

# How Can You Be Pleasing to God?

Genesis 15:6

Halifax: 26 April 2015

## Introduction:

How can you be pleasing to God?

- Surely you all want that—how could you not?
  - I know there are people who claim that they do not believe in God—
    - but often one of their reasons for denying Him is because of despair—they see His judgements in the earth and they see that if there is a God, He must not be pleased with us and if not, they want nothing to do with Him.
      - They have no hope of reconciling with Him, often declaring that He is unreasonable if He exists at all, and so they want nothing to do with Him.
    - But if somehow they might be able to find a way to please Him—to become the object of His delight—would they not desire it?
- Just like a child with estranged parents—what son or daughter, if it were possible, would not want to have a great relationship with his or her parents?
  - I have asked young people before who are bitter with their parents—
    - “Do you like this? Do you like to have such a cold relationship with your parents? to be always disappointing them? to have them displeased with you?”
      - And I have never had a child say that he or she did—and if one ever does, I don’t think I will believe them!
      - Of course you want your parents to be pleased with you—of course!
        - But when you despair of that, you don’t even think about it—and you don’t even try to please them anymore.
        - Everything between you is adversarial and you often do things to try to get at them.
        - It seems impossible to change and you are angry with them for that and you are just bitter and make yourself more and more of a pain to them.
      - But if you step back and think about it—of course it would be wonderful to you if you could have a great relationship with them...
        - Where they not only love you, but actually take real delight in you—are pleased with what you do and how you do it and with who you are!
      - Of course I know that for this to happen, it is often they who need to change as much and sometimes even more than you!
        - But surely, that does not change the fact that if it were possible to have a right relationship with them—and by that I mean one where everything was excellent—you would want that!
  - But I tell you, it is even more desirable to have a right relationship with God—a relationship in which you please Him—in which He takes delight in you!
    - And that is our topic today.
    - We are going to look at how we can be pleasing to God.

- We have been studying about Abram, and we have seen that he is presented to us in the Bible as a model for all believers—for all who enter Christ’s kingdom—
  - A model of how a human being can be righteous—truly pleasing to God!
  - In other words, we can look at his life and learn how to be pleasing to Him.
- And today, we have come to a place in the Bible where this is presented to us in a single sentence.
  - It is found in Genesis 15:6.
  - This verse is such an important summary that Paul gives devotes nearly a whole chapter to it in his epistle to the Romans—the chapter we read a moment ago.
  - Last week we looked at Genesis 15:1-5, and this week we are going to devote all of our time to Genesis 15:6

So please give me your careful attention as I read this text to you...Here is the Word of God:

**Genesis 15:6: And he [Abram that is] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

There we end the reading of God’s Word.

- May He bless it to our understanding.

You can from this verse that Abram’s believing is accounted for righteousness...

- We are going to look at why it is said to be accounted to him for righteousness,
  - and we are going to look at what this believing is,
  - But first, we need to explore what *righteousness* is.

## I. What is righteousness?

A. When you have righteousness, it simply means that you are *right!*

- *Right* in the sense of being all that what a person ought to be.
  - You know, an unrighteous person is one who is out of step—perhaps he is a murderer or a thief—his life is not right...not what it should be.
- 1. And the righteousness we are talking about here is not just righteousness in the eyes of other people, but in the sight of God!
  - Other people are not qualified to judge you...How could they be?
    - They cannot see your heart—things may look right to them on the outside, but they can’t see what is really going on within you...
      - And don’t flatter yourself here...
      - You know that you would come out worse if they really could see what is inside you—not just the things you might select for them to see—but if they could see *everything!*
    - Neither are they qualified to judge if you are righteous because they do not always even know what is right...
      - In fact, they often approve what is perverse and wrong.

