

# The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 17. Its Results-Righteousness Continued

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## Transcript

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In our last chapter we sought to show that in order to the justification of His people God required from Christ something more than a sacrifice which would blot out their sins. It has been rightly said that, "There are few questions of more importance than the one which has reference to the way in which a sinner becomes perfectly righteous before God. If he be not completely righteous, he cannot enter heaven" (J. C. Carson). When man fell from his sinless condition he was no more able to procure for himself a righteousness which would meet the inflexible demands of God's justice and holiness, than he could eradicate the sinful nature which now vitiates all his faculties. His only hope lay in a substitution who was able both to keep the law for him and to suffer the penalty for his breach of it. Both of these were indispensable if sinners were to be saved from hell and given a valid title to heaven. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). Life is not to be obtained unless all is done that the law requires: it must be kept either by us or a surety. "There is the same need of Christ's obeying the law in our stead, in order to the reward, as of His suffering the penalty of the law in our stead to our escaping the penalty; and the same reason why one should be accepted on our account, as the other. This is certain, that that was the reason why there was need that Christ should suffer the penalty for us, even that the law might be answered; for this the Scripture plainly teaches. This is given as the reason why Christ was made a curse for us, that the law's threatening a curse to us: Galatians 3:10, 13. But the same law that fixes the curse of God as the consequence of not continuing in all things written in the law to do them (v. 10), has as much fixed doing those things as an antecedent of living in them (v. 12). There is as much of a connection established in one place as in the other. . . We have not eternal life merely on the account of being void of guilt, but on the account of Christ's activeness in obedience and doing well" (Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4, p. 92). "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. . . For therein is the righteousness of God revealed" (Rom. 1: 16, 17). It is indeed pitiable to discover the evasive subterfuges to which men have resorted in their unworthy efforts to rob the Gospel of its distinguishing glory. Many who ought to have known better (some we fear, did) defined this expression as "God's method of justifying sinners." That the Gospel reveals the consummate wisdom of God in devising a way whereby all His attributes are illustriously displayed in the saving of His people, is perfectly true. That the Gospel exhibits the perfect consistency between the grace and

righteousness of God, His mercy and justice, is a most blessed fact. Yet, this is not at all the meaning of that expression "the righteousness of God." Let such a definition be applied to 2 Corinthians 5:21 and its fallacy is at once exposed: "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made God's method of justification in him!" "The righteousness of God. This is one of the most important expressions in the Scriptures. It frequently occurs both in the Old Testament and in the New; it stands connected with the argument of the first five chapters of the Roman epistle, and signifies that fulfillment of the law which God has provided, by the imputation of which sinners are saved" (Robt. Haldane). We are bold to affirm that the competency or incompetency of a man to expound the epistle to the Romans largely turns upon his understanding of this key expression. If he errs in his apprehension of "the righteousness of God," his whole scheme of interpretation is bound to be faulty and erroneous. Nor can any man fully preach the Gospel, so as to exalt Christ as He ought to be exalted, while he fails to unfold the blessedness of this vitally important term. Nor can any believer be fully established in the faith, nor is he capable of rendering to God that praise which is His due, while he remains ignorant of what is meant by "even the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). What then, is meant by this expression? The "righteousness of God" is that perfect conformity to the Divine law in heart and life which the holiness of God requires, which the grace of God has provided, which the incarnate Son of God has wrought out, and which the justice of God imputes to every one that believes. Let us enlarge upon this statement. First, the "righteousness of God" is that perfect conformity to the law in heart and life which the holiness of God requires. God cannot relinquish His rights, nor recede from His just claims. For Him to set aside the demands of the law for full obedience to it, would be as much as saying He had given a law which was not "holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). This could never be. Divine love gave the law; Divine wisdom drew it up; Divine justice requires the perfect performance of it. Therefore, second, Divine grace provided a satisfaction unto its righteous claims. Unfallen man failed to keep it; fallen man cannot keep it; so the God-man — forever be His name praised — came here to keep it in the stead of and in the behalf of His people. It was by a special Divine constitution that Christ became subject to the law. Men are born under the law as the natural descendants of Adam. But not so the Lord Jesus Christ. As His humanity was produced in a supernatural manner (that is, not according to the settled order of nature, but by the intervention and power of the Holy Spirit), so He was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4) by a special Divine appointment. Christ, as Man, by virtue of the personal union of His manhood with the second person of the Godhead, was raised high above the condition and state of a mere creature. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8). He was under no personal obligation to the law, but voluntarily placed Himself under it, that He might work out for His people a perfect and vicarious righteousness. May our hearts truly be drawn out to Him in profoundest admiration and adoration for such an amazing condescension. The unremitting and perfect obedience which Christ rendered unto the law proceeded from supreme love to God and unfeigned affection to men. "His delight in God was conspicuous even from His early years. The sacred solemnities of a sanctuary were more engaging to His youthful mind than all the entertainment of a festival. When He entered upon His ministry, whole nights were not too long for His copious devotions. The lonely retirements of the desert, as affording undisturbed communion with God, were more desirable to Christ than the applause of an admiring world. So ceaseless and transcendent was His love to God, that He never sought any separate pleasure of His own, but always did those things which were pleasing in His Father's sight. 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' was the rule of His childhood and the leading maxim of His whole life. In doing this, He was absolutely indefatigable. It was His 'meat and drink,' refreshing as the richest food, delightful as royal dainties, to finish the work that was given Him to do (John 4:34). "How wakeful and jealous was His concern for the divine honor! I hear the vilest

reproaches cast upon His own character. I see the most horrible indignities possible to His own person. Yet no resentful emotion reddened in His cheek; nor one angry syllable starts from His mouth. But when mercenary wretches profaned the Temple, and turned His 'Father's house' into a den of thieves, then His bosom throbs with zeal, then He makes His tongue like a sharp sword, and having first severely rebuked, afterwards resolutely expels, the sacrilegious intruders. Indeed, His zeal for the house of the Lord and for the purity of His ordinances, is represented by the evangelical historian as eating Him up (John 2:17). Like a heavenly flame glowing in His breast, it sometimes fired Him with a graceful indignation, sometimes melted Him to godly sorrow, always broke forth and exerted itself in a variety of vigorous efforts, till it even consumed His vital spirit. . . "Who can declare the charity of Jesus Christ? It was ardent, it was unintermitted, it was unbounded. Though always serene and serious, He was never sullenly grave. His conversation was affability itself, and the law of kindness dwelt on His lips. What fretted and chagrined the disciples, made not the least ruffling impression on their Lord. The rude and troublesome behavior of some, the weak and impertinent talk of others, served only to display the unalterable mildness of His temper. Nothing could embitter His spirit. Even the wicked and unthankful were partakers, ample partakers of His benevolence. Whoever applied to Him in vain? When did He dismiss any needy petitioner without the desired blessing? What heavy burden did He not unloose? What afflictive evil did He not relieve? He even 'took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses' (Matthew 8:17). In all their afflictions He was afflicted. "He not only relieved when His aid was implored, but anticipated the expectations of the distressed. He 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38), seeking the afflicted and offering His assistance. With great fatigue (John 4:6) He traveled to remote cities; with no less condescension, He visited the meanest villages, that all might have the honor and benefit of His healing Presence and heavenly instructions. He gave sight to the blind, health to the diseased. He delivered the wretched soul from the dominion of darkness and from the tyranny of sin. He made His followers partakers of a divine nature, and prepared them for a state of never-ending bliss. Nor were these righteous acts His 'strange work,' but His repeated, His hourly, His almost incessant employ. When ridiculed and affronted, He kindly