

# WHEN IS A MAN RIGHTEOUS IN GOD'S EYES? Curtis Pugh

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Curtis Pugh

Our text is this: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:9-15).

There seems to be much confusion today regarding when an individual is saved, that is, when a person is declared to be righteous in God's eyes. Some think that only after a man is dead and resurrected in Christ's likeness can he be righteous. In a sense this is correct, for "...when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Then we shall be sinless in our experience. Then we shall experience righteousness, but our question in this message deals with when God views us as immaculate. Some would have us to believe that we are righteous in God's eyes only upon our baptism. That is they teach that the waters of baptism wash away our sins and make us righteous before God. Others would have us think that only after coming to the front in a religious meeting and praying a certain prayer we are then righteous in God's eyes. And so I raise the question and will seek to answer it from the Scriptures, "When is a man righteous in God's eyes?" I do not refer to the eternal purpose of God where God views all His works as already accomplished, but rather refer to the experience of men in their lives.

We did not read the first part of chapter ten of Romans, but there Paul tells us about the Jews. He writes, "...they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Rom. 10:3,4). This is a characteristic of every man-made religion in the world today. Men think that they can, by their works, or by their religious ceremonies, by their good lives or good deeds – by something that

they do – that in this way they can be righteous in God’s eyes. The Jews thought to be righteous by trying to keep God’s law. But they did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God – that is, they rejected Christ who is the end of righteousness by law-keeping to everyone that believes. But around the world at this very moment there are sincere men and women in various religions, including some which claim to be Christian, who think to be righteous in God’s eyes because of something that they do or have done. They are “ignorant of God’s righteousness” and are busy “going about to establish their own righteousness.” But they have missed God’s righteousness which is in Jesus Christ and are in fact without imputed righteousness.

The famous British Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in preaching on the subject of election had as his first point, “There is such a thing as election.” My first point in this message is, “There is such a thing as justification – that is, there is such a thing as being declared to be righteous in God’s eyes. In Romans chapter 4 and verses 1-8 we read of a man who experienced this justification, that is, he experienced being viewed by God as righteous. There we read these words: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:1-8).

Notice these things regarding this imputed kind of righteousness. This righteousness is something Abraham “found” or discovered. He did not earn it nor did he qualify for it. He did not know about it, but discovered it in his experience as God dealt with him. This, then is a truth that God must reveal. It is unknown to the natural man and can only be understood from the Scriptures. Notice that this righteousness came to Abraham when he believed God. It is not, cannot be, of works because it is of grace. This righteousness comes not because of a combination of works and grace as some think, for such a combination automatically by its very nature negates grace. Speaking of election which is by grace unto salvation, Paul wrote, “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). The principle is clear and is this: you cannot mix works and grace and still have grace! To add man’s works for righteousness to God’s free grace is to change the nature of grace so that it is no more grace, but rather works. If I do something which earns God’s favor, He does not give it, but pays me with His favor because I have worked for it. To preach such synergism is not to preach the Gospel of Christ! Notice this, and this is very important! This justification or righteousness before God is not just

the forgiveness of past sins. Revelation 1:5 says that Jesus, "...loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Now I ask you, what sins did Jesus wash us from? The answer is "our sins." All our sins! For when Jesus died to pay for sins, I had committed none. All my sins were yet future when Christ paid for them and the truth of justification is that we are declared to be righteous. We are declared to be sinless. When we are justified we are viewed by God as immaculate. Proof positive is in that Paul goes on in Romans chapter four to quote David in the Psalms as saying, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Romans 4:8). According to Paul and David, there is a blessed state of justification where God does not write down sin on our account sheet! He does not impute sin to His children.

Remember the story of Balaam? Most of the time we think only of Balaam's donkey and how she spoke to the prophet. Sometimes we miss the point. Balaam was a prophet of God. The enemies of Israel wanted Balaam to curse Israel so that they could defeat them before they entered the Promised Land. Think about what Israel had been doing for forty years. The people had complained and murmured against God and Moses. They had plotted to chose a new captain and rebel against Moses and Aaron. They wanted to return to Egypt. During the very time that Moses had been on the mountain receiving the Holy Law of God, the children of Israel, along with Aaron, had made a golden calf and were worshipping it in the most licentious manner. And yet, Balaam reported that "He (God) hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel..." (Numbers 23:21). God does not behold iniquity in His children. This can only take place because of God's free grace! Only imputed righteousness can be in view here. So there is such a thing as being righteous in God's eyes. Abraham found it. The next question we want to consider is this: when does it occur? Does it occur at the moment a person comes forward in a religious meeting? Does God declare a person righteous when he prays a certain prayer? Is this what is meant by "calling on the name of the Lord?" Or, as some say, does God declare a person righteous when he is baptized in water? When?