- They do not judge righteous judgement.
  - For example, a Muslim extremist thinks it is a good thing for a fellow to give his life in Jihad...
  - And in our society, there are extremists who say that it is wrong to say that same sex relationships are sinful...
    - Even if you don't agree on the particulars, the very fact that there is disagreement about these things proves that human beings are not capable of making right judgements.
2. But you see, when we are talking about the righteousness that is associated with Abram here—we are talking about righteousness even in the eyes of God!
- We are talking about one who even pleases God—someone that God delights in as being what a human being ought to be!
    - And I tell, you God says we are righteous, He is right about it!
- B. Let's look further into what righteousness is—what does it entail?
1. Well, do you remember what we saw when we studied about man at creation?
- We saw that God made the world for us and then made us, and when He finished making us, He declared that what He had made was very good.
  - He was delighted with what we were—we were beautiful to Him—we were right—we were righteous.
2. We are told that He made us in His own image!
- a. That was very special indeed...As His image, God could look at us and see His beauty reflected in us...and it was truly beautiful!
- As we learn of God from His word, we see more and more of His extreme beauty—and we were the perfect image of that beauty!
    - We see the love that made the world and the love that caused Him to send His only Son to die for our sins...
    - We see integrity in God, we see faithfulness in Him, we see truth and we see generosity.
    - We see a willingness to sacrifice for His creatures.
    - We see an unwillingness to ever pervert justice or to ever approve of what is sinful.
    - We see perfect wisdom.
    - We see vengeance against wrong.
    - We see mercy and tenderness without any perversity whatsoever.
    - We see pure goodness and virtue.
      - Everything about Him is right.
- b. And as His image, we were made with these same qualities.
- The love and the integrity and the justice and wisdom were all there and we were very beautiful to look upon—we showed forth God.
  - There was the kind of love in a man for his wife that would have caused him to take her punishment when she had sinned...like Jesus did.

- There was a perfect love for God, a love that saw Him and delighted in Him and that always gave Him the honour and the praise and glory that is due to Him.
    - We were right in every way—upright—without spot or blemish—full of righteousness.
    - We pleased God—just the way Jesus did...
      - As our Father, God looked upon us and said, “I am very pleased with them.”
      - We had that most desirable relationship with Him.
- C. To be without this righteousness is to entirely miss the mark of what you ought to be as a human being.
1. One of the words for sin means just that—it is an archery term, and it means to miss the mark...
    - If you are shooting rabbits for supper and you miss, it is no good.
    - That is how it is when you miss the mark—everything is wrong if you come short in any one point...lying, stealing, ingratitude to God, idolatry—whatever it may be—it ruins it all...
      - And perhaps I could say as well that if you come short in any one point, you actually come short in all the others too...
        - because your relationship with God is off kilter...
        - If you do not regard God enough to, say, keep your heart from lusting after a woman...
          - then you also don’t regard God enough when you are doing something like giving to the poor—even though you may do it, you do it in way that comes short before God...
            - You can’t isolate disrespect for God from just one part of your life.
              - If it is in one part, it is in all the parts.
  2. So if you are not righteous in all things, you are completely ruined...
    - You cannot please God, you cannot be called righteous, you are twisted and distorted as a human being—a poor specimen of what it is to be human...
      - And you are highly offensive to God...because you are still His image—only now a very bad one.
      - You are under His wrath and curse.
        - You are far from that relationship in which it may be said that you *please God* or that you *have righteousness*.
  3. The Bible actually declares emphatically that we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
    - It says that there is none righteous, no not one—
      - There is not one that is right in God’s eyes...
      - And because of this, we are all under His wrath and curse.

- We were made upright—but when Adam sinned in eating the forbidden fruit—in defiance to God...
  - He went wrong and so did all the rest of us who have been born of him.
- We are no longer righteous and God is righteous so that means we cannot dwell with Him.
  - That is why there is sickness and death and famines and wars and hurricanes in addition and all the rest!
  - That is why we are headed for the place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth and where Satan will be.
  - It is all because we are not right—not righteous—not pleasing to God.

