giving him the money. But I knew that he was irresponsible with other's money because some brothers had come to me beforehand and told me that this person borrowed often from the brothers, and warned me not to loan him anything. So on second thought I decided that I would not simply give the money to him, but would loan it instead. When I handed him the amount he asked for, I asked him when he would return it to me. I pressed him for a payment date, even though I knew that I would never be paid back. Borrowing was his habit; it was his life. But I could not tell him that I did not expect to be paid back, for that would have invited more borrowing. Therefore, I made him set a payment date. When the date arrived, I purposely wrote a letter to him, reminding him that the due date had come. After he received my letter, he came to see me. But before he was able to say very much, I interrupted him and told him to go home and see his wife, for she had something to tell him. So off to his home he went. Actually, prior to his coming to see me, I had taken the exact amount of money he owed to his home and had given it to his wife. I told her that when her husband came home she should tell him that I had sent him this sum of money for the payment of his debt. When the husband reached home, the wife told him what I had said. Then he opened the package and found the exact amount of his debt. He understood what to do next. He came back to my home and

returned the money to me. In this act, you can see love and you can see righteousness. If this man had been forced to pay, there would have been no love. But if I had allowed him not to pay, I would have been unrighteous, for I had said specifically that the money was given as a loan. Not only would I have been unrighteous in myself, but I also would have exerted a bad influence on him. The next time he would have been more irresponsible. Thus, I did what I did.

We owe God "ten thousand talents of silver," but we have no way to repay. Now God is doing the same thing for us. Because He loves us, He cannot ask us to pay Him back. But because He is righteous, He will not tell us that we have no need to repay at all. For us to pay Him back is impossible. Yet for God to release us from our obligation is unrighteous. Thank and praise Him that He has come to give us the "money," that we can pay back what we owe Him. The collector is God, and the payer is also God. Without collecting, there is no righteousness; but if we are made to pay, there is no love. Now God Himself is the collector; hence, righteousness is maintained. And God Himself is also the payer; hence, love is maintained. Hallelujah! The collector is the payer. This is the biblical meaning of redemption from sins.

Therefore, Jesus the Nazarene came and bore our sins in His body onto the cross. God Himself came to bear our sins. Our sins were judged by God in the person of Jesus Christ. The blood of the Lord Jesus shed on the cross is proof of this judgment. We come to God by this blood. Through the Lord Jesus we tell God that we have been judged. Now we are turning over to Him what the Lord Jesus has paid for us. It is true that we have sinned. But we are not irresponsible; there has been the judgment. It is true that we had a debt. But we are not avoiding it; the debt has already been paid. We have the blood, which signifies the accomplished salvation of the Lord Jesus, as the receipt proving that God has paid our debt back to Himself. This is why the blood in the Old Testament was sprinkled seven times within the veil. This is why it had to be brought to the propitiation cover on the ark. God has to forgive every sinner who comes to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus. There is no way for Him not to forgive us.

Let us return to the previous illustration. Suppose I borrowed ten thousand talents of silver from a brother and I have no money to pay him back. One day he comes to my home and says, "You owe me ten thousand talents of silver. Now you must pay me back. I am not an irresponsible or loose person. Whatever I do, I do seriously. You have to pay me back. Now here are ten thousand talents of silver. Bring this to my house tomorrow and pay back your debt. Then you can take back your promissory note." I would expect that when I go to his house with the money the next day I will be able to redeem the promissory note. But suppose that after I hand him the money, he says that because the money was given to me by him the day before, he will not return the promissory note to me. Can he do such a thing? When I hand him the money, does he have the right not to hand me back the promissory note? No. He had the right not to give me the money the day before. If he did not give me the money the day before, at most I can say that he does not love me. I cannot say a word more. But if he has given me the money and I pay him back, he is unrighteous if he still keeps my note; it is not simply a matter of him not loving me. If he is righteous, he has to hand me the note when I hand him the money.