In Romans 10:14 and 15 we read: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Notice that (1) calling follows belief; (2) believing follows hearing; (3) hearing follows preaching; and (4) preaching follows being sent. Let us reverse the order and put it in the way we usually think. (1) First the Holy Spirit speaks to a Church and the Church is responsive and sends out a preacher. This is the New Testament pattern. No other entity in the world has authority from God to send out a preacher other than a New Testament Baptist Church. No association, community, fellowship, mission board, convention or union has this authority. Only a New Testament Church can rightly do this sending out. (2) The preacher preaches the Gospel.

(3) The Gospel is believed – not just in the head, but in the heart. That means that faith has come to the individual and is exercised toward Jesus Christ. (4) Then these believers call on the name of the Lord. They do! The Bible says in verse 14, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” Calling on the Lord is something that believers do! Unbelievers cannot do it! Unbelievers can mouth empty words that may be called by some people a prayer, but only believers can truly call on the Lord. Praying a prayer does not make an unbeliever into a believer. According to verse 14 only believers can and do genuinely call upon the Lord! Let me illustrate this in this way. I do not know what the modern medical practice is, but I am told that many years ago when a baby was born, it was sometimes, at least, picked up by the feet and given a swat on its bottom. Of course the baby immediately screamed! Such a procedure probably helped clear out all the mucus that might have been in the throat and nasal passages of the infant. It also provoked the baby to take in a great gulp of God’s air, thus filling its lungs to capacity. I suppose the scream tested the baby’s vocal chords. But the scream of that baby did not make it alive. The scream of that baby was evidence of it’s being alive, but did not in any sense make it alive! Now, without the swat, babies cry and scream at times. This is the natural course of events in the life of a baby. So it is with believers. They call on the Lord. Calling on the Lord does not make them a believer. Be clear on that point! Calling on the Lord does not make an unbeliever into a believer! But genuinely calling on the Lord is evidence that those who call are believers! Only believers begin and continue a lifetime of calling on the Lord in the Scriptural sense. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:22, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Notice Paul does not say “with all them that have once upon a time called on the Lord.” The idea that you can call one time on the Lord and be saved and go on in life and never call on the Lord again is foolish. Believers call on the Lord – not once, but again and again. They do! It is a characteristic of a believer in Jesus Christ to be often calling on the Lord. The Psalmist cited this evidence in testifying to the righteousness of Samuel. He wrote, “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and SAMUEL AMONG THEM THAT CALL UPON HIS NAME...” Psalm 99:6 – Capital letters added for emphasis). What a recommendation! To be reckoned “among them that call upon his name” is to be reckoned up among the host of true believers. Believers call on the Lord! It is an evidence of spiritual life. True believers will be found calling on the Lord and confessing with their mouth regarding Christ and their faith in Him (Romans 10:9).

Now we come to the question. Does justification, that is, does a man become judicially righteous in God’s eyes at the time he calls on the Lord? Does a man become judicially righteous in God’s eyes at the time he is baptized? Or does a man become judicially righteous in God’s eyes at the point of faith? What does the Scripture say? The Scripture says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Abraham was not righteous in God’s

eyes when he prayed or was circumcised, but when he believed! This is the testimony of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 1:21 we read, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." God saves who? He saves them that believe! Let us take a little "tour" through the New Testament and just read what the Word of God says. In John 1:12 we read: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." Who has authority to become the sons of God – those who are baptized? Those who pray a certain kind of prayer? Or is it those who believe? In John 20:31 are these words: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Who has this eternal life? Those who believe! In Acts 13:39 we read these clear words: "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Here it is clearly stated that justification, that is being declared to be righteous in God's eyes, comes to "all that believe." Again in Acts 16:31 "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The requirement for salvation is not calling on the Lord – not praying some so-called "sinner's prayer," but the requirement is faith! Notice Romans 3:22 which says, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference." The righteousness of God is by faith and is unto all and upon all them that believe! Plain words. Nothing here about being baptized for righteousness or praying or calling on the Lord or doing anything else for righteousness! In Hebrews 10:39 we find these words, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." At what point is the soul saved? This verse is clear. It is upon believing that the soul is saved. One more Scripture should suffice. In 1 John 5:13 we read these words, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life...." Who is it that has eternal life? The answer is plain and simple. It is those who believe on the name of the Son of God! And these may "know" that they have this never-ending life! From these and other Scriptures it is clear that justification, that is being judicially declared to be righteous in God's eyes, comes at the point of faith, not at some subsequent point in time when a person acts on that faith and confesses his faith, or prays to the Lord, or is baptized. What could be clearer to the unbiased mind?