**II. But if you look carefully you will see that our text tells us that Abram’s faith (his believing in God) was only *accounted* to him for righteousness.**

A. In other words, it does not say that he was actually righteous, but that he was *accounted* as such...

1. You might say that he was credited with being righteous, or regarded as being righteous even though he was not righteous.
  - This is sometimes referred to as the *imputation of righteousness*...
  - It is an accounting term where something is credited to an account—it is imputed to it.
2. It is very important to see that Abram was not accounted as righteous on the basis of the good things he had done...not really on the basis of what he was.
  - There were quite a few good things that he had done by the time we get to Genesis 15...
    - He had left his homeland when God had called him. It was a great sacrifice that he had made in obedience to God.
    - He had made peace with Lot and the Bible says blessed are the peacemakers.
    - He had gone to rescue Lot in an act of courageous faith fuelled by love!
    - We saw how he had built altars along each step of the way.
  - But none of these were enough to make him righteous...
    - Our text says plainly that his faith was what God accounted to him *for* righteousness.
    - He had done all of those good deeds, but they were not adequate.
    - He had come short in them.
    - He had to have righteousness imputed to him from outside—he could only be *accounted* as righteous because he was not actually righteous.

TRANS> And so righteousness was credited to him!

B. Now this was a very splendid thing.

1. It means that even though Abram was not right with God, he was regarded as being right with Him!
  - Even though he had come short of what is required to please God, God looked upon him as if he had not come short at all!
    - He got credit for being righteous even though he wasn't righteous!
2. This means that God would forever treat Abram as if he was righteous.
  - He would be with him to protect him and to bless him in every way.
  - He would work with him as His own child, instructing him and chastening him, but never cutting him off as his sins deserved.
  - He would give him an eternal reward in glory—
    - He would give him the reward of righteousness even though he was not righteous because He accounted him as righteous.
3. It is sort of like a fellow—let's say he is an sculptor—and he supposed to do a great marble sculpture for his city—right in the main square...
  - But he is a procrastinator and he never gets it done—all he does is make a bit of a mess in the square, but he never finishes the work...
    - Nevertheless, the city writes him a check for the full amount—they account it as though he has completed the task.
    - That is similar to what God does when He accounts people who are not righteous as though they are.
4. And there is more, it also means that God does not impute their sins to them.
  - In accounting them as righteous He also does not impute sin to them.
    - It is as if they had not sinned—so they are not cut off, they are not cast away into the Lake of Fire as they deserve.
  - What a great blessing this is for the one who knows he deserves to be a castaway...
    - to be brought into his heavenly Father's house and treated as though he had always been right with Him.
      - As Paul said in Romans 4, quoting Psalm 32—'How blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity...'
    - Just think what you have been delivered from—if you have in fact been delivered!
      - Do you understand what a huge thing it is to be spared from God's judgement? to be treated as if you are righteous when you are not?

TRANS> Now a lot of people, hearing that God has accepted Abram and others will declare that this is not fair...

- They especially say this when they have been rejected and the one who has been accepted does not even seem to be as righteous as they are...
- They will say, God cannot do that—it is unjust for Him to let them off and not let me off—it is unjust for Him to say that a person like that is righteous and to treat him as righteous. This is actually what fuels a lot of gossip.

- Now I suppose there is a sense in which it is not fair...but before we make too hasty of a judgement,
  - we need to see what this “believing in the LORD” entails that God counts as righteousness....
- I mean, if believing in the LORD is what causes the LORD to regard sinners as though they are righteous, then it is very important to know what it is...so...

### III. What is this “believing in the LORD” that is spoken of here?

A. In short, to *believe in the LORD* is to rely upon Him to do what He has promised.

1. According to the grammarians, this probably indicates an ongoing trust in God—
  - In other words, it is more than a comment about what Abram did when he heard the specific promise of God
    - that he would have an heir from his own body,
    - and that a great multitude of people like the stars of the heavens in number would come from him.
  - Saying that he believed in God immediately after those promises that were given in a time of crisis, certainly does indicate that he believed those particular promises,
    - but that statement seems to be saying that Abram’s characteristic way of life was that he believed the LORD.
  - He had believed Him...
    - He believed in Him when he left his homeland...
    - He left because he believed—he trusted in what God had promised.
    - And he had continued to believe Him.
2. To say that a person believes in God means that that person is counting on God.
  - Similar to the way that I was counting on the pilots who flew the planes that I was on last week to get me to the promised location...
    - Never once did I check to make sure the pilot was staying on course—I just trusted him to do what he was supposed to do, and all five pilots did just that.
    - I believed in them.
3. And there is another parallel as well...
  - I was believing in those pilots to do something that I could not do myself.
    - I was not even able to check on the course—I do not understand their instruments, nor was I familiar with the terrain over which we flew...
    - And if I had been left to fly the plane, we would never have gotten to our destination.
      - It would be something that was completely beyond my ability.
      - I had to believe in these pilots to do it for me.
        - And you see, the end result was, it was much better in this case for me to believe in them than to attempt to do it myself!

