

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Romans 3:21-31

One of the problems that we face every day that we live is the problem of right and wrong. We are hearing a lot over the television on the news and seeing a great deal in our papers these days about politicians who have been caught in some form of wrongdoing. Men have always been inclined to ask are there things which are absolutely right and other things that are absolutely wrong? And if so who determines what is right and who determines what is wrong. Is this determined by each person. Is it determined by a persons background, his culture. Is it determined by the government under which he lives so that you can equate the rights and the wrong with things that are legal or things that are illegal. Now if we are holding that right and wrong is determined basically by individuals then there is really no basis for saying that there is anything that is absolutely right or anything that is absolutely wrong because we would never agree on what we considered to be right and wrong especially if you take this on a world wide basis. When there is no supreme standard which can serve as a guide for us then truth becomes a relative thing and there is no basis upon which moral judgements can be made. That to a great extent is where we are today. Truth has been set aside as in the sense that it is anything that is absolute. People are as we hear the expression being used doing their own thing continually which is just another way of describing what was going on in Old Testament times when in the days of the judges the Word of God tells us that there was no king in Israel and that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Now was that wrong for them to do the thing that appeared to be right to them. Is this the right example this morning for us to follow. Should we join those who are doing that which they would like to do. In the whole area of morality are there things which are absolutely right and on the other hand things which are absolutely wrong. Who is the judge and how are we to know? I want you to turn if you will this morning for just a few moments to the 36th Psalm. As you know in considering the attributes of God we have gone through many passages of Scripture in each one of our messages because you don't find all of the information in one place and in none of these attributes have we considered all of the Scriptures

that we could possibly consider. But the subject this morning as Gary mentioned is the righteousness of God. And two verses in this Psalm in this 36th Psalm mention the righteousness of God. One is verse 6 and the other is in verse 10. Verse 6 reads thy righteousness is like the great mountains, thy judgements are deep O Lord thou preservest man and beast. And in verse 10 O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee and thy righteousness to the upright in heart. And you will notice if you were to read through the Psalm that the righteousness of God is mentioned in connection with other attributes of God. For example in verse 5 His mercy is mentioned, and His faithfulness is mentioned. So here again we see a blending of the attributes of God. But now having seen that there is such a thing as the righteousness of God which I am sure does not need proof for most of you who are here this morning. Notice the statement that David makes in verse 9 especially in the latter part of the 9th verse when he says in thy light we shall see light. Now what David is saying by this expression is as we come to an understanding of what you are like O God then we have the light that is necessary for us to understand the things that we need to know. In the light of your character, in this case in the light of your righteousness then we have light as to how we are to live. Now why is he saying all of these things. Well obviously he is worshipping God for these various characteristics but the Psalm begins with these words, the transgression of the wicked saith within my heart that there is no fear of God before his eyes. And you could read down through the 4th verse because he enlarges upon this and then he begins to talk about the mercy of God and the faithfulness of God and finally the righteousness of God. And he is contrasting in the Psalm the wickedness of the wicked on one hand and the righteousness of God on the other hand. So that when he brings these together he is teaching us in this Psalm that the wicked man is the way he is because he lacks the light of the knowledge of God and so we can say that he is wicked and he is acting wickedly because there is something very wrong between him and God. Now this is important for us to understand. Psalm 10 states it in another way in the 4th verse where the Psalmist says the wicked

through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. And then most of you will remember that Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 begin with identically the same expression, the fool hath said in his heart there is no God. Now I think that the predominant interpretation of that verse is that he is not saying that there is no God in the sense that God does not exist, this is not the declaration of an atheist. But the fool hath said in his heart no God for me. Don't tell me about God, I don't want to learn about God. I don't want to obey God, I don't think God has anything to do with my life. God is not in his all thoughts. So this was the attitude that men often have and this is the root of man's wickedness. Now in dealing with this subject it is important for us to know what we are talking about. And so let me raise the question first of all what is righteousness. Now if you are not familiar with the Bible this may be a brand new expression to you. The Bible uses words that you don't find anyplace else. And yet they are words that we need to understand. The Old Testament as most of you know was written mainly in the Hebrew language. A section of the book of Daniel was written in the Aramaic language but by and large the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. The New Testament was written in the Greek language. And so when we talk about righteousness in the Old Testament we are talking about Hebrew words, when we talk about righteousness in the New Testament we are talking about Greek words. But the interesting thing is that when you take the Hebrew word and the Greek word and you examine both of these they mean essentially the same thing so that you could say that one in one language is a synonym for the other in the other language. So we don't have to say that it means one thing in the Old Testament and it means another thing in the New Testament. Both words in their various forms mean that there is a standard and that things are righteous or unrighteous to the extent to which they conform to the standard. So the words mean that things in our lives can only be what they should be when they conform to that standard if we want to be righteous. Now this can be illustrated in a number of ways. For example <sup>in</sup> just a

