

Become The Righteousness of God?

by Wayne Goff

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” 2 Corinthians 5:21. So how can we *“become the righteousness of God”* when we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:23**)? The verse answers this question in two words: *“in Him.”* We are righteous in Him, in Jesus Christ. Therefore, if we are *“in Him,”* then we are *“righteous.”* But that leads us to two more questions: (1) How do we get *“in Him”*? and (2) In what manner do we *“become”* the righteousness of God.

“In Him”

The context of 2 Corinthians 5 would suggest that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ with the *“ministry of reconciliation”* (**5:18**), or *“the Word”* (**5:19**). Also notice that it is by the *“grace of God”* (**6:1**) which we are not to receive *“in vain.”* When we add this up we can clearly see that the Gospel is the Word of reconciliation, and that it is to be preached and received as the transmission of God’s grace to us, and that we must receive it *conditionally* (in vain, or not in vain).

Galatians 3:26-27 says it more simply. *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* We are *“sons of God”* through the faith that baptizes us **into Christ**. So our relationship *“in Him”* begins at the point of baptism of a true believer.

“Become The Righteousness Of God”

There are at least two theories as to **how** one becomes the righteousness of God in Christ. The first says that Christ’s perfect life covers our sinful lives and that while we are still full of sin, God only sees the righteous life of Christ once we are in Him. This is a pseudo or false righteousness, but theoretically God accepts Christ’s personal righteousness for each one of us. This theory makes salvation automatic, unconditional, and worry free! Quite a temptation to believe, don’t you think?! But is it true?

The second theory says that Jesus Christ’s blood *actually washes away our sins* (**Acts 22:16**) once we are baptized into Him. These sins are gone, and remembered no more by God the Father (**Heb. 8:12**). Therefore, we are *actually “righteous”* before God in Him (Christ). This washing away of sins does **not** prevent our future sins, and when we **do** sin again, then we must repent and pray for God to forgive us of our sins through the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ (**1 John 1:8-9; 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:16; 7:22**). But we *actually “become the righteousness of God in Him.”* It is **conditional**, and therefore can be lost or forfeited. It is **conditional**, and therefore requires work or effort on our behalf (see **Phil. 2:12**), but it is **real**. The false righteousness proposed by the first theory is a false theory. Paul did not argue in our text that we *“pretend to become the righteousness of God in Him.”* We *“become the righteousness of God in Him.”*

Some have mistakenly understood **Romans 4:7** which says our *“sins are covered”* to mean that the perfect life of Jesus covers their lives! But a closer look at the verse points out the meaning of *“covered.”* *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”* Our sins are *“covered”* when they are *“forgiven.”* Paul is quoting Psalm 32:1-2 which uses the grammatical *“synonymous parallelism.”* Simply put, the same phrase is stated with synonyms to make clear the point. *“Lawless deeds”* is synonymous with *“sins”* and *“forgiven”* is synonymous with *“covered.”* So the point should be understood by the reader of either the Old Testament or the New Testament. Be sure you understand **how** you become the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ.

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