TRANS> Those pilots and the airlines they worked for promised to take me to each destination, and I believed and it got me there.

B. Now we need to consider just what it was that God had promised to Abram.

1. Well in fact it is the very thing that Abram received by believing—righteousness!
  - Righteousness is what God promised to Abram when you really boil it all down.
  - The men at Babel had tried to make a great name for themselves and a great nation that would be safe and secure and in communion with God.
  - They wanted to have a city and a kingdom that was right—that was all that a kingdom ought to be—all that it could be.
    - But they went about it in the wrong way because they were not humble.
      - They did not take into account the problem of sin and their need of grace.
        - They supposed that by building a tower, they could commune with deity in heaven...this is man's religious efforts...
        - They supposed that by banding together, they could make themselves successful, honourable, and secure...this was man's political efforts
        - But they were no more capable of this than I was capable of flying that plane or of flying without a plane by flapping my arms.
  - These men, in fact, did not understand what the righteousness that they really needed was!
    - They were thinking more about what *they* thought would be right or righteous, than about what God requires for a kingdom and its members to be right or righteous.
      - As we saw before, what we think righteousness is is not the same as what God thinks—and He's right—we are wrong.
2. How did God promise righteousness to Abram?
  - a. He did it—here in Genesis 15—by renewing and expanding His promise to make Abram a great nation...
    - God had promised to make him a great nation, to give him a great name, to bless him, to make him a blessing to others, and to bless the whole world through his seed.
    - And this would be a great nation and great name according to what God considers great!
    - It would not be a great nation by man's definition of greatness, but by God's definition—
      - and not blessing as man conceives blessing, but as God conceives it to be.
  - b. It is like this—man had gone wrong by sin...
    - And somehow, God was going to make a kingdom of those who were righteous—right with Him—all that they are supposed to be.
      - That is what He promised all along...all through the ages...
    - Even on the cusp of Jesus' appearing, the promise of John the Baptist was, "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand."
      - The kingdom that was coming was a righteous kingdom where people were righteous—a kingdom that was right with God instead of lost in sin.



- c. Paul makes a beautiful contrast with God's law, explaining that the law which commands us in the way of righteousness has no ability to produce righteousness.
    - It *tells* us what is right, but it has no power to *make* us right the way God does through the gospel.
      - Rom 8:3-4 says: **For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**
3. We have seen this all along in Genesis.
- When God calls His people to be fruitful and promises to make them fruitful, He is not just talking about multiplying people...
    - He is talking about bringing forth a *godly* multitude.
  - When God promises to make Abram a great nation, He is not just talking about a nation with power and wealth—He is talking about a kingdom of righteousness—one that is righteous before Him...
    - And the call from Genesis to Revelation is that we are to trust God to bring forth this kingdom of righteousness because we can't do it!
- C. Believing in God means that you look to Him for righteousness.
- This occurs on a personal level as well as on a corporate level...
1. Abram knew that he (and his seed) had not yet become the great nation that God had promised.
- He also knew that he himself was not righteous—
  - But you see, he trusted God to do that for him—
  - He trusted Him in a way that was appropriate to the times in which he lived.
    - Jesus had not yet come and had not yet died on the cross, but Abram believed in Him by believing that God would establish the kingdom of righteousness that He had promised.
      - In Abram's day, that included bringing forth a son through whom this righteous kingdom would eventually be brought forth by God.
  - For us, who live in these present days, it means trusting in what God has already done through Jesus Christ on the cross...
    - And looking to the LORD to complete the work by gathering the rest of His people into His kingdom and by returning again to judge all, and then to vindicate His people and cast into the outer darkness those who are not His people.
    - Anyone today who does not receive and rest upon the work that God has now done in Christ is not counted as righteous.
      - Like Abram, we are trusting God for the completion of God's righteous kingdom, but unlike Abram we have the privilege of seeing the Messiah who came to establish that righteous kingdom,
        - and we get to see what He did to establish it and that gives us great comfort and assurance.