bore and kindly overlooked the insult. When contradicted by petulant and presumptuous sinners, He endured, with the utmost serenity of temper, their unreasonable cavils and their obstinate perverseness. "When His bloody sweat tinged the stones, when His bitter cries pierced the clouds, and were enough to awaken the very rocks into compassion, His disciples slept, stupidly and repeatedly slept. But did their Divine but slighted Master resent the unkindness? Did He refuse to admit an excuse for their disobedience and neglect? Nay; He made their excuse, and that the most tender and gracious imaginable: The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Matthew 26:41). When His enemies had nailed Him to the cross, as the basest slave and most flagitious malefactor, when they were glutting their malice with His sorrows, His torments, and His blood: nay, when they spared not to insult and revile Him, even in His last expiring agonies; far, very far from being exasperated, this Hero of heaven repaid all their contempt and barbarity with the most fervent supplications in their behalf: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34) was His plea. Divine, adorable compassion" (Jas. Hervey). Now as the Christian bows in admiration and adoration before the Holy Spirit's description of the exquisitely lovely ways of our Lord, let him not miss that which is most evangelical of all in the four Evangelists, namely, that the perfect life of Christ was not only, nor even primarily, a pattern for our imitation, but was also, and supremely, in order to our justification. To present to a ruined and impotent creature the flawless life of the Holy One of God, is no "glad tidings," but as another has said, "only a consummate Copy for a withered hand to transcribe." But O my brethren, when our faith is enabled to lay hold of the blissful fact that, from Bethlehem to Calvary, Christ acted as our Surety and Representative, that by all He did He wrought out for us a perfect righteousness, which in the construction and judgment of the law is really ours; that God Himself imputes

that righteousness to us, and will forever deal with us according to its deserts, then we behold the light of the glorious Gospel and enter into the "unsearchable riches of Christ." "And is this righteousness designed for us? Is this to be our wedding-dress, this our beautiful array, when we enter the regions of eternity? Unspeakable privilege! Is this what God has provided, to more than supply our loss in Adam? Boundless benignity! Shall we be treated by the Judge of the world as if we had performed all this unsinning and perfect obedience? Well might the prophet cry out, like one in astonishment, 'How great is His goodness!' How great indeed! Since all that the Lord Jesus did and suffered, was doing and suffering for us men and our salvation, is imputed to us for righteousness, and is the sole and infinitely sufficient cause of our justification; is not your heart enamoured with a view of this incomprehensibly rich grace? What so excellent, what so comfortable, what so desirable, as this gift of a Savior's righteousness? Though delineated by this feeble pen, methinks it has dignity and glory enough to captivate our hearts and fire our affections: fire them with ardent and inextinguishable desire after a personal interest and propriety in it? O may the eternal Spirit reveal our Redeemer's righteousness in all its heavenly beauty and divine luster. Then, I am persuaded, we shall esteem it above everything. We shall regard it as the 'one thing needful.' We shall count all things in comparison of it, worthless as the chaff, empty as the wind (Jas. Hervey). It is that perfect obedience which Christ rendered to God, His absolute conformity to the law, which makes Him competent to save. Thus saith the Lord God, He shall "justify many." On what consideration? Why this: because He is "My righteous Servant" (Isa. 53:11). It is because of His perfect obedience in life and in death that "Judah shall be saved" from eternal damnation, and "Israel shall dwell safely," having been given an indefeasible title to life and glory; for it is on this very account, namely, that God raised unto David "a righteous Branch" and that He is owned as "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:5, 6). It is this which renders His intercession so prevalent. He is an Advocate, a successful Advocate, with the Father. Why? Because He is "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1)! Has the Lord Jesus risen on His people with "healing in his wings?" It is because He is "the Sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2). So various, so efficacious, so extensive, are His beneficent influences, that like a "sun" (the monarch of the material creation), He enlightens and enlivens; like "wings," He cherishes and protects; like an all powerful remedy, He "heals" and restores. And all this by virtue of His righteousness. Pitiably indeed, though perhaps needful it is, that we should now turn away from this glorious object, and briefly look at some of the objections which a carping unbelief has brought against it. Not a few who have been looked upon as exceptionably able students of the Word, have dogmatically affirmed that "the righteousness of Christ" is an expression of human invention, and is nowhere to be found in Holy Scriptures. It is sufficient refutation to quote 2 Peter 1:1 — "to those who have obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (R. V. and also margin of A. V.)