

## The Basic Principle of the Exchanged Life

*The Christian life is an exchanged life*

**T**he Christian life portrayed in the New Testament is an exchanged life. That is, a life where one life becomes the substitute for another. The exchange of the Christian life is twofold: Christ, our substitute on the cross, dying instead of us, and Christ, our substitute in resurrection, living instead of us. Thus, the exchanged life involves substitution. Paul expresses it in Gal. 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." The last part of the verse – Christ "gave Himself for me" reveals His substitution for us in death, and the first part of the verse – "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" reveals His substitution for us in His resurrection life.

The thought of *exchange* and *substitution* is implicit everywhere in the New Testament. It is Christ who dies for me, and Christ who lives in me. This means Christ is my substitute in death and resurrection. This exchanged life means I have been taken out of the way – "I have been crucified with Christ." Paul says it again in Col. 3:3-4: <sup>3</sup> "For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Utterances of this kind are imbedded everywhere in the fabric of the New Testament, depicting the Christian life as an exchanged life.

The Lord Himself alludes to this exchanged life in John 14:19: "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also." He doesn't say, you will live because you have it all together, or because your condition meets a certain standard. He just says, "Because I live, you will live also." My Substitute lives. And because He lives, I live also. In other words, He defines me according to *Himself*. He doesn't identify me according to what I am in myself – good or bad. By

virtue of the fact that He is joined to me and lives in me, my condition is as He is (1 John 4:17). This is the exchanged life based upon substitution.

### *The basic principle of the exchanged life*

The exchanged life is Christ Himself living His life in and through us. It is Christ as the life-giving Spirit *being* all in us and *doing* all through us. But for this to be a reality in us we have to see the basic principle of the exchanged life. We may also refer to this basic principle as the foundation of the exchanged life. What is this basic principle and foundation? It is simply this – life can only come to a certain condition. That is, God's life, eternal life, Christ as life cannot indiscriminately go to any kind of condition or situation. The life of God can only come to a situation that is described in the Bible as "righteousness." Life can only operate in the environment of God's righteousness. In other words, righteousness is the unique condition where life will work.

This is a major principle that governs the Old and New Testament (cf. Gen. 3:22-24 & Rev. 22:14). It can be likened to an airplane that can only land on a runway. The airplane cannot land under any other condition but the condition of a runway. In the same way Christ can only land and come to the runway of "righteousness." He can't land on any old condition. Thus, the basic principle of the exchanged life is that the life of God that comes to us will only come to the condition of righteousness. We must have a perfect righteousness to qualify us for the operation of life.

### *The gift of righteousness and life*

Righteousness is a gift, but it is not a thing separated from Christ. Righteousness is embodied in a Person. Christ Himself is righteousness. Righteousness is actually personified in Jer. 23:6: "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Or, in Hebrew "*Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (tsid-kay-noo)." Thus,

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both His Person and work make up the content of righteousness. He is the righteousness that comes to us and makes us righteous. This is given to us as a gift and imputed to us by faith.

The relationship between righteousness as a gift and life is seen in Romans 5:17: "For if by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." Notice the last words of the verse, "those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life." It is the gift of righteousness that causes us to reign in life. This verse not only helps us to see this basic principle but also defines the nature of the righteousness that is needed for life to come and reign. It tells us that it is "the gift of righteousness."

In other words, if life is going to come to me and I'm going to experience reigning in life, it can only happen where the condition of righteousness is of the nature of a free gift. This means to release the Lord to live in me, to change me, to operate in my mind, emotion, and will, to work in me to tear down all my resistance, stubbornness, and stiff-neckedness, it will only happen to a foundation of righteousness received as a gift.

All those feelings of "not wanting to turn my heart" and "not wanting to go to the Lord," are a part of my fallen flesh that desperately needs God's life. How can I get God's life when I don't have a condition of righteousness? It's not like I can change myself with myself and make myself ready for God to come in. I can't clean up the mess on my own. I need God to come into the mess. I need God to come into my wretched condition and situation so He can live and operate in me to break down the hardness of my heart and incline my will towards Him. It has to be God from A to Z.