- But in essence Abram was made righteous the same way we are—by looking to God to make Him righteous and to establish His Kingdom of righteousness.
- 2. And you see, because Abram was relying on God to make him righteous—to raise up a kingdom of righteousness before God...
  - his faith (his believing that) was just as good as if Abram had himself been righteous—it counted as righteousness...
  - Why? Because he was relying on the One who could make him righteous and who had promised to make him righteous.
  - As far as God is concerned, that means (obviously) that you are relying on what cannot fail to make you righteous...
    - and so the LORD accounts you as righteous—even as He accounted Abram as righteous.
      - He regards you as righteous because His way of making you righteous does not fail.

#### **IV. And so I would urge you now: Do not trust in anything but the LORD to make you righteous...**

- A. Abram did not err in any of the ways that men so often do.
  1. First, he did not suppose that he was already righteous.
    - No, he was looking to God to bring forth righteousness for his seed.
    - Even today, now that Jesus has come, there are a lot of people who think they are righteous—that God ought to accept them—without trusting in Jesus.
    - Abram was counted as being righteous because he looked to God.
  2. Second, he did not suppose that he could make himself righteous...
    - This is the error of those who strive to be righteous by their own works, by their religious efforts, or whatever...
    - It is a total waste, and much worse than that, it is an offense to God to even think they can do such a thing—especially when He has promised to do it.
    - Paul makes it clear that Abram has nothing to boast about...
      - He cannot boast because, despite all the fine works that he did, he was not justified (or made right with God) by his works!
        - His faith was accounted to him for righteousness.
  3. Third, he did not suppose that righteousness was not important.
    - This is the error of those who are so distracted and caught up with the world that they don't even see their glaring need of righteousness.
    - To them, the living God who made the world is a vague shadow or perhaps an impersonal force—not a judge who will judge each according to their works.
      - So even though Christ has been provided, they see no need to trust in Him—unless it will help them to make more money or something.
      - But Abram knew that he needed the blessing that God had promised and he just had to have it!
        - He would not go on without it.

B. And here is the outcome of all of this...

1. Whatever you rely upon, that is what you will be judged by...
  - If you rely on your own righteousness, you will be judged based upon that.
  - If you rely on your own works to make you righteous, you will be judged on the basis of those works.
  - If you rely on nothing to make you righteous because it is just not important to you, you will be judged for disregarding God like that—for taking His name in vain.
  - But if you rely on Jesus Christ for your righteousness, you are already accepted and you will be judged on the basis of His life and work...
    - You cannot possibly fail.
    - God has already accepted you because He has already accepted Christ.
    - Because He was well pleased with Him, He is well pleased with all who are truly in His kingdom by faith (not as hypocrites)...
2. He is well pleased because of what Jesus has done...because of what you are trusting in...
  - Jesus stands before us as our representative.
    - And so when God judges His kingdom, He looks at Him as our king, and His words are, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”
    - And so He is well pleased with all of us who are in His kingdom...
  - And not only that, but as there are sins among us, Jesus also represents us in showing His wounds on the cross...
    - declaring that He has paid for the sin of all who are in His kingdom and that His offering has been accepted—He was wounded for our iniquities, but raised for our justification.
      - And so on the basis of His suffering, you who are trusting in Him are fully pardoned...no sin can be laid to your charge because they have been laid on Christ, and He has covered them all.

**Conclusion:**

So in closing I would ask you this simple question...

- Have you gotten on the plane?
  - If I had never gotten on the plane so as to trust the pilot to take me to my destination, I never would have gotten there in time.
  - No matter how much I flapped my arms or how much I put it out of my mind, I would not have reached my destination.
- And so it is when it comes to pleasing God—to being righteous before Him—
  - It will not happen unless you trust in Him and what He has done to make sinful people righteous.
  - Believe in the LORD and it will be accounted to you for righteousness.