

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

12.3 What Is God Like?

Part III

The Righteousness of God

Scripture: Jeremiah-23:5-6

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, **The Lord Our Righteousness.**"*

INTRODUCTION

JEHOVAH TSIDKENU: The Lord Our Righteousness. These words were addressed to a recalcitrant people, a people who had despised the gracious overtures of God, a people who had proven themselves rebellious, a people who had plunged themselves repeatedly into the worst forms of idolatry and spiritual adultery; and yet a people upon whom the Lord God had set His name, a people whom the Lord would save.

Jeremiah lived in a tragic period. He lived in days when Jerusalem was threatened and finally destroyed, when the walls were broken down, the treasures of the temple were carried off to distant Babylon, and when Solomon's temple, all of its beauty withstanding, was burned with fire. He lived in times when one might have despaired for the future and come to the conclusion that the national existence of the people Of God had little to look forward to. Doom was on the horizon, destruction was threatening. Yet, Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, spoke words of consolation for those who had ears to hear them when he said, *"A king shall arise, his name shall be called Jehovah Tsidkenu, The Lord Our Righteousness."* Our doctrine this morning is this: The righteousness of God. Three points may be considered:

- I. The Lord is righteous.**
- II. Mankind is unrighteous.**
- III. The Lord is our righteousness.**

I. CONSIDER FIRST, THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS:

1. He is righteous in His person. Theologians divide the attributes of God into two significant categories. These are called **Absolute** or **Immanent** and **Relative** or **Transitive**. The first class has to do with those qualities of God which concern Himself, His **spirituality, infinity** and **perfection**. Relative or Transitive attributes deal with the outward revelation of God's being. These are concerned with God's relations to creation and humankind. Included here are His faithfulness, love, mercy, justice and righteousness.

Holiness is an absolute attribute of God. In His holiness God eternally maintains and wills His moral purity and excellence. The Hebrew word here is **Quadash** coming from the root "qad" meaning "to cut" or "to separate." In the New Testament we have the word **hagios** or **hagiazō** which means to "separate" or "to set apart." Thus, the essential meaning of holiness is that of separation. With this in mind scholars speak of God's **majestic** holiness and His **ethical** holiness.

In **His majestic** holiness God is just unlike His creation. There is not one thing or being to be compared with Him. Hence, the words of the Lord, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways,"* reflect God's majestic holiness. (Isaiah 55:7) This truth is also seen in Exodus 15:11, *"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* Or, consider, I Samuel 2:2, *"There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside thee, neither is there any rock like our God."* Finally, Isaiah 57:15, *"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I will dwell in the high and holy place."* So we have the concept of God's majestic holiness in which God is exalted above creation.

But there is another sense in which the holiness of God is revealed in Scripture. This is what has been called His **ethical holiness**, or the fact that He is separate from evil. This holiness forbids God having anything to do with sin whatsoever. In Habakkuk 1:13 we read about ethical holiness, *"Thine eyes are too holy to behold iniquity."* God is so holy He can have no communion with or association with evil and what does not conform to His nature.

This emphasis in Scripture provides one of the most important concepts of God that is possible for the mind of man to consider. We live in an unholy world and are within ourselves unholy. For this reason we have come to take unholiness for granted and are accustomed to such as a way of life. The adage, "no one is perfect" is fallacious. There is a perfect one. God is perfect. To be confronted

with such perfection, would undoubtedly cause any one of us to react as the prophet of old, *"Woe is me for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."* (Isaiah 6:1-5)

Having considered the holiness of God we may be thankful that our study deals also with God's righteousness else we are left with a God who can have nothing to do with us. The righteousness of God is a transitive attribute. It relates to that virtue in God by which His treatment of His creatures conforms at all times to the purity of His nature. Thus, thanks be His name, His dealings with mankind never violate His holiness. God is perfect in His standard of conduct toward us. All of His ways are righteous. Here we must remember that He is His own law. He need not conform to our code or manner of thinking, He is a law unto Himself. Now, this is a very practical doctrine. If God is holy then He is good. How can a good God allow things to happen which happen? The doctrine of the righteousness of God has to do with God's being perfect in His person or nature in this world which He controls.

2. He is righteous in His precepts (word). You may recall the occasion of the Ten Commandments being given. There was thundering and lightning, the sound of trumpet's and the sight of smoking mountains. When the people saw these things they stood afar off. (Exodus 20:18) This given law of God unmistakably revealed the holiness of God. That is why Paul wrote in Romans 3:24, *"The law is holy."* It originated with a holy God and reflects His holiness. Why was the law given? According to Galatians 3:24, it was given as a reminder of God's holiness and our need of Christ. Further, we have no problem with a "Holy" Bible. Is it the white paper and black ink which deserves such a qualification? Surely it is the conviction that its words reflect the mind of a holy God. We may be sure this was the attitude of Peter when he was led to write, *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."* (II Peter 1:21)

3. God is righteous in His promises. Few people realize how important the promises of God are. The fact of the matter is that much of what goes on in the world happens as result of the promises of God. This understanding helps us to resolve the great ethical problem of evil and suffering. If God is righteous he is good. If God is good, He would wish to make His creatures happy. Inasmuch as His creatures are not happy, God lacks either goodness or the power to make them happy or both. People have tried to solve this dilemma by adopting one of these positions.

