

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background.

When we talk about the subject of righteousness, we usually first refer to Romans or Galatians, which set out the great doctrines of justification by faith, righteousness and the law. Righteousness in the Epistles of Corinthians may not seem obvious, but it is related to obvious themes such as wisdom, resurrection, love, cross, etc. The Epistles of Corinthians are very important, because they relate directly to the nature and foundation of every Christian's faith, they are important not only for the Corinthian Church at that time, but also for the churches today. The situation of the Corinthian Church at that time was special and complicated, and there were big deviations and errors in the fundamental problems of righteousness, which Paul pertinently cut into. Obviously, the situation is different, and Paul's entry point is different from Romans and Galatians.

Corinth was a large city in the Roman Empire. It was the capital of the province of Achaia at that time, and an important seaport city. It had prosperous trade and a developed economy since ancient times.¹ Corinth had a large foreign population, including Greeks, Jews, Romans and other people from all over the world.

¹ Victor Paul Furnish, *Corinth in Paul's Time—What Can Archaeology Tell Us?*, Biblical Archaeology Review, May/June 1988 Volume 14 Number 3, 16.

There were many religions here, with many temples and of course many Jewish synagogues. Corinth was only 80km away from the philosophical city of Athens to the east, so it was a city deeply influenced by Greek philosophy. Corinth had long been one of the economic, cultural and religious centers. It was prosperous and sinful².

During Paul's Second Missionary period, he stayed in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:1-18) and established the Corinthian church (Acts 18:11). Because the church in Corinth had a diverse population and diverse backgrounds, on the one hand, the church was sufficient in all gifts, rich in everything, complete in eloquence and knowledge (1 Corinthians 1:5, 7). On the other hand, the church in Corinth was full of all kinds of disputes and sins, and the problems were many, complex, and serious. From the perspective of righteousness, all Corinthian Christians were not only unrighteous by their respective backgrounds, but also had many shortcomings and deviations in their understanding of "righteousness"; and their behavior was full of sins: factions, strife, sexual immorality, drunkenness, idolatry, reviling, etc. (1 Corinthians 1:11-12; 3:3; 5:11). Even they were not ashamed and also proud with their lives (1 Corinthians 5:2). There was a lack of righteous life and testimony within the church, and there were various voices outside the church.

The Jews have the opposite way of life. The Jews believed that they were God's chosen people and had God's law, so that man could be made perfect by the

² Kasper H.J.Wong, *Tien Dao Commentary*, Tien Dao Publishing House Ltd, 2nd printing 2013, 2-5.

works of the law, and man could be righteousness by works.³ They lived with self-righteous principle. When Christians call Jesus Lord, this was a huge stumbling block for them, and they couldn't accept it. Because their unanimous acceptance of "The LORD our God was one LORD"(Deuteronomy 6:4) conflicts.

How about the Greeks? They valued wisdom above all else. They had four great virtues: Wisdom, Righteousness, Courage, Temperance⁴. When they learned that Jesus Christ had been crucified, the believers called him the Saviour to save the world, which was unacceptable to the Greeks because it was so irrational, so unwise, and so stupid⁵. The Greeks could not accept the folly of letting a man who could not save himself die on the cross to save himself (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).

For the Romans, virtues like wisdom and righteousness were equally valued; They focused more on judicial justice.⁶ According to Roman law if one breaks the law, he commits a crime and you are punished. If one doesn't break the law, he is not a sinner. Rewarding goodness and punishing evil was the expression of a Roman's righteousness.⁷ The Romans could not accept the Christian proclamation that Jesus

³ Geehard Kittel (Editor), *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, volume II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 196.

⁴ Stephen Tong, *Sin, Righteousness and judgement*, Simplified Chinese Version, Published by STEMI, Printed by Printmate SDN BHD, 12-13.

⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The First Epistle of Paul to The Corinthians*, Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 54.

⁶ Geehard Kittel (Editor), *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, volume II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 193.

⁷ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Chinese translated vol 2, Campus

could save them. Because Jesus was sentenced to death on the cross by the Roman governor, he violated Roman law and was a sinner. A Roman who has not broken Roman law is not a sinner and is in no need of salvation.

These perspectives deeply affected Christians of these backgrounds. Paul's triple identity of Jewish identity, Greek identity and Roman citizen made him understand their problems very well. When he repented and was called by the Lord Christ, he had a fourth identity that was a Christian. His mind was completely reversed, and he broke the imprisonment of cultural background and philosophical thoughts and entered the truth.

When we talk about righteousness, we must know what it means. Under what conditions? The original Greek word for justice is δικαιοσύνη. It is a legal term⁸, the state in which a person is acquitted by a judge, He can be called "Forensic Righteousness",⁹ when the person has judicial justice, he is justified. On the other hand, if a man sins, he is condemned, he is called a sinner, and he is condemned to bear the consequences of his sin. In the Old Testament, the words קָדַשׁ also have this meaning, Is to express that the person is "to be righteous",¹⁰ LXX translations often

Evangelical Fellowship Press, 829.

