

God's Righteousness In Romans – Part 7

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Let's take a moment to review what Paul has said about the righteousness of God. He began with where mankind was – lost in sin and without hope. God is righteous in bringing wrath against all humanity but His righteousness found another way to deal with our sins. Jesus, the son of the Living God, came and died for our sins. Thus, God's wrath against sin was dealt with and our salvation was made possible. When we respond to God's redeeming work in Christ in faith, we are declared by God to be righteous before Him. That is the amazing grace of God at work. But there is something else that needs pointing out about our faith response to God as seen in the book of Romans.

Paul ended Romans chapter 5 with an important principle: WHERE SIN ABOUND, GRACE ABOUND ALL THE MORE (Romans 5:20). Paul has established that our sin did abound in chapters 1-3. In the context, this principle applies particularly to the sin of Adam and to the grace of God in Christ. But it is also a universal truth. God's grace is greater than all our sin. We even have a hymn with words to this effect: "Grace that is greater than all my sin ..."

Chapter 6 begins with the question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" If grace outruns sin, then why not continue in sin so that grace can increase in greater measure? Once we have been saved, our sins forgiven, and heaven has become a certain hope, why not continue to live as we once did? Paul has a very definite answer to this question.

Salvation occurs when men are identified with the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is accomplished by water baptism. Paul shows that continuing in sin is living in a way utterly inconsistent with Christ's work, a work in which we have become participants. If Christ died to sin and we died in Him, how can we now go on living in sin? If Christ was raised from the dead, to live a new and glorified life, and we were joined to Him, how can we avoid the conclusion that our lives too must be transformed?

Baptism is a faith response and has everything to do with our salvation. Paul said, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-4.) Here Paul takes for granted that Christians have been baptized into Christ's death. It is a natural response of faith to be baptized for Jesus said to do so to be saved (Mark 16:16) Throughout the book of Acts, people were baptized out of faith in the redeeming message of the cross. When we believe in the redeeming work of Christ, that faith will seek to identify with the cross in a physical way. For sure, baptism does not save by itself but when done out of faith it does. That's how we are justified by faith. It's not a work that earns anything. It is a faith response just like any other thing God would have us to do.

And we are raised from baptism into a new life and hope just as Jesus raised from the dead. In fact, in Paul's language, there is no new life or hope without baptism. This makes baptism essential to the salvation process and now we seek to live a righteous life before a righteous God. And Paul will go on to describe this new life....