## **GOD BEING BOUND TO FORGIVE US BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Therefore, before the Lord Jesus came to the earth and was crucified on the cross, it would have been fine for God to refuse to save us. God could have left us unsaved. Had God not given us His Son, all that we could have said was that God did not love us. We could not say anything more. But because God has indeed given us His Son and put our sins upon Him that we might be redeemed from our sins, God can do nothing else but forgive our sins when we come to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus and through His work. Hallelujah! God has to forgive our sins! Do you realize that God is bound to forgive our sins? If you come to God through Jesus Christ, God is bound to forgive your sins. It was love that brought His Son to the cross, but it was righteousness that caused God to forgive our sins.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Out of love God gave us His only begotten Son. But 1 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." The work of the cross was accomplished for us through the love of God. But today when we come to God through the accomplished work of Jesus Christ, God has to forgive us based on His faithfulness and righteousness.

Hence, if the Lord Jesus had not come, God would be free not to save us. But now that the Lord Jesus has died, even if God were unhappy about saving us, strictly speaking He still has to do it. If He received the money could He refuse to return the note? God cannot be unrighteous, because if He is unrighteous, He Himself becomes a sinner. Therefore, God is bound to forgive all those who come to Him through the blood of the Lord Jesus. Hallelujah! God cannot refuse to forgive them. I want to shout that this is the gospel. Since God has given us His Son, He is bound. Do you think that we can pay God back now? Today through the Lord Jesus, not only can we pay God back, but we have more than we need to pay Him back. We have an overflow. For where sin abounds, there grace much more abounds. Sin is abundant. But the grace in God's Son is more abundant, even superabundant. For this reason, it is through the Lord Jesus alone that one can be saved.

Everyone has to admit that there is nothing unrighteous with God when we come to Him by the Lord Jesus and when He gives us life and forgives our sins. Our heart can never say that God, in forgiving our sins, saved us lawlessly when He passed over our sins, exercised forbearance toward us, and justified us who believe in Jesus. We can never say that God has dealt irresponsibly with our sins. On the contrary, we must say that God has saved us in the most righteous way. Our salvation is a proper and upright salvation. Our sins have been judged; hence, we are saved. No one can say that God has saved us by using unrighteous procedures. Rather, we must say that God has saved us by the most righteous procedures.

## **GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS MANIFESTED APART FROM THE LAW**



Now let us come back to Romans 3. Verses 19 to 26 are quite a difficult passage in the Bible. But after what we have seen concerning God's righteousness and the righteousness that the Lord Jesus has accomplished, Romans 3:19-26 is wonderful. Verse 19 says, "Now we know that whatever things the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may fall under the judgment of God." Why did God give man the law? It was given so that man would have nothing to say before God, so that every mouth may be stopped. God wants to show man that everyone is a sinner and that everyone has sinned. There is not one who has done good. Verse 20 says, "Because out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him; for through the law is the clear knowledge of sin." The ultimate purpose of the law of God was to show man that he is a sinner. The purpose of the law was not for man to be saved through it. The tone of the law is completely condemnatory. The law says that man should be condemned, that he should die, and that he should perish.

If the matter stopped here, there would be no gospel and everything would be over. But the matter does not stop here. Man cannot live by the law, but God has other ways. If you cannot pay back the money, God has other ways to pay it back for you. The first two words in verse 21 are marvelous; they mark a big turn in this matter. "But now." Thank the Lord that there is a turn! "But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested." God's righteousness was originally manifested in the law. But if that were the case now, we would be doomed. What does it mean to say that God's righteousness was manifested in the law? It means that whatever you owed God you had to pay back. If you sinned, you had to perish. If you transgressed, you had to go into perdition. Thus, the law would manifest God's righteousness. To punish sinners would be the most righteous thing for God to do. But thank the Lord, God's righteousness is no longer manifested in the law. If His righteousness were manifested within the law, God would have to judge sinners. But the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the law, in which case, judgment falls on God Himself. The end of verse 21 says, "Witness being borne to it by the Law and the Prophets." Even the prophets in the Old Testament, including David and all the other prophets, testified to the same thing.