⁸ Geehard Kittel (Editor), *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, volume II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 192-193.

⁹ Che-Bin Tan, *Ten lectures on Pauline Theology*, Pulished by Campus Evangelical Fellowship Press, 101.

¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, Baker Book House Company, 307.

use δικαιοσύνη, corresponding to this Hebrew word.¹¹

If a man breaks God's law, God declares him guilty of iniquity, he is a sinner, and will suffer the punishment of sin: death. All men who were in Adam died (1 Corinthians 15:22), and 1 Corinthians 15:47-48 says: The first man was from the earth and belonged to the earth; as that which is of soil, so is all that is of soil. Therefore all who are in Adam are sinners. If you cannot solve your sin, you are an enemy of God, and you will fall into God's judgment, and the result of the sinner is death. Because God is a righteous God; righteousness is not only one of God's important natures, but also reflected in God's work and judgment, because God is an honest and righteous God (Deuteronomy 32:4). He rewards and punishes, and rewards good and punishes evil according to His truth. He is a God who loves righteousness and hates sin. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot be joined (2 Corinthians 6:14); and sinners as unrighteous do not live peace with God. Those who are unrighteous will never inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9). Everyone is a sinner, and as a human being, a sinner is total corrupted. Everyone has been declared unrighteousness by God; he is an enemy of God, and is bound to fall into the wrath and judgment of God, and the end is a terrible, miserable, and hopeless death. There can be no reconciliation with God until mankind solves the problem of sin. In God's standard, there are two ways in which a person can be called righteous by God. The first way is to fulfill

¹¹ Geehard Kittel (Editor), *Theological Dictionary of New Testament*, volume II, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 195.

God's just requirements by keeping the law completely perfect. If anyone can keep the law completely perfect, then he is righteous (Romans 10:5). But since the first man Adam sinned, therefore every Adam's descendent has been defiled with sin and is born a sinner. It is impossible for him to do righteousness. The mistake of the Jews was to think that they could be righteous by the work of the law, which was nothing more than their self-righteous and seeming blameless. Paul regarded himself, as an elite Pharisaic, was blameless in his conduct; but he after his conversion admitted that he could not be called righteous by God because of it (1 Corinthians 4:4). Before his conversion he had been zealous in persecuting Christians before he believed in Christ. He thought this was pleasing to the Lord, but Jesus said to him that he was persecuting the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:4). He even raised the question that represents the great contradiction of the Jewish faith: "Who are you, Lord?" The mouth calls out to the Lord, but the truth knows him not. In his heart, he thought that he loved the Lord, but in reality he did exactly what offended the Lord. This self-righteous Jewish thought is filthy and hypocritical in the eyes of God (Isaiah 64:6).

The Greeks and the Romans thought that if they performed such virtues as righteousness, they were perfect men. These people thought they were knowledgeable and wise, but they were fools in the eyes of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-21). These are of no use to solving sin and becoming righteous. The world neither knows God (1 Corinthians 1:21) nor the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:11, 14), nor has true wisdom; the wisdom of men is vain and foolish, and all men are blind. This requires great

wisdom, and such wisdom is not to be found on earth. For this is God's wisdom, not human wisdom, it is mysterious (1 Corinthians 2:7), it is transcendent (1 Corinthians 1:22-24), and it is spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:12-15). The wisdom of God is Christ, and this is the second way in which God calls people righteous, outside the law, the way of grace (1 Corinthians 1:4; 2:12; 2 Corinthians 8:9), and it is the only way sinners can become righteous.

God is righteousness, so He takes the initiative to choose, and He is willing to save us. If God wants to save us and forgive people's sins, he must do so in a righteous way, and he cannot casually forgive people's sins, because his nature is righteousness, and God's righteousness is absolute, and he will not lower the standard of righteousness, or if he lowers his standard, he will count the guilty as innocent. If a person sins, he will certainly be condemned as a sinner before God's absolute righteousness. There must be punishment as death. God must judge the world according to His righteousness, so how can man get rid of sin? There is no such wisdom in the world, but it is perfected by His wisdom: Christ. On the cross, Christ satisfied the righteousness of God, bore the sins of many people, faced the terrible wrath of God, and willingly submitted to the will of God, willingly took the punishment for His people's sins, and died on the cross.

