

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

**JUSTIFICATION**

**IN**

**GOD'S WAY**

**WITNESS LEE**

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***Living Stream Ministry***  
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# **JUSTIFICATION IN GOD'S WAY**

The first three chapters of Romans unveil man's need for God's salvation. They show that we are helpless and hopeless and are under God's condemnation. [Romans 3:21—5:1](#) goes on to reveal the accomplishment of His salvation, which is called justification. Justification is related to propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation. In this booklet, we shall cover all these terms and seek to make them clear. However, we first need to consider the righteousness of God.

## **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**

### **God in Justice and Rightness**

What is the righteousness of God? We may say that the righteousness of God is what God is with respect to justice and rightness ([Rom. 3:21-22; 1:17; 10:3](#); [Phil. 3:9](#)). Furthermore, all that God is in His justice and rightness is actually Himself. The righteousness of God is a Person, not merely a divine attribute.

## **Christ as the Righteousness of God to the Believers**

Many Christians say incorrectly that they have the righteousness of Christ. We should not say this. Our righteousness is not the righteousness of Christ; it is Christ Himself. Christ Himself as a Person, not His attribute of righteousness, has been made the righteousness of God to us ([1 Cor. 1:30](#)). God has made Christ, who is the very embodiment of God Himself, our righteousness.

## **The Believers Made the Righteousness of God in Christ**

[Second Corinthians 5:21](#) says that the believers are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Paul does not say that the believers are made righteous; he says that they are made righteousness. This is a deep matter. How can we become the righteousness of God? By having Christ wrought into us. Christ is the embodiment of God, and God as a living Person is righteousness. Therefore, righteousness, God, and Christ are one. Since God is embodied in Christ, Christ is the righteousness of God. Christ has been wrought into us, and we have

been put into Christ. We have been mingled together with Christ as one. Thus, we become the righteousness of God. As Christ has been wrought into us, we can say with Paul, “For to me to live is Christ” ([Phil. 1:21](#)). Suppose we have a glass of water. Once tea has been blended with it, it no longer is plain water; it is tea. Likewise, once Christ has been wrought into us, we become one with Him.

The righteousness of God is not only God Himself in His justice and rightness, and it is not only the living Person of Christ; it is also we who have been made one with Christ. The living Person of Christ as God’s righteousness has been wrought into us, and we have been put into Him. Therefore, we have been made the righteousness of God.

## **Justification—Being Approved according to the Standard of God’s Righteousness**

What is justification? Justification is God’s action in approving people according to His standard of righteousness. His righteousness, not ours, is the standard. Regardless of how righteous we are or how righteous we think we are, our righteousness is just a fraction of an inch

high. How high is God's righteousness? It is unlimited! Can you be approved by God according to your own righteousness? This is impossible. Although you may be right with everyone—with your parents, your children, and your friends—your righteousness will never justify you before God. You may justify yourself according to your standard of righteousness, but that does not enable you to be justified by God according to His standard. We need justification by faith. Justification by faith before God means we are approved by God according to the standard of His righteousness.

How can God do this? He can do it because our justification is based upon the redemption of Christ. When the redemption of Christ is applied to us, we are justified. If there were no such redemption, it would be impossible for us to be justified by God. Redemption is the basis of justification.

## THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST

### The Atonement in the Old Testament

As we come to the subject of the redemption of Christ, we need to consider the atonement in the Old Testament ([Lev. 16:34; 25:9](#)).

## The Expiation

The atonement in the Old Testament was an expiation ([Lev. 25:9](#); [Num. 5:8](#)). To expiate means to appease God for us, to conciliate God by satisfying His righteous requirements.

## The Expiatory Cover of the Ark

The expiatory cover (rendered “mercy seat” by the King James Version) was the lid of the ark ([Exo. 25:17-22](#); [Lev. 16:14](#); [Heb. 9:5](#)). Under this cover was the law which was called the testimony of God ([Exo. 25:21](#)). Why was it called the testimony of God? Because God is fully testified and expressed by His law. Above the expiatory cover were the cherubim of glory, expressing the glory of God ([Exo. 25:19-20](#); [Heb. 9:5](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)).