! This inspired sentence is the key to all those texts in the New Testament and many in the Old, which mention the "righteousness of God." It is not the essential righteousness of an absolute God, but the vicarious righteousness of an incarnate God! Just as "the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28) means, and can only mean, that the church of God who became incarnate, the church of Christ. It has been objected that God would have been unjust to require Christ to perfectly obey the law, and after having done so, inflict upon Him the penalty which the law enforces upon the disobedient. Such an objection had held good if Christ acted only in the capacity of a private person, that is, as a single or isolated individual. But He did not. He came here as the federal Head of His people (Rom. 5:14 last clause; 1 Cor. 15:45, 47), made one with them (Heb. 2:11, 14). To say that the law requires no man to obey and die too, is specious reasoning, quite beside the point at issue. The real question is, Did the law require a transgressor to obey and die? There is a twofold debt which sinners owe to God: as creatures, perfect obedience to the law; as criminals, liability to suffer its punishment. The claims of the law cannot be relaxed at either point. In coming here as

the Sponsor of His people, Christ assumed all their debts, and discharged their full responsibilities both as creatures and criminals. It needs to be steadily borne in mind that Christ was "made under" (Gal. 4:4) a broken law, and consequently, under its curse: therefore justice required that He should not only fulfill its precepts, but suffer its penalty. Had the Surety died only, He had delivered us from punishment, but that would have afforded no claim to "life," no title to the "reward" (Rom. 10:5). Scripture declares of the Divine commands that "in keeping of them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11), but it nowhere affirms that in undergoing their curse there is the same reward. God's elect, fallen in Adam, not only needed to be made negatively guiltless, but positively righteous. To "reign in life" (Rom. 5:15), to be entitled to the "crown" (2 Tim. 4:8), required the obedience of Christ to be imputed to us. Just as in sanctification there is both the putting off the "old man" and the putting on of the "new man" (Eph. 4:22-24), so the Divine sentence of justification proceeds on the double basis that there is "no condemnation" resting upon those in Christ, and also that His righteousness has been "imputed" to their account (Rom. 4:11). Romans 4:25 unites the two: Christ was "delivered [to death] for our offenses [remission] and was raised again for our justification" — righteousness. "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord" (Isa. 54:17). John Bunyan, in the account which he gave of the Lord's dealings with him, recorded with artless simplicity the establishment of his soul in this most glorious truth. "Now I saw that Christ Jesus was looked upon by God, and should be looked upon by us, as the common or public person, in whom all the whole body of His elect are always to be considered and reckoned: that we fulfilled the law by Him, died by Him, rose from the dead by Him, got the victory over sin, death, the devil, and hell, by Him; when He died we died; and so of His resurrection," etc. (Grace Abounding). May it please the Lord to grant a like precious faith unto many readers of this book. To have the heart established in this blessed truth is worth infinitely more than the riches, honors, pleasures of this perishing world. Let us return now to the objections which Satan has moved men to make against this precious truth. One of the favorite "arguments" of the Romanists against the teachings of the Reformers upon this subject was: If God has transferred the righteousness of Christ to believers then they are sinless, holy, righteous in their own persons, as righteous as Christ is righteous. But this is a confounding of things that differ. The saints of God may be considered either as to what they still are in themselves or as justified in Christ. That this distinction is not of human invention, is capable of being established from many scriptures. Take one passage only from either Testament: "I am black, but comely" (Song of Sol. 1:5). Yes, "black" in myself, as a fallen descendant of Adam, and such I continue to the end of my earthly course; but "comely," as I am in Christ (Col. 2:10). "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be [experimentally] a new lump, as ye are [judicially, in Christ] unleavened" (1 Cor. 5:7). They who make not this distinction are ignorant of "the mystery of the Gospel" (Eph. 6:19). Others