Christ's blood on the cross fulfilled all the requirements of God's righteousness; It is an absolute necessity that he is perfectly righteous, and that he is willing to share his righteousness with those who trust in him, so that the believer is

clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and therefore is called righteous by God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As Calvin said: How are we righteous in the sight of God? For he assumed in a manner our place, and might be dealt with as a sinner, not for his offences, but for those of others, as he was pure and exempt from every fault, and might endure the punishment that was due to us not to himself. It is in the same manner, assuredly, that we are now righteous in him not in respect of our rendering satisfaction to the justice of God by our works, but because we are judged of in connection with Christ's righteousness, which we have put on by faith, that it might become ours.¹²

A sinner becomes the righteousness of God in Christ, which amounts to a court-like declaration, which is positional, it's not moral,¹³ for no sinner's moral behavior is perfect. However, if someone is in Christ, he is righteous in status, a new creation, and his life is renewed (2 Corinthians 5:17), he will inevitably bear the fruit of righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:10), which is reflected in the moral dimension. In his epistle, Paul severely rebukes the Corinthian church for its low morals and corrupt life, including the sins of idolatry, feasting and drunkenness and so on. But Paul warned them that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians

¹² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Pauline the Apostle to the Corinthians*, volume XX, Baker Book House, 242.

¹³ Gordon D.Ee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (Revised Edition)*, Chinese Translation Copyright by A Kernel of Wheat Christian Ministries, 163.

6:9), and where righteousness and unrighteousness cannot have fellowship, neither can light and darkness (2 Corinthians 6:14). A person who is in Christ also receives the Holy Spirit, so that believers can not only understand the truth of God, but also have the Holy Spirit dwell in the human body, so that people can live a holy and righteous life, bear witness to the Lord, and glorify God.

Paul carefully warned the church at Corinth not to deceive themselves, to wake up and be good, and not to sin. For God is the judge, warning the people of the last days through his great judgment of the chosen people of Israel in the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). Christ is the Lord of judgment and will judge the world according to righteousness, so Christians should live a righteous life, because everyone who believes in Christ has already had a righteous life of Christ and will face the judgment of Christ, and believers should also be recompensed before the judgment seat of Christ, according to their own good or evil deeds. Paul constantly exhorted them to repent and turn to God, and to walk in a manner commensurate with repentance.

The Corinthian epistle is very clear about the meaning of imputation. From the Middle Ages to the present day, the Roman Catholic Church does not accept reduction and still believes in injected righteousness, which is obviously very wrong. And the New Pauline view (New Perspective on Paul), which some modern theologians have put forward, does not accept the idea of imputation. This view is obviously dangerous.

1.2 Statement Of The Problem

Some people in the Corinthian Church had a very wrong understanding of the righteousness of Christ. They believed in Jesus but did not make a breakthrough in their cognition, and many of their concepts of righteousness remained in the cognitive level of the original cultural background, thus leaving the core of the Christian faith. And some of them did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12-19), but they also looked down on Christ, and even regarded Jesus on the Cross as stupid (1 Corinthians 1:23). It can be said that their understanding of Christ is one-sided and wrong, which will inevitably lead to a wrong understanding of Christ's righteous attribute and a cognitive deviation of Christ's righteous deeds. Such faith was unclear in doctrine and full of mistakes. Their indifference to Christ's righteous identity and righteous work inevitably leads to a lack of respect for salvation, and the consequences are terrible.

Not only that, their faiths are out of touch with life: indulging lust, dissenting factions, etc., which is very bad. Their various sinful deeds (1 Corinthians 1:11-12; 3:3; 5:2, 11), it can be seen that they have not yet left the old life, that they have not done righteousness in their life, that they have not lived as new people, and this was very dangerous. They even ignore the fact that everything that man does will face the righteous judgment of the Lord.

1.3 Research Questions

In the Corinthians Epistles, I will research the following questions:

1. What is the connection and necessity between God's righteousness, the total fall into sin, and Christ's righteousness?
2. How is the righteousness of Christ has become believers'? And what is the nature and meaning of a believer's righteousness?

1.4 Thesis Statement

1. In Adam everyone is a sinner, and sinners must be judged by God because of God's justice. But Christ died on the cross to pay for sinners and shared his righteousness to them. So all those in Christ are righteous in God's eyes, and this is the only way we become righteousness.

2. Christ is sinless, the righteous One (2 Corinthians 5:21). His sacrifice on the cross paid the price of sin and bore the punishment of sin, thus satisfying the requirements of God's righteousness. So that believers are called righteous by God through imputation, that is, the believers' sins are imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believers.

3. The believer is righteousness by the righteousness imputed to Christ, although this is an alien righteousness, but imputation can only take place in Christ, and the believer who in Christ must live out righteousness in acts.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is: First, to correct the erroneous understanding of "righteousness" among Christians. Second, to encourage Christians to live out the "righteousness of Christ."

1.6 Method and Structure of the Thesis

This topic of righteousness will obviously use Systematic Theology; and because this area of study is in the Corinthians Epistles, so Biblical Theology is indispensable. Some details have to be obtained through Biblical Study. And the purpose of this thesis must be is to apply, so I use a little Practical theology.

Chapter 1: Introduction, which focuses on the background and the issues in the situation. Chapter 2: The righteousness of Christ. Chapter 3: The righteousness of Believers. Chapter 4: Contemporary Application.