

## Lesson 12: Christ Our Righteousness (Part 1)

### Intro

We live in an achievement-driven society, where our worth is measured by what we are able to accomplish. Even children are confronted with this expectation. In fact, it is so pervasive that we assume God is the same way. Sometimes we believe that God can only accept us when we are good enough. The result is an achievement-driven faith that leads to frustration and despair because we think that we are simply not good enough for God to love us.

### Martin Luther and his search for freedom

In no other age was this false teaching more prevalent than during the Dark Ages. At that time, people lived under the heavy yoke of the Roman Church and were never sure of their salvation. They constantly tried to fulfill the requirements of the Church, never finding peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Did you know that Martin Luther experienced this? Every time he heard about the righteousness of God, he trembled in fear of this dreadful God. It was fear that compelled him to become a monk. In 1505 AD, Luther was a young law student, making his way home on a beautiful sunny day in July. As he came near the village of Stotternheim in Thuringia, he was suddenly caught in a horrific thunderstorm. He was scared for his life and was convinced that God had sent this storm as a warning message to him. In fear he prayed to St. Anna and promised: "If you help me, then I will become a monk!" When the thunderstorm passed over, Martin Luther took his promise seriously. He entered a monastery and subsequently became one of the most earnest and zealous monks. But even as a monk, he lived in terrible fear of God. He did his best, but even through his most arduous and strenuous works he did not find peace with God. Luther said, "I was indeed a pious monk and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it. . . . If it had continued much longer, I should have carried my mortifications even to death."

Unsatisfied and shaken to his core, Luther travelled to Rome to find answers. He entered the city, visited the churches, listened to the marvelous tales repeated by priests and monks, and performed all the ceremonies required. One day he crawled on his knees up "Pilate's staircase," which were claimed to have been the original stairs in front of the Roman judgment hall that Jesus descended after being condemned. In case you were wondering, they were miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. As he was devoutly climbing these steps, he suddenly heard a voice saying to him: "The just shall live by faith." He sprang to his feet and hastened from the place in shame and horror. But that text never lost its power upon his soul. From that time on, he saw more clearly than ever the fallacy of trusting in human works for salvation and the necessity of constant faith in the merits of Christ. (*see The Great Controversy, p. 125*)

Back in the monastery he studied the book of Romans and discovered the wonderful truth of "righteousness by faith". He saw that the right to stand before God could never be earned through good works, pilgrimages, blaming oneself or suffering. It became clear to him that he didn't have to earn God's mercy, because mercy is the very essence of God's character. Luther realized that he could only stand justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ as his savior. When he discovered this news, he finally met Jesus and became a new person. Of course, he could not keep this to himself. He preached the good news whenever an opportunity arose and his preaching became the tipping point that began the Protestant Reformation in the

16th century, which forever changed the world.

**Even today...**

We need this message today just as much as the people of Luther's day. The fact is that without this Biblical understanding of justification, we can not have peace with God and experience the assurance of salvation. Our religion would only be characterized by uncertainty, fear, and a pressure to perform. A fulfilling relationship with Jesus would not be possible.

**The fundamental problem**

God created Adam and Eve in His image. They lived in harmony with God and reflected His righteousness. However when they sinned, they lost this righteousness and hid themselves from the face of God. As a direct result, we too lack righteousness. This is our fundamental problem. Without righteousness in our hearts, the kind that reflects the character of God, we can no longer see and interact with God face to face. No strenuous attempts on our part can free us from the problem of sin and prepare us for such an intimate communion with God. Adam and Even tried to hide their nakedness, which was one result of their sin, when they made clothes out of fig leaves. But their fig-leaf outfit (a symbol for mans attempt to overcome the sin problem by their own works) was not suitable for the cold world in which they had to make their new home. In His mercy, God gave them something else.



What did God give Adam and Eve to prepare them for the cold world they now had to enter?

**Genesis 3:21**

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This article of clothing was completely undeserved and cost the life of an innocent animal. But it served as an excellent symbol for the righteousness that God gives us as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus.



How does Isaiah describe the righteousness of natural man?

**Isaiah 64:6**

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Just like the fig leaves could not solve the problem of sin, there is nothing that we can add to the gift of righteousness that cleanses us and allows us to stand before God.



What does God's solution look like? What consequences does this solution have on our lives?

**Isaiah 61:10**

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**Zechariah  
3:1-5**

We find this symbol again in the impressive vision that God gave to Zechariah. How did Joshua, who represented the people of God, stand before God? (Verse 3)

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Satan accused Joshua (and thus the whole people of God) of being sinful. And in truth, Satan was right. Joshua wore filthy clothing that represented the sins of God's people. But because he accepted his condition and confessed his sins to the Messiah, Jesus Christ could do something for him. What did Christ do for him? (Verse 4)

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Because of the new clothes, Joshua (and all the people of God) could stand justified before God and rejoice in their salvation!