few minutes we will get in our cars. and start home. And you may not know it but there may be a white car sitting along the road somewhere with red and blue lights on the top and a blue door on the side and the man who sits inside or the men who sit inside are equipped with radar. And you are driving along I can tell by looking at you some of you are wondering how you got to church safely this morning but you are driving along and the officer turns the radar on you and he is interested in one thing. If you are going through a 35 miles an hour zone he wants to check to make sure you are not going more than 35 miles an hour. Now if you are under 35 as far as the law is concerned in that particular instance you are righteous. You are conforming to the law. You are conforming to the standard. But if you are going 36 or 37 or 40 or 45 or more you are unrighteous because you are not abiding by the law, you are not abiding by the standard and as a result he is perfectly righteous in fining you or fining me if we happen to be in that situation. Now this is the purpose of tests that are given to us isn't it. Just the other day I got a notice from the state of Oregon that the license on one of our cars needs to be renewed in the next couple of months. And there was also a notice in that that I couldn't renew that license unless I passed the DEQ. We have all been there before. We go in there and they put on their little gadgets that they have and I don't understand but the attendant will come up and say either you passed or you didn't pass. And if you don't pass then you go find a mechanic to make the corrections so that you can be in conformity with the standard. And if I drive my car without renewing my license because I refuse to go through the DEQ I am unrighteous with respect to that area of the law. Now I am using this and you could think of your own illustrations to help you to see that the word righteousness means that there is a standard and if we are to be considered righteous we must conform to that standard. If we do not conform to the standard we are unrighteous. Now what is the moral standard by which all things are to be judged as right or wrong. How can we answer such a question. Well actually the answer to that question is fairly simple. We come to the Word of God. There can be no higher

authority than God Himself. This is His Word which you and I hold in our hands this morning and it is here and only here that we will find our answer. All things have to be examined in the light of the Scriptures. Now the Bible doesn't specifically tell us what to do in every instance that we face in our lives but the Bible certainly gives us as Peter says all things that pertain unto life and godliness. So that as you and I go through every day we are going to make many many decisions today. Some are going to be decisions that in which we will face the question of is this right or is this wrong. And the extent to which we know God and the extent to which we know His Word will be the extent to which we will be able to make the proper decisions. So remember what we read just a moment ago in Psalm 36. In thy light we see light. As we come to understand God in His Word then we have light upon our path. So the answer that is given to us in Scripture is that the standard, the perfect standard to which we are to conform is God. And I might say that if you want to be accepted by God, if you want to go to heaven some day really the only way that you can find such acceptance and be guaranteed that you are going to go to heaven is actually to be like God is. He is the standard. Now I am not saying that is the way we get there by making ourselves like God but this is what you face when you consider the standard that God is Himself. Let me read you some of the verses that have to do with the righteousness of God and by the way I discovered in studying for this message that I am sure I could say that the dominant term for the people of God in the Old Testament is the righteous. They are the righteous ones. Listen to these verses. Psalm 119:137 Righteous art thou O Lord and upright are thy judgements. Psalm 119:142 Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness and thy law is the truth. In one of Daniel's prayers during the captivity of Israel we find him praying these words which are found in Daniel 9:14 Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil and brought it upon us for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth for we obeyed not his voice. Revelation 15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the lamb saying great and marvelous are thy works Lord God almighty, just