But for that to happen there has to be a basis for God to step into this fallen situation – my fallen, mortal self. There has to be a basis for God to be a just and righteous God, and at the same time, to do His work in a less than righteous situation, to work hiddenly, secretly, so that my heart changes. I find my affections which were in one direction are now in another direction. Thus, the changes proceeding from God's life happen in the environment of the gift of righteousness.

This gifted-righteousness is the basis for God to come into man and do His work in him. It is different from our performing good deeds to become righteous. It is like receiving a pen as a free gift. If I give the pen as a gift to a brother, there is no need for him to pay for it or do something to earn it. You don't pay for a "gift" and you don't do anything to earn a "gift." Otherwise, it loses the nature of a gift (cf. Rom. 4:4-5). This is a gift. Just receive it. This is the way to relate to God's righteousness – receive it as a gift.

When we simply take and enjoy the gift of righteousness, it opens the floodgates of life. Life does not come because of "works of righteousness which we have done" (Titus 3:5), but because of receiving "the gift of righteousness." Thus, the kind of righteousness we pursue determines whether life can come to us or not (Rom. 9:30-32). This is the basic principle to experience the reality of the exchanged life.

Romans 8:10 is another key verse that reveals how life is based on righteousness: "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." The reason Christ can live in me and change me

from within is simply because of righteousness! My regenerated spirit is life because of righteousness! Life can flow in me (John 10:10), life can save me (Rom. 5:10), life can operate in me (Phil. 2:13) – all because of righteousness!

We can have the absolute assurance that Jesus Christ lives in us. It is not a matter of hoping He does or wishing He does. No. Christ is in us. We all can open up and participate directly in Him. With Christ in us, our spirit is now life because of righteousness. Life flowing from our spirit is continuously available to our wandering mind, fickle emotion, vacillating will, and mortal body (Rom. 8:11). Life is available to these very conditions because of righteousness!

Romans 8:10 continues, "If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin. . . ." That means we recognize we are still in a mortal body and we can feel the effects of our weakness. The body is described as "dead." That is, it is smitten with death where we feel our inabilities. Even if Christ is in you, you will still feel your mortality, you will still feel your weakness, your own inability to carry out those January 1<sup>st</sup> resolutions. We find ourselves not doing what we thought we were going to do – yes, "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness."

When Christ lives in us, despite the consciousness of weakness, our spirit is maintained in a state of life because of imputed righteousness. As unfinished and imperfect humanity, we are joined to all that Jesus is because of righteousness. The very possibility of God's life doing a work in us requires a perfect righteousness imputed to us. This is where we can see how critical it is that we have a foundation for our Christian life of God's righteousness.

### *Concerning our own righteousness None righteous, no, not one*

God has given a clear diagnosis of everyone of us from the divine point of view. Romans 3:10 says, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." On the surface it seems that Paul is exaggerating here. He wanted to make it clear, in no uncertain terms, that none of us can claim anything. We might think, "Yeah, but I'm not that bad. I haven't done what other people have done." The very fact that we say it in that way exposes us as a big sinner. What kind of sin? Pride and self-trust.

Then we read Romans 3:11-12: <sup>11</sup>"There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup>They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." Across the board, the Word gives us a clear and accurate diagnosis of ourselves. "None righteous, no, not one," is about as clear and straight forward as you can get.

Based upon the above verses righteousness will definitely not be coming from me. The description in Romans 10:10-12 rules out the righteous condition necessary for God to give His life to me. And if I must have righteousness in order for life to come into me, abide in me, and operate in me to do everything through me, then I will have to go to an altogether different source than myself. I must have the kind of righteousness that qualifies me for the life of God to come into the precincts of my being. It has to be a righteousness outside of me, not in me.

### *Not having our own righteousness*

Paul in Philippians 3:8-9 speaks another word that rules out righteousness proceeding from us: <sup>8</sup> “But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through the faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith.”