**Quote #1**

"The high priest cannot defend himself or his people from Satan's accusations. He does not claim that Israel is free from fault. In filthy garments, symbolizing the sins of the people, which he bears as their representative, he stands before the Angel, confessing their guilt, yet pointing to their repentance and humiliation, and relying upon the mercy of a sin-pardoning Redeemer. In faith he claims the promises of God... His own sins and those of his people were pardoned. Israel was clothed with 'change of raiment'—the righteousness of Christ imputed to them... It was by faith in the coming Saviour that Joshua and his people had received pardon. Through faith in Christ they had been restored to God's favor." (*Prophets and Kings, p. 583-585*)

**Quote #2**

"We are not worthy of God's love, but Christ, our surety, is worthy, and is abundantly able to save all who shall come unto Him. Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character. He pleads before God in our behalf, saying: 'I have taken the sinner's place. Look not upon this wayward child, but look on Me. Does Satan plead loudly against our souls, accusing of sin, and claiming us as his prey, the blood of Christ pleads with greater power.'" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings, p. 8-9*)



**Jeremiah  
23:5,6**

What is Jesus Christ called in this messianic prophecy?

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Righteousness is not just some abstract thought. First of all righteousness is a person: Jesus Christ. His name is "Yahweh, our Righteousness". Righteousness is a description of God's perfect character.



**Revelation**  
**7:14; 19:8;**  
**22:4**

What are the redeemed clothed with at the end of time?

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What does the clothing symbolize?

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How did the redeemed obtain these clothes'? How are they washed clean?

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How are they going to interact with God?

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It is through Christ's righteousness alone, which He gives to us as a free gift, that we are able to access Heaven. It is His righteousness that allows us to come into God's presence. His righteousness is the express image of God and is restored in us when we confess our sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and are baptized. Through the Holy Spirit, God's Law (God's character) is written on our hearts. As a result, God seals us and writes His name, which also represents His character, on our foreheads (this stands for the exactly the same thing as the attitude of the heart). The name on our foreheads, mentioned in Revelation 22:4, is none other than "Christ, Our Righteousness". This is the seal of God that we read about in the Book for Revelation at the end of time. The Sabbath is an outward sign of this righteousness by faith. When asked about the context of the 3 Angels' Messages and their connection with the seal of God, mark of the beast, and righteousness by faith, Ellen White wrote:

**Quote #3**

"Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message in verity.'" (*Last Day Events*, p. 199-200.)

**Not only ONE  
element in  
our message**

The message of justification by faith is not just ONE element in the Advent message. It is the root and the foundation of our message. How could it be anything else? Our message is the "everlasting gospel". It is the same gospel that Christ and His apostles preached. They placed justification by faith in the center of their preaching. We can also find this teaching very clearly in the writings of Paul.



**Philippians**  
**3:5-11**

How does Paul describe his life before he met Jesus? (Verses 5,6)

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How did his values change after meeting Jesus and being transformed? (Verses 7,8)

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Whose righteousness was then important to Paul?

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**Paul and justification**



Paul learned that it is not his righteousness by keeping the Law, but justification by faith through Christ alone that prepares and enables him to be with God in eternity. This knowledge became the foundation of his message. He never tired of putting in the spotlight Christ's Righteousness as our only hope of salvation.

Please read the following texts from Paul and search for the answers to the following questions! (Romans 3:19-31; 4:5, 25; 5:1,18-21; Galatians 2:16,20,21; 5:4-6)

By what means could we never stand justified before God?

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By what means is our righteousness before God made possible again?

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By what means are we justified before God?

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What are the consequences when we by faith are justified?

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Think about it: Why is it impossible to add to our salvation through our own works? Think about yourself! Are you tempted to keep tabs on your good works to show God?

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**Christ our Righteousness**

The Bible describes with unmistakable clarity the condition under which we are born. We are all sinners and unrighteous. We cannot achieve through our own efforts the righteousness demanded by the Law. But Christ made possible what was impossible for us to do. He became man and lived a life in full obedience to God. He alone lived the righteous life the Law demands. He took death upon himself—the death that we deserved—in order to give us the gift of righteousness—which only He deserved. The Bible calls this gift, grace, and it is all God’s doing. However, we must decide if we will accept the gift of Christ’s righteousness.

The term *justification* is the opposite of condemnation. When a repentant sinner is justified it means that God has declared him/her not guilty. The foundation of this justification is not *our* obedience, but Jesus’ obedience alone. When we accept this gift by faith, we put on Christ’s righteousness, have peace with God, and begin a new life in Jesus Christ.



**2 Corinthians  
5:19-21**

How did Paul describe justification to the Corinthian church?