The expiatory cover was sprinkled with the expiatory blood ([Lev. 16:14, 18](#)). On the day of atonement, or, as is better to say, the day of expiation, the blood of the expiatory sacrifice was shed, brought into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled upon the expiatory cover. At that time, two problems—the problem of sins and the problem of falling short of God’s glory—existed between God and the people, creating a separation

between them. Although the people needed God's grace, and although God had grace to dispense to them, there was no way for the two parties to approach one another. Expiation was the way of atonement, of at-one-ment. In the Old Testament times, the way of atonement, that is, of expiation, required a sacrifice in which blood was shed. This blood was brought into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the cover of the ark. Under this cover was the law exposing and condemning the people as they approached God, and above the cover were the cherubim of glory observing everything. As the blood of atonement was sprinkled upon the cover of the ark, it satisfied the righteous requirements of God's law, and it fulfilled the demands of God's glory. Upon the expiatory cover of the ark God could meet with man, speak to man, and fellowship with man in a lawful way without contradicting His righteousness or glory. It was in this place that God and man were made one.

## **The Redemption in the New Testament**

### *The Propitiation*

The expiation in the Old Testament was a type of the propitiation in the New Testament.

Propitiation is mentioned at least five times in the New Testament. In [1 John 2:2](#) and [4:10](#) we are told that Christ, the Son of God, is Himself the propitiation for our sins. In both places the word propitiation actually means a sacrifice and should be rendered “propitiatory sacrifice.” The Greek word in these verses is *hilasmus*, which means “that which propitiates,” that is, a propitiatory sacrifice. In [1 John 2:2](#) and [4:10](#) the Lord Jesus is the propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. Another Greek word regarding propitiation, *hilasterion*, is found in [Hebrews 9:5](#) and [Romans 3:25](#). *Hilasterion* in these two verses means the place of propitiation, and the King James Version renders it as “mercy seat.” In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *hilasterion* is the word for the term “mercy seat” in [Exodus 25](#) and [Leviticus 16](#). Thus, *hilasterion* is the place of propitiation. Furthermore, in [Hebrews 2:17](#) is the word *hilaskomai*, the verbal form of the noun *hilasmus*. The King James Version translates *hilaskomai* as “make reconciliation for”; however, it should be translated “propitiate.” Christ propitiates for our sins. The matter of propitiation is mentioned five times in the New Testament in relation to Christ: twice it refers to Christ Himself as the propitiatory sacrifice,

twice it refers to the place where propitiation was accomplished, and once it refers to the action of propitiation.

We find the same root used by the publican in his prayer in the temple ([Luke 18:13](#)). According to the King James Version, the publican prayed “God be merciful to me.” However, the Greek means, “Propitiate for me.” The publican actually was saying, “O God, propitiate for me.”

What is the meaning of propitiation? How shall we distinguish it from redemption and reconciliation? Reconciliation includes propitiation; nevertheless, there is a difference between them. Propitiation means that you have a problem with another person. For instance, if I wrong you or am otherwise in debt to you, a problem exists between us. Because of this problem or debt, you have a demand upon me, and unless your demand is satisfied, the problem between us cannot be resolved. Thus, there is the need for propitiation.

The Greek word *hilasmus* implies that I have wronged you and that now I am indebted to you. There is a problem between us that hinders our relationship. Propitiation, therefore, involves two parties, one of which has wronged the other, has become indebted to the other, and must act to

satisfy the demands of the other. If the offending party is to appease the offended party, he must fulfill his demands. The Septuagint uses the word *hilasmos* for the word atonement in [Leviticus 25:9](#) and in [Numbers 5:8](#) because this Greek word means to conciliate two parties and make them one.

The word atone is composed of two words, “at” and “one.” We may write the word atonement this way: at-one-ment. The meaning of atonement is to bring two parties into one. When two parties have been separated and seek to be in oneness, there is the need for propitiation. The action of propitiation is atonement. Propitiation means to make us one with God because there had been a separation between us and God. What was the problem that kept us from God, that made it impossible to have direct fellowship with Him? The problem was our sins. Our sins kept us away from God’s presence and hindered God from coming to us. Therefore, we needed propitiation to appease God’s demands. Christ accomplished this on the cross when He offered Himself as the propitiatory sacrifice. On the cross He propitiated for us and brought us back to God, making us one with God.

## *The Redemption*

What is the difference between propitiation and redemption? The word redeem means to purchase back something which originally was yours but which has been lost. Thus, redemption means to repossess at a cost.