In verse 9 Paul wants to be “found in Him” in a certain way. He wanted to be found with a different kind of righteousness than his own, that is, a righteousness out of God and based on faith. It is this “other” kind of righteousness out of God that becomes for Paul the essential factor to know Him. After Paul abandons his own righteousness to be found in Him, with a righteousness of God based on faith – at this point he speaks of knowing Him. Verse 10 says, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” All four items mentioned in this verse are matters pertaining to the operation of the life of God in Paul. This operation in verse 10 is coming not out of his own righteousness, but the righteousness out of God in verse 9. In other words, this is a practical example of how the basic principle of the exchanged life works – life comes to righteousness. It is when Paul abandons his own righteousness, and stands in God’s righteousness that life is imparted to know and experience Him in the realm of the cross and resurrection life.

### *Establishing our own righteousness*

Romans 10:1-4 greatly helps us to see the basic principle of the exchanged life with the two different kinds of righteousness. In verses 1 and 2, Paul is speaking about Israel. He says, <sup>1</sup> “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” They are definitely an actively religious people. They are zealous for God, “but not according to knowledge.” Then, Paul continues in verse 3 to distinguish the two kinds of righteousness: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

Then Paul follows in verse 4 with the specific content of God’s righteousness: “For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone who believes.” In other words, God’s righteousness is centered wholly in Christ. Just submit to Christ – this is God’s righteousness! In our experience we will either be “establishing” our own self-concocted righteousness or “submitting” to Christ our righteousness. So here we have a contrast. Whenever there is a contrast, it is helpful for us to see what it is not. It is not establishing our own righteousness. It is submitting to Christ, God’s righteousness.

### *Establishing by the good-bad scale*

By seeking to establish our own righteousness we will  
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find ourselves being preoccupied with ourselves and our performance. We will be “up” and then we will be “down.” We will always be measuring where we are on the good-bad scale. For example, I will try to be good so that the good will outweigh the bad. But if the bad starts to gain ascendancy I will try to counteract it by doing more good. There will be this good-bad struggle going on in me. I will always be somehow seeking to establish some kind of juggled approach to God based upon my performance. So I’m looking for righteousness in me. I am trying to establish a relationship with my conscience and with God that will bring peace. But it’s all based upon coming up with something in me that merits God’s favor. I can’t find peace on this deadly road. Oh, brothers and sisters, this is a dead-end street!

Such experiences should teach us to recognize that righteousness is not established out of ourselves. Whenever we catch ourselves “establishing” we better bypass that road, and quickly switch and “submit” to an altogether different street. Christ is our street – He’s our forgiveness. He’s our pardon. He’s our cleansing. He’s the One who washes us in His blood.

He cares for sin on the negative side – takes away sin, pardons sin, clears the slate – He cleanses us from all sin. The blood doesn’t leave us with a shadow of sin. No, all sin is done away. On the cross, He bore it all. “Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world!” All of our sins were transferred to Him. And as the Lamb of God, He was let loose in the wilderness to bear it away, to take it away, so sin is gone. My sins are gone. Your sins are gone. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions. He has buried our sins in the depths of the sea. We are forgiven. We are pardoned. That is all on just the negative side.

On the positive side, His obedience, His cross, His death, and His resurrection now make it possible to not only forgive us, but to positively clothe us. He has clothed us with Himself as our righteousness (Isa. 61:10-11; Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30). So He not only forgives my sin, He puts a robe on me. And that robe is just Himself.

With this robe on, my entire situation is reckoned as righteousness. God can now righteously pour His life into me. The robe of righteousness is Christ and what He did on the cross. Indeed, the cross is where righteousness comes from. Galatians 2:21 makes this crystal clear: “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” Pay close attention to the phrase, “If righteousness is through law.” This phrase echos the same truth found in Romans 10:3 concerning establishing our own righteousness. If I believe that righteousness comes through keeping the law, then I will put forth every effort to establish my righteousness. I know the demands of the law: what is right and what is wrong. I am trying to keep those demands to feel good about myself in order to establish my righteousness. But (and this is a huge “but”) pursuing this path means that there is no need for the cross. As Paul said it, “Christ died in vain.” Think about it! If there is any potential for righteousness to be established by one person, then there was no need for Christ to come and die on the cross. It would mean there is still the possibility for fallen man to raise himself up by establishing his own righteousness.