To persuade someone to be immersed in water when he is yet in unbelief and then to tell that person that because they were baptized they are righteous in God's eyes is to deceive them. The Bible does not teach that it is at the point of going under the water or coming up out of the water that a man is viewed by God as righteous. Imputed righteousness does not come that way! But to persuade someone to make a false calling upon the Lord, that is, to solicit and to elicit a prayer from the mouth of a man who is yet in unbelief, and then to tell him he is saved because he

prayed – that is the worst kind of deception! Let me say that another way. To get someone to “come forward” in a religious meeting – a thing unknown in the New Testament – and then instruct them to pray, telling them they will be saved as a result of their prayer, gives a person a false confidence. Human nature will trust in the prayer and not in Christ! The person will have come forward as an unbeliever and will return to his seat as an unbeliever who is deceived into thinking he is saved because he prayed. He will think he is saved because of something he did – and thus the glorious gospel of the free grace of God is turned into a false gospel of works for salvation.

We have these people walking our streets. They have been deceived. They came forward in some kind of evangelistic campaign or meeting. They were sincere in wanting something, but had not repented of their sins nor received faith in Jesus Christ. But they were told to pray a certain prayer and they did it. And they returned to their place just as lost and dead in their sins as they were before they stood up from their seats. Now they are cynics. Whereas once they would at least listen to the Gospel, now they speak against it. I hear them saying, “I tried Christianity. I went forward and prayed, but nothing happened. There is no reality in Christianity. It is false. I know. I tried it and it doesn’t work.” What harm we do when we do not follow the Bible exactly! Why are we not content to follow the example of the apostles and other New Testament preachers? They simply preached the Gospel and left the results in God’s hands. There is no record that they ever told anyone to come forward or to pray a certain prayer in order to be declared righteous in God’s eyes. But the power of God was on them and men asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And what was their answer? “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts 16:30, 31). They did not tell them to call on the Lord and by doing that they would be saved. They told them that men are righteous in God’s eyes by faith in Christ!

Now we have considered Abraham. Abraham had positive righteousness imputed to him – that is set down on his account sheet – when he believed God. That is clear. But does that have anything to do with us today? Yes it does. Consider how Paul closes chapter four of Romans. Romans 4:23-25 says, “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” Romans chapter four was not written that we might read it and wonder at the man Abraham and marvel at how God blessed him. No! It was written for our sakes. For we shall have the same judicial, positive righteousness charged to our account upon believing! Do not marvel at Abraham and the grace given to him. Rather rejoice, believer, at the grace given you! The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8, 9, these words, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” The Cornilescu



(Romanian language) translation may be of interest to you here. It says clearly in translation, “For through grace you were saved through faith, AND THIS (i.e. this faith – CAP) DOES NOT COME FROM YOU, but is the gift of God.” God gives “...the faith of God’s elect” (that is what the Bible calls saving faith in Titus 1:1) and at the point of faith, the time of believing, righteousness is imputed to the believer.

In closing let me ask you a question. Have you believed to the saving of your soul? I do not refer to mere intellectual or mental understanding. I do not refer to mere mental assent where in you agree in principle to the facts of the Bible or to the facts of the Gospel. I ask if in your heart, your innermost being, you have believed the Gospel in such a way that all your hope, confidence, trust, and expectation is in Jesus Christ? Do not think you shall be saved because of something you have done. The only way anyone is righteous in God’s sight is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, a man can be righteous in God’s eyes, by grace, through faith which is the gift of God. And this righteousness is charged to your account at the point of faith in Jesus Christ. Imputed righteousness comes at the point of faith! Do not be deceived, but rejoice in the simplicity that is in Jesus Christ and salvation through faith in Him. Amen.

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