How is God's righteousness manifested? Verse 22 says, "Even the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ to all those who believe, for there is no distinction." Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (v. 23), how can we obtain God's grace? Verses 24 and 25 say that we are "justified freely...through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth as a propitiation place." God has sent Jesus to redeem us from our sins and has set Him forth as a propitiation place. I believe we all know what the propitiation place is. The propitiation place is the covering of the ark in the Old Testament tabernacle; it was the place where God bestowed grace upon man. Every place on earth is defiled by sin. But this place, and only this place, is without sin. Now Jesus has become the propitiation place. How has He become such a place? By His blood being the surety. God has set forth Jesus as the propitiation place, and now through the blood of Jesus I can come by faith to God. God cannot do anything else but bestow grace upon me. Only after God has done this can we say that His forbearance and His passing over of sins in the Old Testament was righteous; and only after God has done this can we say that His justifying those who believe in Jesus in the New Testament is also righteous. We are saved today not because God glossed over our sins but because

**God has dealt with our sins. Before God we are not forgiven debtors, but paid up debtors who are forgiven.**

This is something most precious in the Bible. This is the only way that Christians can have boldness before God. Have you ever realized that inasmuch as love is precious, it is never that reliable? You cannot bring a person to court just because he has not loved you for a few days. There is no such thing as love in a law court. But if unrighteousness occurs or if sin arises, the law will speak. God likes to give us a handle, something for us to hold on to. Through such a handle, our faith can be strengthened and the promises of God can be fulfilled in us. This handle is the Lord Jesus Christ. God knows that we may doubt, so He works faith into us through His Son. We can say to Him, "God, since You have given me Your Son and have allowed Him to die, You must forgive my sins."

Sometimes we hear people praying, "O God, I want to be saved. Please save me! I have sinned, but I am determined to be saved. Please be merciful to me and have the Lord Jesus die for me." When such ones pray, they may cry bitterly. They act as if God's heart is very hard and believe that before God would forgive them or turn His heart toward them they have to cry much. Those who pray this way do not know what the gospel is. If the Son of God had not come to the earth, their crying and imploring before God might work. But the Son of God has come, and the problem of sin has been solved. The redemptive work on the cross has been accomplished. When people come to God, there is no need for poor begging anymore. Since God has given us His Son, He can forgive sins through His Son. He is faithful to do so; He is not being a liar by doing so. And He is righteous to do so; there is nothing unrighteous in it. When righteousness is involved, faithfulness is also involved.

Most people today are ignorant first of God's righteousness and then of the fact that the Lord Jesus has accomplished God's righteousness. People do not know that God's righteousness is manifested apart from the law. They still try to work up righteousness before God. They are like the man who owes ten thousand talents of silver. There is absolutely no way to repay the debt. But the man still tries to save six cents by getting off at an earlier stop, hoping to save to repay his debt. He is still calculating, hoping to save a little here or there, to do this or that, to generate a little money for the repayment of the debt. He still wants to say to his creditor that though he owes ten thousand talents, he does have a few pennies with him. He does not realize that the full sum has already been sent to his home.

Man has no idea what God has done in His Son. Because of this, the apostle Paul tells us what attitude man should have. Concerning God's righteousness, we need to look at two passages in the Bible. The first passage is in Romans 10. Verses 3 and 4 say, "For because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish their own righteousness, they were not subject to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone who believes." I love these two verses. When we read these verses in relation to the gospel, our hearts must be warmed up. These verses say that the Jews did not know that God's righteousness had been established; they were still seeking to establish their own righteousness. They tried their best to be good, to exchange their work for their salvation, and to exchange their righteousness for life and all that God has given to them. But Paul said that all those seeking to establish their own righteousness are not subject to the righteousness of God. Not to be subject to

the righteousness of God is not to be subject to the work that God has accomplished in His Son Jesus. God's righteousness is accomplished in His Son Jesus. The cross of Jesus is both a manifestation of God's love and an accomplishment of God's righteousness. On the cross of Jesus, God's righteousness was accomplished. If any man wants to establish his own righteousness today, he is denying the sufficiency of the Lord's work on the cross. Never think that we can add something to the work that the Lord Jesus has finished. Never think that we can help it or patch it up a little. All those who seek to establish their own righteousness are not subject to God's righteousness at all. If someone sends a sum of money to my home to pay back a loan he has made to me and I still try to save a few pennies to repay him, I am in reality despising what he has given me. All those who seek to establish their own righteousness are blaspheming God.