which is another translation for the word righteous, just and true are thy ways thou King of saints. In the next chapter Revelation 16:5 and I heard the angel of the water say thou art righteous O Lord which art and wast and shalt be because thou hast judged us. And our Lord Jesus Christ was praying to the Father in John 17:25 He addresses Him in that verse O righteous Father and the Apostle John speaking of the Lord Jesus in I John 2:1 says and if any man sins we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Now many other Scriptures could be cited. You know the Bible is full of these. But these are sufficient to show that the standard by which all men and all actions are to be judged is God. The Triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. So when we compare ourselves with one another or the person says well I am just as good as that person who claims to be a Christian or I am doing the best that I possibly can, I am living up to my own standards. I am living a life that's good in the eyes of men and my government or my society has no complaint as far as I am concerned remember those may be commendable things but that doesn't bring you face to face with the main issue. The main issue is not are you as good as any body else is. But the main issue is do you measure up to the standard by which God is going to judge all men and that standard is God Himself. So whatever conforms to God, to the character of God is right. And whatever is opposed to the character of God is wrong. Whatever pleases God is right, whatever displeases Him is wrong. And to state this as the Apostle John states it in I John 5:17 you have these words. All unrighteousness is sin. So if you and I do what we want to do without any reference to the Word of God and in conflict with the Word of God we are on the wrong track. If we feel free to do things just because lots of other people are doing it then again we are on the wrong track. Or if I am satisfied just to accept the customs of men and even in some instances the laws of men, because often the laws of our country are brought down to accommodate people in what they want to do so that I find that often even in those circumstances I am on the wrong track. God is the one who determines what is right and wrong and He ultimately is the judge

of all people and of all actions. He is perfect moral excellence. Everything that He does is right. And everything has to be judged in the light of what He is and in the light of what He requires. Again I remind you of Psalm 36:9 In thy light shall we see light. Now if you are following me this morning you know that this raises another question. If right and wrong are determined by God in His will then where do we go to learn about God and to find out what His will is. Now I have directed you already to the Word of God and again I say that the answer is simple and clear. God has made Himself and His will known in His Word. And so if you want to know God and His will, this is where you and I must turn. The psalmist said long ago and it's still just as true as it was then Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Psalm 119:105. And in the 130th verse of that same Psalm we have the entrance of thy word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple. So this means that you will never find anything by way of teaching about God or His will in Scripture that will lead you astray. The Bible is absolutely trustworthy and this is the one and the only place that God has been pleased to make His will known. Now with this in mind let me show you this morning that the Word of God teaches that God is righteous not only in His character but God is righteous in His Word. That is His Word is consistent with Himself. And when I learn of the Word of God I am learning of God Himself. Now there are several who have emphasized this in Scripture. Let me just mention three this morning. Moses in Deuteronomy 4 was bringing to the children of Israel one of the last messages that he brought to them before he died. The book of Deuteronomy is basically a book of sermons. And Moses is pouring out his heart to the people. And the first of these messages is in the first four chapters and in the fourth chapter, the last chapter of this first message in the 7th and 8th verses you have this as he is trying to get the people of Israel to see what a treasure they had in the Lord and what a treasure they had in the Word that God had given them thus far. Now remember they didn't have the books that you and I have. They had at best the books of Moses and the revelation that had been given to them and of course since he was in the process

of saying the things that were in the book of Dueteronomy it means that they did not have the book of Dueternomy as yet. But what if you and I only had say Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. With possibly the book of Job. What if that were all of the Bible that you had. Would you speak in such glowing terms as Moses speaks in this passage of Scripture. Dueteronomy 4:7-8. For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for. And what nation is there so great that hast statutes and judgements so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day. Now in other words what Moses was telling the children of Israel is that if you want to know the difference between right and wrong go to the law. Go to the Word of God. And if you want to do what is right in God's sight then obey that Word. If you are going to displease Him it will be because you are living in disobedience to that Word. Psalm 19 is a Psalm in which David is extolling the Word of God and the Revelation that God has made in the Word as well as in creation and in the 9th verse, I think the latter part of the 9th verse of Psalm 19 David makes this declaration by the direction of the Spirit of God. The judgements of the Lord, the judgements is a term used for the Word of God, the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous and then so we won't miss the point that he is making he says altogether. That is every part of it. You don't find anything in the Word of God that has to do with God and His will that is wrong. And David is worshipping God because of that marvelous fact. Let me site one more. In the book of Nehemiah which has to do with the captivity of the children of Isreal the Levites, the assistants to the priest were praising God for His faithfulness to them as the seed of Abraham and they said among other things this in Nehemiah 9 the first part of verse 7 and the last part of verse 8 Thou art the Lord, the God who hast performed thy words for thou art righteous. So when I take these statements together and I could add other statesments that you would find in the Word of God it indicates this that the Word of God is absolutely true first of all in what it reveals about God, secondly the Word of God is absolutely