We originally belonged to God. We were His possession. However, we were lost. Nevertheless, God did not give us up. He paid the price to have us back, repossessing us at a great cost. This is redemption. However, this was not easy for God to do because our being lost involved us in sins and in many other things that were against His righteousness, holiness, and glory. Many requirements were laid upon us, and it was impossible for us to fulfill them. The price was too great. God paid the price for us, repossessing us at a tremendous cost. Christ died on the cross to accomplish eternal redemption for us ([Gal. 3:13](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [3:18](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Heb. 10:12](#); [9:28](#)). His blood has obtained eternal redemption for us ([Heb. 9:12](#), [14](#); [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)).

## *The Reconciliation*

The problem of being an enemy is even more

serious than the problem that necessitates propitiation. If I am your enemy, propitiation is inadequate. I need reconciliation. Sinners need propitiation; enemies need reconciliation. Enmity is the greatest problem between man and God. Propitiation mainly deals with sins; reconciliation deals with enmity as well as sins. Therefore, reconciliation includes propitiation. [Romans 5](#) tells us that before we were saved we were both sinners and enemies. As sinners we needed propitiation, and as enemies we needed reconciliation. Herein lies the difference between propitiation and reconciliation: propitiation is for sins; reconciliation is both for sins and enmity.

Reconciliation is based upon Christ's redemption ([Rom. 5:10, 11](#)) and was accomplished through God's justification ([2 Cor. 5:18-19](#); [Rom. 5:1, 11](#)). Hence, reconciliation is the issue of redemption with justification.

In the previous points we mainly covered the definition of various terms—the righteousness of God, justification, propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation. Once we have the proper definition of these terms, we can understand what it means to be justified.

# THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HAVING BEEN MANIFESTED

What is justification? Justification means that the righteousness of God has been manifested. Although the righteousness of God has existed for ages, it was not manifested to us until we believed in the Lord and called on His name. Then the righteousness of God was revealed to us. When God's righteousness is revealed, it is manifested. The manifestation of God's righteousness is mentioned twice in the book of Romans. [Romans 1:17](#) says that the righteousness of God is revealed out of faith to faith. The righteousness of God is manifested in the gospel out of our faith and to our faith. Then [Romans 3:21](#) says that the righteousness of God has been manifested without law, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

## Without Law

That the righteousness of God has been manifested without law means it has nothing to do with the law. Never mix the righteousness of God with the law. They must be kept separate. We can never obtain God's righteousness by going to the law. The law was the old dispensation. Now

without law, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested through faith of Jesus Christ.

## Through Faith of Jesus Christ

Bible students have great difficulty with the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” ([3:22](#)). Some say that it means our act of believing in Jesus Christ. Others say it refers to the faith of Jesus, that the faith of Jesus becomes ours. I would put it this way: genuine believing is to believe in the Lord Jesus by His faith. We believe in Jesus Christ by His faith, for we have no faith of our own. Jesus is the Author and Finisher of our faith ([Heb. 12:2](#)). The more we look at ourselves and examine ourselves, the faster our faith disappears. Faith is not our invention; it can never be initiated by us. It is impossible for us to generate faith. Faith is an aspect of Christ Himself. In fact, faith is Christ. [Galatians 2:20](#) says that we live by the faith of the Son of God. I do not live by my faith—I have no faith of my own—but by the faith of the Son of the living God who has faith and who Himself is faith to me. If you look at yourself, you will never find faith, but if you forget about yourself and say, “O Lord Jesus, I love You,” faith will immediately rise up within you. This faith is the

faith of Jesus, or we may say it is Jesus believing within us. Thus, the phrase “through faith of Jesus Christ” means believing in Jesus Christ by His faith.

The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law by our believing in Jesus Christ by His faith. Christ is our faith. Never say that you cannot believe, for you can believe if you want to. Do not try to believe by yourself, because the more you try the less faith you have. Simply say, “O Lord Jesus, I love You. Lord Jesus, You are so good.” If you do this, you will have faith immediately. We believe in Jesus Christ by His faith, and out of this faith and to this faith the righteousness of God is revealed to all who believe.

### **Meeting the Requirements of God’s Righteous Law and God’s Glory**

The righteousness of God has been manifested to meet the requirements of His righteous law and His glory ([3:23](#)). When we believe in the Lord Jesus, we receive the righteousness of God which meets all the requirements of God. In [Romans 3](#) we find that the requirements of God are of two categories: the requirements of His righteousness and His glory. Paul clearly

mentions God's law and God's glory. We have all broken the law, and we have all come short of the glory. Therefore, [Romans 3:23](#) says that all have sinned and come short of God's glory.

