

The Righteousness of the Believer

A believer's righteousness is twofold: imputed and practical. The two terms are related but not identical. Practical righteousness always follows imputed righteousness. As a sinner, when a person believes in Jesus Christ with all his heart, God reckons him to be righteous (that is, his faith is counted for righteousness). Christ's perfect righteousness is charged to the believing sinner's account. This imputed righteousness was made possible because of Jesus Christ's death, which was for the sins of the world. The believing sinner immediately passes from death unto life and is in perfect standing before God. He no longer stands before a holy God as a condemned sinner, but rather as a newborn, heaven-bound child of God. This new birth experience begins the life-long process of the Christian becoming more and more like Jesus Christ each day as he yields his life to God through faith and obedience. This day-by-day working of God in the believer's life after the new birth manifests itself in an actual, practical righteousness in the life of the believer. As the believer is daily conformed to Christ's image, he is becoming more righteous in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Thus, the remainder of the believer's life should be one of growth in the grace and knowledge of his Savior Jesus Christ.

Only imputed righteousness can fit a person for heaven, because only God's righteousness is perfect. The receipt of imputed righteousness is based on Christ's work, not the works of the sinner. Therefore, only imputed righteousness can give the believer assurance of acceptance before God and eternal life. Practical righteousness gives evidence to the reality of imputed righteousness and regeneration which accompanies it in the conversion experience. Only in this limited sense can one's practical righteousness support one's assurance of eternal life. However, those who trust in their own imperfect righteousness to secure their eternal life should instead receive God's gift of perfect righteousness by grace through faith without works. When a person acknowledges that his own righteousness is filthy before a holy God, and trusts Jesus alone, perfect righteousness and eternal life is given to the believer as a free gift. An outward, practical righteousness will then be the natural outworking as the believer grows in grace. Some of the differences between imputed righteousness and practical righteousness are presented below.

Imputed Righteousness

(Rom 3:22-5:21; Gal 3:6; 1Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9)

Establishes our judicial standing

Establishes our union with God

Establishes our relationship with God

We are *declared* righteous

A transfer

Sins not imputed

Perfect because it is God's righteousness

Stable (never changes)

A gift received by faith without works

Based solely on Christ's work

Received once upon initial faith

Received freely by the ungodly

Coupled with unconditional forgiveness

Positional justification (Rom 4-4-5)

Practical Righteousness

(2Tim 2:22; Heb 11:33; 12:11; 1Jn 2:29; 3:7,10)

God's purpose for our daily walk (lifestyle)

Necessary for our communion with God

Necessary for our fellowship with God

We are *made* righteous

A transformation

Sin the continual enemy

Never will be perfect in this life

Variable (Should continually grow)

Involves works that complete faith

My works in Christ contribute

Continuous growth through a life of faith

Achieved by godly living

Lived out by resisting and confessing sin

Practical justification (James 2:24)