Why is "Christ...the end of the law"? Christ as "the end of the law" means that Christ includes everything that the law has. In other words, God has not just given you ten thousand talents of silver; all the money in the world has been given you. How can you save a few more pennies? The end of the law is Christ. How are you going to find any more righteousness? If a man is very big, and he occupies the whole chair, can you squeeze yourself into the same chair? The end of the law is Christ. How are you going to establish your own righteousness? Thank and praise God that what He has given us is the best! I would say a strong word in a most reverent way: God has "exhausted" His omnipotence in His Son Jesus. The end of the law is Christ. All those who believe in Him must receive righteousness. Those believing in Jesus are bound to receive. There is no possibility for them not to receive. I like this thought. It is impossible for us not to be saved. God has given us His Son, who does not only possess the little that you need, but even everything. God can never forsake those who have believed into His Son. God has no way to reject us. All those who come to God through the Son must receive righteousness. There will be no hassle; the guarantee is sure.

The other passage of Scripture is 2 Corinthians 5:21. We have been saved, but we still live as humans. It is true that we are now saved, and that our sins are forgiven, but what do we do while living on this earth? We are all Christians today, and are all the children of the Lord. Regarding His children, God declares something most amazing here: "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf." God has made the Lord Jesus sin. Originally the Lord Jesus was without sin at all; He had nothing to do with sin. Now God has judged Him as though judging sin itself. God judged Him this way "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Today in the Lord Jesus Christ, you and I are the showpiece of God's righteousness. When people see us, they see God's righteousness. We, the sinners, through the Lord Jesus becoming sin for us and through His bearing of our sins to forgive us, have now become the righteousness of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are the living righteousness of God walking on earth. In Christ we are the representatives of God's righteousness.

If you do not know what God's righteousness is, all you need to do is find a saved person and take a good look at him. You will then know what God's righteousness is. If you want to know what God's righteousness is, just find a Christian and you will know that God has not dealt with our sins irresponsibly. He has made sin Him who knew no sin. Because the Lord Jesus has died, the work of redemption is accomplished. For us to be in the Lord Jesus today is an expression of the righteousness of God. When a person sees someone who believes in the Lord Jesus, he sees God's righteousness. If someone wants to know what God's righteousness is, I can stand up and

tell him, "Just look at me. God loves me so much. He loves us to the uttermost. He is not loose concerning sin at all. This is why He caused the Lord Jesus to die on the cross. Look at me, a saved sinner today. I am the showpiece of God's righteousness in Christ."

Today we declare two great messages to the world. Both of them are what the world desperately needs. The first is that God loves man. This is a most wonderful fact. But that is not all. The other great message is that God in His righteousness has forgiven man's sins. Now man can come to God with all boldness and full faith, reminding Him that He has forgiven his sins.

At the end I would like to ask you a question. Why is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? It seems that there is something lacking in this parable of the prodigal. After the prodigal squandered his estate and came home, the father should indeed love him, but he should have said at least a few words of reprimand to the son, perhaps something like this: "You have taken all your estate and have spent everything; even your stomach is empty now." But the father did not say a word like this. No wonder the older son had to say something. Even we have to say something. Is it not unrighteousness when there is sin and it is not dealt with? If Luke 15 had only the parable of the prodigal, we would have to conclude that God is not righteous, that God has not judged sin, but has glossed over it. In the parable of the prodigal son there is not so much as one word of rebuke. But thank and praise the Lord that there are three parables in Luke 15. The first is the parable of the shepherd saving the sheep. The second is the parable of the woman seeking the lost coin. The third is the parable of the father receiving the prodigal son. Immediately in the first parable we have the good shepherd forsaking his life for the sheep. The Lord Jesus has already come and died. The sin of the prodigal was already judged in the first parable. Because of what happened in the first parable, there is the second parable, in which a woman lights a lamp to seek for the lost coin. Since the Lord Jesus has accomplished salvation, the Holy Spirit can come to enlighten with His light. After this the Father does not see the problem of sin anymore. The problem of sin has been cleared up in the parable of the shepherd giving his life for the sheep. In addition, the inward feeling has been enlightened in the parable of the woman lighting the lamp. The wrongs have been realized already. By the time the Father comes, all He needs to do is to welcome the prodigal. The Lord Jesus has forgiven our sins. The Holy Spirit has enlightened us and has caused us to be convicted concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. Hence, by the time the Father comes, the matter of sin need not be mentioned anymore; He only has to do the work of welcoming us. In the previous two parables, God's righteousness as well as His love were already manifested.