Why does Paul suddenly mention the glory of God? The answer involves the propitiation cover mentioned in [verse 25](#). As Paul was writing this part of Romans, he probably had in mind the picture of the ark of the testimony, especially the propitiation cover. As we have already pointed out, underneath the cover was the law exposing the sinfulness of people and condemning them, and above the cover were the two cherubim representing God's glory and observing every action of the people. The exposing and condemning law signified the requirements of God's righteousness according to the law, and the observing cherubim signified the requirements of God's glory according to the expression of God. Unless these requirements were fulfilled and God was satisfied, there was no way for sinners to contact God and for God to communicate with them. Hallelujah for the expiating blood! The expiating blood was sprinkled upon the propitiation cover, meeting the requirements of the righteous law and of God's glory.

Propitiation is not only an action; it is a place

where God can meet with man. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was bold to say that this propitiation place is Jesus Christ. God has set forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation cover ([3:25](#)), and this propitiation cover is the propitiation place where God can meet with man. This place is the Person of Jesus Christ the Lord. Although many Christians love the Lord Jesus and realize that He is so much to them, they may not know that Christ is a propitiation place where God can meet with us and where we can contact God. Before we knew of this place, we were frightened by the thought of approaching God, but now we are no longer afraid of Him. Upon Christ as the propitiation cover we can meet with God. This is the meaning of Paul's writing in [Romans 3](#). He used the type of the ark with its cover to show the meaning of justification.

In this universe the Lord Jesus has been set forth as the propitiation place, and all sinners may come to meet God upon Him. Where are we today? We are on the propitiation place. We do have a position, a ground, to meet with God, and God has the same ground to communicate with us. Where is the law? The law is under the propitiation cover, covered by the propitiating Christ. Where is God's glory? It is above us, yet

it has no claim against us because we are upon Christ as the propitiation place. Here we are justified. On this propitiation cover we are the same as God in His righteousness. We and God correspond to one another and are mutually approved. We approve God, and God approves us; God justifies us, and we justify Him.

Do you think it is too bold to say that we can justify God? [Romans 3:4](#) says that God should be justified in His sayings and overcome when He is judged. We can justify God. I have done this a number of times. Although I recognized that I was a sinner, I did not follow God blindly. I tried my best to verify His words. Eventually, I fully approved God as being right. Do not be afraid to study about God and investigate Him a little to see whether He is right. If you investigate Him, you will find that He is one thousand percent right. You will justify God.

According to our experience, it was not God who firstly approved us, but we who approved God. We do not know how much time God spent to convince us of His righteousness. We were rebellious and said, “I don’t like God. God is not right.” We all thought this way before we were saved. Many people speak against God saying, “If God is right, why are there so many poor

people on the earth? If God is right, why is there no justice among the nations?” They admit that there is God, but claim that He is not righteous. Many of us can testify the same thing, confessing that we thought God was wrong, that He was not righteous. However, God has been patient with us, doing many things for us until He finally convinced us of His righteousness. Who justified whom first? We first justified God. When we were convinced by God of His righteousness, we justified Him and wept in repentance, saying, “God, forgive me. I’m so sinful and unclean. I need Your forgiveness.” When we called on the name of the Lord Jesus, we were put not only into Christ but also upon Christ. Now we are upon Christ as our propitiation place where God and we can justify one another. Firstly, we approved God; then God approved us. We justified God; then God justified us. All this happened upon Christ as the propitiation place. Under Him the law is covered and upon Him the cherubim are joyous when they see the mutual justification that occurs upon Him as the propitiation cover.

Where are we now? We are on Jesus Christ as the propitiation place. We are on the propitiation cover. The law is under our feet, and the

glory of God over our head is satisfied. The law has been silenced; it can no longer speak against us, but the glory of God can rejoice over us with satisfaction. Here upon the propitiation cover we enjoy God's full justification. Thus, justification brings us to God and even into God where we may have the full enjoyment of God.

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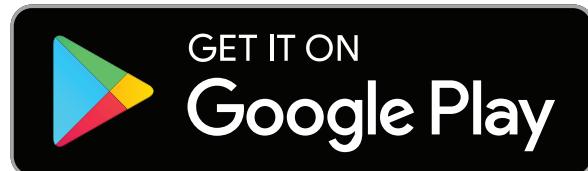
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