have objected — though it is not likely many will echo it in these days of lawlessness — that if Christ has fully kept the law for His people, then they are freed from all obligation to personally keep it. The answer is, True, God does not require His people to keep the law for the same ends and upon the same accounts that Christ fulfilled it, namely, to satisfy Divine justice and purchase a title to everlasting life and an inheritance in heaven. But for other ends, God does require His people to obey the law, namely, as creatures in subjection to His holy will, and out of loving gratitude for all He has done for them. Christ kept the law to earn eternal life for us — carefully ponder Romans 5:21; 1 John 4:9; Christians are to keep it from a desire to please Christ: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Nor do we have to keep the law by our own power: "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength" (Isa. 45:24). Again, it has been objected that such a thing as vicarious obedience, the transferring of moral merits from one to another, is quite unknown in human history. What of that? That only goes to prove the uniqueness of Christ's work. Many things which are impossible to man are possible to God. Those who refuse to believe in the vicarious obedience of Christ (most probably to their own

eternal damnation) because of its unprecedented character, have the same ground for rejecting His miraculous birth, His impeccability (incapableness of yielding to temptation), His unique life, His raising Himself from the dead; for none of these have any parallel in human history either! But this particular objection overlooks entirely the unique relation which existed between Christ and His people, namely, their federal union: in the eyes of God's law, what Christ did His people did. "For as by one man's disobedience, many were made [legally constituted, as in 2 Cor. 5:21] sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made [legally constituted] righteous" (Rom. 5:19). One had thought this was plain enough for any who profess to bow to Scripture, yet there have been those who, doing manifest violence to the Greek (see Bagster's Interlinear), have insisted it should be rendered "one obedience," which they limit to Christ's willingness to be crucified. As though anticipating this very perversion, in Philippians 2:8 the Spirit has expressly declared that, Christ "became obedient unto death," not merely "in death." Death was the final act of His obedience, referring us back to all the previous virtues and duties of His righteous walk. Just as Jehovah's promise. "and even to hoar hairs will I carry you" (Isa. 46:4) does not exclude God's sustaining grace in youth and manhood, so "obedient unto death" does not exclude the vicarious obedience of Christ's life. In like manner, "justified by His blood" (Rom. 5:9) was the climax or consummation of the complete satisfaction which Christ offered to God. Let us now briefly consider — D. Its Typification The double value of Christ's Word was shadowed forth as soon as sin entered the world: See Genesis 3:21. Two things are to be noted there. To procure those "skins" blood must be shed, life must have been taken. Very, very striking was this. The first blood ever spilt on this earth, was shed not by the hand of man, but by the hand of God! The first life taken in this world was not Abel's (as many suppose), but that of sinless sacrifices. Their blood pointed forward to that of Christ's which cleanseth the believer from all sin. But more: the skins taken from those slain animals "clothed" Adam and Eve, thereby foreshadowing that "robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10) with which the believer is covered. "The name of Christ not only cancels the sin; it supplies in the place of that which it has cancelled, its own everlasting excellency. We cannot have its nullifying power only: the other is the sure concomitant. So was it with every typical sacrifice in the law. It was stricken; but as being spotless it was also burned on the altar for a sweet-smelling savor. That savor ascended as a memorial before God: it was accepted for, and its value was attributed or imputed to, him who had brought the vicarious victim. If, therefore, we reject the imputation of righteousness, we reject sacrifice as revealed in Scripture; for Scripture knows of no sacrifice whose efficacy is so exhausted in the removal of guilt, as to leave nothing to be presented in acceptableness before God" (B. W. Newton). How beautifully was the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ to all whom He represented typified by what is recorded in Psalm 132:2. The costly and fragrant unguent which was poured upon Aaron's head and which ran down his beard, descended to the very skirts of his clothes. So the merits of our great High Priest have passed to and upon all who are members of His mystical Body. Again; when Aaron (as the representative) presented the names of the children of Israel before God, he did not barely present them, but he bore their names on his breastplate, engraved on