Suppose a person has not yet come to God, but he sees that he is a sinner and realizes that the Lord Jesus has judged his sins. The Good Shepherd has borne his sins away and the Holy Spirit has enlightened him concerning his sins. When such a one returns home, he has to realize that the matter of sin is forever gone; it has been dealt with on the cross. Remember that the Father's house is not the place to talk about sin. It is not the place to talk about our squandering. The cross is the place to talk about sin; it is the place to talk about our squandering. If you are at home, God can most righteously choose not to talk about your sins. We can eat and drink to our heart's delight. We can live, wear the costly garments, rest, and make merry to our heart's delight. God has said that once we were lost, but now we have been found, that once we were dead, but now we have come to life. There is no problem here any longer. Hallelujah! God's grace is sufficient for us. In this way, we realize that God's grace is a faithful and righteous grace.

## **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SALVATION**

One thing we have to know is that before the Lord Jesus died, it was unrighteous for God to forgive our sins, but after the Lord Jesus died, it would be equally unrighteous for God not to forgive our sins. Without the Lord Jesus' death, God's forgiveness would be unrighteous on His part; He could never do this. With the Lord Jesus' death, He would be held equally unrighteous if God would not forgive. Please remember, a redemption without blood is unrighteous. On the other hand, when one has the blood and is denied salvation, this is also unrighteous.

Once I went with a brother to Kiukiang. While we were on the boat travelling and sharing the Word with others, I began to speak to a person about our faith. At the same time our brother spoke to another person, who was Moslem. During the conversation, our brother asked the man if he had any sin. The man tried to tell him how good Mohammedanism is and how great Mohammed was. But our brother said, "I am not asking you about these things. My question is this: Do you have any sin?" He confessed that he did. Our brother then asked him, "What then are you going to do about it? Is there any way that you can be forgiven?" The man answered that if he wanted to be forgiven, he had to feel remorseful at heart and do good, and do this and that and many other things. After the man had listed all the things that should be done, our brother said, "This is precisely the point of controversy. You have said that when one sins, remorse can bring in forgiveness. But I say that when one sins, there must be punishment. Without punishment, there can be no forgiveness. You think that a sense of remorse will earn someone forgiveness. But I say that forgiveness only comes through judgment. If I have sinned in this city and I escape to a far away country, I can be remorseful over there, and I can perform many charities. I can be a nice man there. But none of these will revoke my sin. Your God is a God who forgives without judgment. But my God is a God who forgives only after judgment." The Moslem then asked, "How can you be forgiven then?" "This is why," said our brother, "You need to believe in Jesus. Only by believing in Jesus will you be forgiven. Your sins have been judged in the Lord Jesus, and when you believe in Him, you will be forgiven." Here is the righteousness of God. Today men consider whether or not God is love. They do not realize that God is not only love, but He is also righteous. It is not that God only wants to forgive man's sins. He has to forgive them in a way that will not conflict with His nature and His righteousness. This is what men fail to see.

## **THE APPLICATIONS OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS**

We should now ask, how is God's righteousness applied to us? God's righteousness is applied to us in two ways. God's righteousness can first be applied in its giving us peace in our heart. Feelings are unreliable; therefore, we may not trust God's feelings. Love is likewise unreliable. If someone's love changes, no one can penalize him or her for it. But we can lay hold of righteousness and make claims based on righteousness. If God only loves us, He may spare us from the judgment of sins or may let us off easily, if that is something that He can do. But what if one day God is not happy with us anymore and does not want to go easy on us anymore? If God does not love us anymore and if He becomes angry and unhappy with us, we would suffer. Under such circumstances, we could not have any assurance about God, and our hearts would never be at peace. But now that God has given us His righteousness, we are at peace, for we know that our sins have been judged in the person of Christ. Hence, we can have a bold conscience and

definite assurance when we come to God, and our heart can have peace. Peace cannot be obtained through love; peace can only be obtained through righteousness. Although in reality God's love is reliable, from man's point of view it is not as reliable as God's righteousness. When a person first begins to trust in God, he should learn to trust more in His righteousness than in His love. Later, as he progresses, he should learn to trust more in God's love than in His righteousness. Such a trust belongs to an advanced stage of the Christian life. This is the life of people like Madame Guyon. But at the beginning, we should take righteousness as the basis of our faith. Without righteousness, faith has no basis. Thank God that our sins have been forgiven. Thank Him that He will never judge us anymore. As the hymn says:

God            would            not            have            His            claim            on            two,  
 First            on            His            Son,            my            Surety            true,  
 And then upon me laid.