a. God is limited. A classic work in support of this view was written several years ago by E. S. Brightman entitled **The Finite God**. The author suggests that God is aware of human suffering, but He cannot bring relief or help because He is not all-powerful. Brightman suggests that when we suffer God also suffers and that God is involved in our hurts.

b. Evil is nonexistent. Eastern religions have taken this view. Hinduism teaches that evil has no real essence, it is like heat from fire. Everything in this world is maya, or illusion. Evil is merely the absence of good, but not a real entity in itself. Christian Science is an Americanized version of this position affirming that pain and evil are all in ones mind.

c. There are two ultimate realities. This philosophy holds that there are two all-powerful realities in the world; a good god and an evil god. The Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, holds that two gods are ever at war with one another. We may make reference to a so-called "Christian" dualism where the devil becomes a second god. The true Christian teaching is that the devil operates within the framework of God's permissive sovereignty. He is not equal with God. (Ezekiel 28 :13-16) There is also a theory which comes from puritan theology suggesting that God is good and the world is evil. Therefore, God has nothing to do with the world or its systems.

Each of these solutions is unsatisfactory because it overlooks or seeks to eliminate the fact that God is God, or that He is all-powerful or that evil exists at all. The problem of evil and suffering is not easily settled, but one approach has to do with God's promises which are continually being fulfilled in the world, God has promised that if man does certain things, certain benefits will accrue. Obedience to God will issue in God's blessing upon mankind. Disobedience will bring death, pain, suffering, and much sorrow. Man's early and continual disobedience are the cause of suffering and evil in his world. God has chosen to allow the processes of His promises to operate in the world. Man has chosen a course which is self destructive and God allows the result of this choice to stand according to His promises. This position is stated in Galatians 6:7, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth this he will also reap."*

4. God is righteous in His pleasures. That is, He will deal righteously. The Lord in the disposition of His creatures is utterly righteous, and in that sovereignty He will be fair. It is up to God what He do with you. If that sounds heavy, would you rather it be chance which dictates your fortunes? The

Scripture teaches that God, possessed of utter independence, without any need for us at all, made us simply for His own good pleasure. Because we are the creatures of His hand, He may deal with us as He will and we may not question Him in the matter, The righteous God will do as He pleases to do and be perfectly just all the while, *“As for God, His way is perfect.”* (Psalm 18:30)

II. CONSIDER SECOND, MANKIND IS UNRIGHTEOUS:

I would despair to stop at this point. The doctrine of God's holiness must be a distressing doctrine because it impresses upon us that God will have nothing less than perfection if His fellowship is to be enjoyed, that the only passport to heaven is a life without blemish. All of the time when confronted with such a standard our best report is to confess with Paul, *“I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.”* The **New Yorker** magazine once featured cartoons portraying a particular scene with a balloon above the head of one of the characters to show what the individual was really thinking. The series was called **“The Naked Eye.”** One particular cartoon featured a remarkably beautiful girl driving a sports convertible car and being noticed by a garage mechanic. The balloon above the mechanics head revealed the man's thoughts. He saw the chassis of the automobile, without its body, showing the powerful engine. This balloon technique may be employed to illustrate the fact that our lives lie bare and fully exposed to the gaze of God. There is no need to attempt any camouflage with Him. (Hebrews 4:12-13) God's level of goodness shows us all to be lacking.

III. CONSIDER THIRD, THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS:

5. God is righteous in His provision. If it is true that God will be righteous in what He proposes to do, how shall we best understand His purposes for our lives? This brings us to the Christian teaching dealing with righteousness **imputed** and **imparted**.

a. Imputed righteousness. The name, Jehovah Tsidkenu, long ago hinted at the fact that the Lord's righteousness becomes our righteousness. God has willed that His justice be satisfied. Therefore, we must make full satisfaction by ourselves or it must be made by another. It is of that “another” of which I speak. For God sent His son to be our righteousness. Jesus became our righteousness in two ways: through His active obedience and through His passive obedience.

In His **active obedience** he left heaven's splendor, was born of a virgin, lived perfectly on earth without once deviating from the pattern of the law. He did

what we could never do. In His obedience to the divine law, He wrought righteousness for us. There was no unrighteousness in Him. Jesus Christ all his life long, deed after deed, during the space of thirty three years, through perfect obedience, wrought righteousness for us.

In His **passive obedience**, after He had achieved righteousness, gave himself up to be crucified. Thus He paid the penalty for our unrighteousness and made His righteousness available to us. He is the **Lord Our Righteousness**. God reckons us to be holy when we choose to accept the righteousness of Christ and are clothed by faith in it. (Romans 3:21-22, 25-26; 4:5-8)

b. Imparted righteousness. Over and over again in Scripture we are admonished to be holy. (I Peter 1:15-16; Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 12:4) How can we be holy when our consciences and our conduct daily dictate otherwise. Few of us feature ourselves as being holy. The answer lies in the fact that God gives us a nature like His own. He comes to live inside us, to indwell us, so that we are a new kind of person possessed of the potential to be like God in the world. Paul wrote, *“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”* (Romans 8:10) We are no longer debtors to the flesh. God’s plan is that we begin the life of eternity while we are still living in time. This is the true meaning of eternal life. It is God’s life which becomes mine the moment I become Christian. This then, is the doctrine of the righteousness of God. God is holy in all His dealings with us and we are partakers of His holiness through Jesus Christ as we trust Jesus from the depths of our hearts.

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