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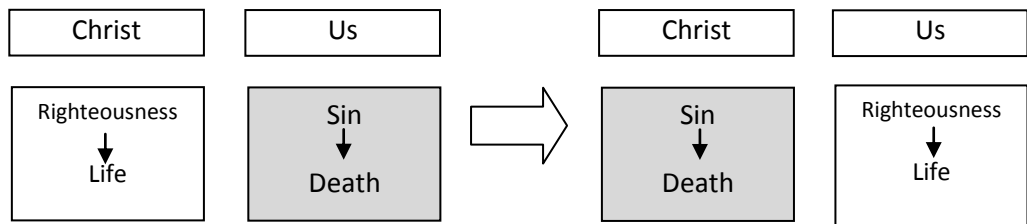
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**The greatest exchange of all times**

What we see here is the greatest transaction of all time. Christ was the perfect living example of God’s righteousness. In Him, no sin was found. He deserved life. We deserve death because of our sinfulness. Jesus took on the death we deserved and gave us, as a gift, the righteousness He deserved.



**Colossians  
 1:21-23**

What does God see in us when we have accepted Jesus' righteousness by faith?  
 What conditions does Paul name here?

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**Quote #4**

"It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and no He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of our character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned." (*Steps to Christ, p. 62*)

**Quote #5**

"When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ's righteousness." (*Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 389*)

**Quote #6**

"Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and 'God is love.' 1 John 4:16. It is conformity to the law of God, for 'all Thy commandments are righteousness' (Psalm 119:172), and 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him. Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it." (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 18*)

**Quote #7**

"Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, comes to us, not as a reward for our works, it is not bestowed because of the merit of sinful men, but it is a gift unto us, having in the spotless righteousness of Christ its foundation for bestowal." (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings, p. 115-116*)

**Quote #8**

"In the prophecy of Daniel it was recorded of Christ that He shall 'make reconciliation for iniquity, and...bring in everlasting righteousness' (Daniel 9:24). Every soul may say: 'By His perfect obedience He has satisfied the claims of the law, and my only hope is found in looking to Him as my substitute and surety, who

obeyed the law perfectly for me. By faith in His merits I am free from the condemnation of the law. He clothes me with His righteousness, which answers all the demands of the law. I am complete in Him who brings in everlasting righteousness. He presents me to God in the spotless garment of which no thread was woven by any human agent." (*Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 396*)

**What is faith?** The Bible is very clear. The righteousness that we need for salvation can never be earned through our own good works—not even partially. We can only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. But what is this faith? It is not just an intellectual belief in something. In this sense even the Devil believes in the gospel. True, biblical faith that leads to justification is much more. This kind of faith requires that...

- I admit that I am a sinner and that I can never satisfy the righteousness required by the Law. (Luke 19:13-14)
- I fully trust God's word.
- I accept Jesus as my personal Saviour, put him ahead of myself, and give him control of my life. (1 John 5:11-12)
- I trust solely in His righteousness and do not try to earn God's favor through my own works. (Romans 4:5)
- I put all of my trust in Jesus and organize my life according to His commandments, because faith without works is dead. (James 2:17)

**Quote #9** "Where there is not only a belief in God's word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith—faith that works by love and purifies the soul." (*Steps to Christ, p. 65*)

**Quote #10** "Through faith we receive the grace of God; but faith is not our Saviour. It earns nothing. It is the hand by which we lay hold upon Christ, and appropriate His merits, the remedy for sin. And we cannot even repent without the aid of the Spirit of God." (*Desire of Ages, p. 175*)

**Quote #11** "The faith that is unto salvation is not a casual faith, it is not the mere consent of the intellect, it is belief rooted in the heart, that embraces Christ as a personal Saviour, assured that He can save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him." (*Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 391*)

God is intimately acquainted with our weaknesses and our failures. He knows that all of our strenuous attempts of making it into Heaven is just as impossible as us trying to jump to the moon on our own strength. Through the gift of righteousness, He invites us to trust Him completely and implicitly. Are you ready to implicitly and completely place your trust in God?

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**The next lesson** Grace and our faith, through the righteousness of Christ that God gives us, is not without consequences. God has just begun His work in us when He has justified us. God transforms us step by step and molds His righteousness into our character. We will look at this more in-depth in the next lesson.





In light of this topic what has become important to you? What has God made clear to you? What decision(s) would you like to make? What would you like to share with God in prayer?

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#### Your homework for this lesson

1. Work through this lesson carefully and prayerfully. Mark the statements that are important to you and write your answers in the spaces given.
2. The memory verse for this topic is Romans 5:1. Write it word for word on an index card and learn it by heart.
3. In the next couple of days, speak with someone about one of the points from this lesson that personally spoke to you and tell them what you have learned!