Our hearts are at rest, for our sins have been judged.

God's righteousness has another application: It causes us to realize the loathsome nature of sin. In order to preserve His righteousness, God was willing even to crucify His Son on the cross. God would rather sacrifice His Son than sacrifice His righteousness, His truth, and His law. God would not do one thing that is contrary to His nature. Therefore, we can see how loathsome sin is. If God cannot be careless about sin and would rather judge His Son in order to deal with sin, we also cannot be careless toward sin. In God's view, His Son can be sacrificed, but sin cannot be left undealt with. Every believer in the Lord Jesus must see then that no sin can be glossed over. God's attitude toward sin is very strict.

Now all our sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus has died, we are forgiven, and everything is taken care of. Here I would like to give you one more illustration. One day I was at Hsiao-feng Park reading my Bible. Suddenly, the sky blackened and thunder began to roll. It looked as if it was going to rain immediately. I closed my Bible quickly and ran to a little house behind the park. But after a while the rain had not yet come, so I walked home hurriedly. On the way home the sky was still quite dark; thunder was rolling, and the clouds were very thick. Yet the rain did not come—not one drop fell on me the entire way home. On another occasion some time later, I went to the same park to read again. This time also the sky blackened like the previous time. Thunder started to roll again, and the clouds were overcast and thick. I counted on my experience from the last time, so I was quite at ease and moved slowly. But unfortunately this time the rain came, and I got wet. I had no choice but to run to that little house again. By the time I reached the house, the rain was pouring down. I did not know how heavy the rain was. But, eventually, the sky cleared, the clouds dispersed, the thunder ceased, and I walked home again. This time, like the previous time, there was not a drop of rain while I was on my way home. But let me ask you a question: On which occasion did my heart have more peace? On both occasions no rain fell on me as I walked home. But which time did I have more peace? Was it the first time, or was it the second time? Although the first time there was no rain on the way home, I did not know when the rain would come; as a result, my heart was held in suspense. On the second occasion there was also no rain on

the way home, but my heart was at peace because the rain had already passed and the sky was clear. Many people hope that God's grace would gloss over their sins. They are like I was on my first trip home. Although there is no rain, darkness still hangs overhead; thunder still rolls and the clouds still cover. Their hearts are still held in suspense. They do not know what will happen to them. But praise and thank the Lord, the salvation we have received is one that has already "passed through the rain." It is a salvation that has "passed through thunder." Our "rain" has already been poured out on Calvary, and our "thunder" has already rolled on Calvary. Now everything is over. We rejoice not only because our sins have been forgiven, but because they have been forgiven after being dealt with. They were not glossed over. God has dealt with the problem of our sins. His Son's resurrection has become the evidence of this work.

Today is the day of grace. But we must remember that grace reigns through righteousness (Rom. 5:21). Grace cannot come directly; it must come through righteousness. God's grace does not come to us directly. It comes to us through Calvary. Today some say that if God loves us, He can forgive us without judgment. That would be grace reigning without righteousness. But grace is reigning through righteousness. Grace needs the righteousness of Calvary before it can reign. Today our receiving of grace is based solely upon God's righteousness. Our sins are forgiven after they are dealt with. When we see the cross, it is right to say that this is God's righteousness. It is also right to say that this is God's grace. The cross signifies God's righteousness, and it also signifies God's grace. To God, the cross is righteousness; to us, it is grace. When we behold the cross today, our heart is fully at rest because we know that the grace that we have received was obtained through God's righteous way. We know that our salvation is clear, complete, proper, and upright. Our salvation does not come through smuggling and fraud. Rather, it comes through judgment on sin. Thank and praise the Lord! The cross has solved the problem of sin, and the resurrection has confirmed that the solution is indeed true.