true in what it reveals concerning the will of God and thirdly the Word of God is absolutely true when it records for me the promises of God. They are all consistent with what God is. And since His righteousness is from everlasting to everlasting as one of these verses has indicated there can be no variant in this. There will be no variation in this. God has been righteous, God is righteous, God always will be righteous and since He has made Himself known in His Word the Word of an unchanging God never needs to be changed. So He is righteous in Himself. He is righteous in the Word that He has given so that you and I have a sure foundation, a sure hope when we put our trust in the Word of God and we believe the things that are revealed here concerning God. But let me say finally this morning that the works of God are righteous and let me mention this just quickly in three different areas. Again anyone would feel frustrated in dealing with such great subjects and having to do it in such a short time. But let me say first of all with respect to the works of the Lord that He is absolutely righteous in His condemnation of sinners. This is the hard message of the Word of God isn't it. Because the message that involves every single one of us. But I want you to turn if you will quickly to Romans 2 and in this early part of the book of Romans where Paul is obviously showing the need that man has for the righteousness of God he says this beginning with the first verse of the second chapter of Romans. Therefore thou art inexcusable O man whosoever thou art that judgest for when thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgement of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this oh man that judgest them which do such things and doest the same that thou shalt escape the judgement of God. Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God who will render to everyman according to his deeds. Now man is guilty of sinful deeds. And here the Word of God declares that God is

righteous because He is supreme over the whole universe. He is absolutely righteous in moving in judgement against those who violate His righteousness, who are guilty of things that are displeasing to Him. Who in themselves are displeasing to God. And this is a truth that Paul brought out also in some verses that we have already looked at in another connection in Acts 17 when he stood in Athens and before those Greeks he says that God now commands all men everywhere to repent because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained and of course he is speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ. So not only is God righteous in exercising judgement against sinners, God would be unrighteous in view of the kind of a God He is if He did not exercise judgement. Now next week I am going to deal with the wrath of God and so I don't want to say anymore about that this morning but I want you to see that even when we take this truth of an eternal hell which I will have to confess is one of the most staggering truths in the Word of God to me. How men will suffer eternally as a consequence of their sins. Even this action taken by almighty God is righteous and cannot be viewed in any other way. Now secondly God is righteous also in His justification of those who believe. Now we read that this morning and in the 3rd chapter of the book of Romans you have the righteousness of God touched on and remember that this emphasizes the standard all the way through. Look at verse 21 of Romans 3. The righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets 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. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And then in verse 26 he says to declare I say at this time his righteousness that he might be just or righteous and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Now God as a righteous God can't say we will just forget about your sins. God is not the kind of a God where as some people say He is so loving and so gracious and so compassionate He is never going to judge anybody. People who say that are only seeing a part of the picture. Because He is a loving God and as Mrs. Johnson was singing this morning

there is no truth in the Word of God that's more amazing than the love of God but God is a righteous God, God is a holy God and therefore if He is going to forgive sinners He has to find a righteous basis on which to do it. And He found that in sending His Son the Lord Jesus Christ who died as a sacrifice for the sins of men upon the cross so that when He took our blame, He took our judgement upon Himself. Then God can be just in forgiving me because His own righteous has been satisfied not by what I have done but by what Jesus Christ has done in my behalf. That's wonderful truth isn't it, that's the Gospel message. Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God. And there would be no salvation with a righteous God if it were not for the substitutionary work of His Son Jesus Christ. But let me say finally God is absolutely righteous in his providential dealings with us day after day. Thomas Manton tells the story of a godly king who was being executed by his enemies. And before they killed him they brought his little children before the king and one by one they killed the children before the eyes of the king. Thomas Manton tells us that the historian who gave the record of this recorded that as he watched the tragic murder of his children and then was led off to his own death he was heard to cry back to his enemies righteous art thou O God and upright are thy judgements. When John the Baptist was in prison he sent two of his own disciples to the Lord to ask a question that expressed the bewilderment that was in his own heart because of the trials he was going through and from which he was never delivered. And he asked the question, art thou he that should come or do we look for another. The Lord listened to the question and He sent the two disciples back to John and He said tell John what you see and hear, the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And then He added these words and tell John this also and blessed is he whoseever shall not be offended in me. Why must we always accept the dealings of God with us with such confidence? Because He is righteous. Because He is ever faithful to Himself. He is ever faithful

to His Word. And He is ever faithful to us. I say to you this morning in the truth of the righteousness of God we have the light that points the way, in the truth of the righteousness of God we have the marvelous truth of our salvation and in the truth of the righteousness of God we have that which guarantees our peace in the midst of the most tragic circumstances and the most bewildering trials and testings that we might go through. There is a righteous God who is working all things for His own glory in accordance with His own will and the safest most wonderful thing that you and I can do is to trust Him and to rest in His promises.