

August 2016

Dear neighbours,

How can someone be right with God? How can we have a correct relationship?

Can we have a relationship at all with an unseen Being? On whose terms?

Is it something to be desired?

With these things in mind let me remind you of one of those most delightful of human experiences. You do someone a small kindness, but either because it came at a vulnerable time, or because totally unexpected, their gratitude to you has been constantly repeated by little acts of returned kindness often out of all proportion to the deed. It reminds us of Jesus' words (Luke 6.38), "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom."

This is how our Father in heaven overflows in the benefits He bestows upon those who trust Him.

The Bible tells us of Abram (later known to us as Abraham). He lived in what was then a modern thriving city, Ur of the Chaldees. But it was godless. The standards which God had given (you may read about them in Genesis chapters 1-4) had long been forgotten, or worse, ignored. The inhabitants were wicked and sinners before the Lord.

God spoke to the innermost heart of Abram. He commanded him to leave Ur and go to Canaan (though at the time he didn't tell him where it was he was to go). But He promised him that "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing (Genesis 12.2). And so it turned out.

A few years later (Genesis 15) Abram was having doubts. He had no son and heir, and yet he had been promised many true descendants as we have seen. By this time he was 100 and his wife 99. The Lord brought him outside from where he was praying one night and said, "Look now toward heaven, and tell (count) the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed (descendants) be. And he (Abram) believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15.5-6).

That expression "counted it to him for righteousness" is quoted later on in the Bible a number of times. And in it lies the clue to how someone can become right with God.

Abram was a sinner like we all are in one way or another. Some of Abram's are there for all to see in the Bible. He lied about his wife. He had multiple wives contrary to the command of Genesis 2.24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife."

Yet for one act of faith, one act of trust, one act of belief God was prepared to forgive every other sin. That is what the expression "counted it to him for righteousness" means. In God's sight it outweighed everything else. All his failures were discountenanced, his sins pardoned. Righteousness (holiness, purity, sinlessness) did not intrinsically belong to Abram. Nor to us. Yet it was counted as if it was.

God's justice only permits such a thing because He had planned the time when His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2.9), would come into the world fully human (more fully than ourselves, because without sin) and fully God. His death upon the cross would make atonement for our sins, being offered on behalf of everyone who believes in Him, as our Representative. He alone has offered the perfect righteousness to God which is His due; but the Saviour has done it on behalf of all who trust Him.

For that every sin is forgiven. That is what is counted to us for righteousness.

This is what the apostle Paul writes in Romans 4:- "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (verse 3). "To him that...believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (verse 5). He quotes Psalm 32 verses 1-2 in which King David relates it as his very own experience after being forgiven for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (Romans 4.6-7). Paul further writes (verse 11) "that Abram might be the father of all them that believe...that righteousness might be imputed to them also."

Abram, David, Paul. They all knew this as their core relationship with God by faith.

Now, we are used to computing. The word means to count quickly, to add up together and, as computers developed, to process quickly. That is almost what the word imputed means. It is that something is counted as belonging to someone, credited to them. It is the same as counted or reckoned.

Abram, "against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

"And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up our Lord Jesus from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4.18-25).

To put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and most specifically for the forgiveness of sins through His atonement upon the cross and everlasting life through resurrection is to enjoy being right with God. It brings peace with God which underlies all other peace. It is the most genuine of experiences.

Oh, make but trial of His love,
Experience will decide
How blessed are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide.

We preach these things week in, week out at our services on the Lord's Day at 10.45am and 2pm.

Yours affectionately,