## *Righteousness comes through the cross*

The very thought that “Christ died in vain” is repulsive to our believing hearts. Yet, when we are seeking to establish our own righteousness by our own self-efforts, we are declaring that the cross is not necessary. Thus, the cross is void of meaning and significance. On the other hand, Paul’s statement in Galatians 2:21, “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain,” reveals the greatest truth in the universe for mortal man. That is, righteousness is freely imputed to man through the cross. Righteousness does not come through the law; righteousness comes through the cross of Calvary.

What transpired on the cross is so deep and meaningful that the result of Christ’s finished work there affects every sinful human being. The cross left mankind with a gift of righteousness that would make it possible for man not only to be forgiven, but to be a partaker of the very life of God to fulfill His eternal purpose in the universe.

Consider the righteousness of God revealed on the cross in Isaiah 53:4-6: <sup>4</sup> “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> . . . the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” These verses reveal the details of the righteousness transacted on the cross. They reveal how our sins were laid on Him in a substitutionary manner – He paid the penalty of death not for His sins, but for our sins. This kind of substitution is clearly defined in Galatians 3:13: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”

Because of our sinless Substitute, sin was righteously dealt with on the cross, and a righteous transfer of His righteousness was made possible to us as it is depicted in 2 Cor. 5:21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” From this verse we can see becoming the righteousness of God is because of our union with Him. And our union is effected because of the absolute perfection of our Substitute’s sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, our righteousness comes from the cross, and not from any subjective feelings proceeding from ourselves based upon the good works which we have done.

### *How to submit to the righteousness of God*

Now we need to consider the final and practical point in considering the basic principle of the exchanged life – that life comes to righteousness. The question ultimately becomes how to submit to the righteousness of God. Paul deals with this matter immediately following his opening up the two kinds of righteousness in Romans 10:1-4. On the one hand, he sets forth the ignorance involved of seeking to establish our own righteousness. On the other hand, he shows forth the obedience involved in submitting to the righteousness of God. To obey the gospel (Rom. 10:16), and to submit to the righteousness of God in the context of Romans chapter 10 means to *believe*. Thus, to obey and to submit under the New Testament economy means to believe.

This believing is believing in Christ. He is the end of the law unto righteousness to everyone who believes. At this juncture Paul outlines the anatomy of believing and submitting to the righteousness of God in Romans 10:6-10: <sup>6</sup> “But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) <sup>7</sup> or, Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.”

By considering the above verses the answer to the question as to how we submit to the righteousness of God is easily comprehended – it is *faith*. Faith in the revelation that proceeds from the Gospel (good news) about Christ. Faith is how we submit, and includes our heart and our mouth. *Believe in your heart* that God raised Jesus from the dead – that is how to submit. *Confess with your mouth* the Lord Jesus – that is also how to submit.

The gift of righteousness is given to us unconditionally by simply recognizing how near He is to us, in our heart and in our mouth. We don’t have to go to the heavens to bring Christ down from above. Neither do we have to hunt for Him in the abyss and try to bring Him up from the dead. We don’t have to do that. The word is near us; it is in our mouth and it is in our heart, the word of faith which we preach. It’s so simple to come out of the realm of establishing our own righteousness to the realm of submitting to the righteousness of God – it’s just in the confessing of His name, Jesus! Jesus! Amen!\*

— Bill Freeman  
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\* This article is edited. The complete message on CD or pamphlet may be ordered for \$5.00 postpaid from **Ministry of the Word**, P. O. Box 48255, Spokane, WA 99228 • (509) 466-4777 • [ministry@thechristian.org](mailto:ministry@thechristian.org)

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