precious stones (Exodus 28:17-20), thereby adumbrating, as far as earthly things can, the splendid and exalted nature of the Redeemer's righteousness in which we are presented to God. Let the reader carefully and prayerfully ponder the wonderful incident portrayed in Zechariah 3:1-5. There we behold a "brand plucked out of the fire" (v. 2). Observe particularly the two things done for and to him. First the command is, "Take away the filthy garments from him" (v. 4), figuring the removal of our sins. Second, "they set a fair miter upon his head and clothed him with garments" (v. 5), emblemizing that vicarious and immaculate righteousness of Christ, which is not only "unto" but also "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). E. Its Imputation "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). Here again the enemies of the truth have

fought hard to rob God's children of the comfort and assurance which the blessed teaching of this chapter is designed to give them. Many have argued that God imputes to faith itself an intrinsic value which He accepts in lieu of perfect obedience to His law. But this is a most horrible perversion. Faith is an emptying thing, which causes the pauper to gladly receive God's gracious gift, and possesses no more merit than does the appeal of a beggar for charity. The "his faith is counted for righteousness" does not mean "in the stead of" for the Greek preposition is "eis" and not "and," and signifies "unto" as in Romans 10:10: "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Our Surety gave full satisfaction to the law, but we are not credited with this by God's gracious imputation until we have faith in Christ. "The righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). Therefore is this righteousness also called "the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13). It is denominated the "righteousness of God" because God required, ordained, provided, accepted and imputed it. It is a righteousness which exalts God's justice, magnifies His law, manifests His grace, and displays all His awful and lovely attributes in their full luster. It is designated the "righteousness of Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1), because He wrought it out without the co-operation of His creatures. It is the "righteousness of faith" because faith apprehends it. From the way in which certain men have spoken of "the imputation of righteousness" many have deemed them orthodox on this vital subject, but their blank denial of the imputation of Christ's righteousness thoroughly exposes their heterodoxy, to all who bow to the authority of Holy Writ. "That righteousness might be imputed to them" (Rom. 4:11). What righteousness? Whose righteousness? The only possible Scriptural answer is: that perfect satisfaction which Christ rendered to all the demands of the law, and which God places to the credit of every true believer in Him. So truly is Christ's righteousness placed to their account, it is said to be "upon all them that believe" (Rom. 3:22). Such persons actually possess it. They wear it as their "robe" (Isa. 61:10). "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Yes, in Him, as our Proxy and Head, and this because He wrought out a justifying-righteousness not only in our nature, but in our name, not only as our Benefactor, but as our Representative. "In the Lord [not in themselves] shall all the seed of Israel be justified" (Isa. 45:25). In the Lord Jesus, believers have a righteousness without spot or blemish, perfect and all glorious; a righteousness which has not only expiated all their sins, but satisfied every requirement of the law's precepts. "That I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9, 10). God's imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, is not in esteeming him to be righteous when really he is not so. Nor is it a naked pronouncement of any one to be righteous without a just and sufficient foundation for the judgment of God declared therein. God pronounces none righteous who are not so. Nor is it a transfusion of Christ's righteousness unto those who are to be justified, so that they should be inherently righteous thereby. No; it is a Divine and legal grant whereby God, out of His mere love and grace, on the simple consideration of the whole mediation of Christ, makes an effectual donation of a real and true righteousness, even that of Christ Himself, unto all who believe; and so accounting it as theirs, on His own gracious act, as not only to absolve them from all sin, but granting them the fight to eternal life and the title to an everlasting inheritance in heaven. The meritorious obedience of Christ is so truly transferred to believers that they are called "the righteous" (Matthew 25:40). Surely the Christian has cause to say, "my mouth shall show forth thy righteousness, thy salvation all the day" (Ps. 71:15) — the one being founded upon the other, the latter deriving its origin from the former; there could be no "salvation" without a proper, real, law-fulfilling righteousness.

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