

Andrew Cook:

In our previous programme, we were talking about Martin Luther. Under God, he was the man who set in motion what became known as the Reformation, 500 years ago.

For Luther, one of the most important Bible verses was Romans chapter 1 verse 17, which reads:

*‘For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”’*

The expression, ‘the righteousness of God’ belongs to this very familiar verse from a well-known passage. But what’s in the background to this ‘stand-out’ statement made by Paul?

Well, from time to time here on Serving Today we’ll explore different themes to see how different parts of the Bible shed light on their meaning. In the Old Testament, God’s righteousness is seen in what he does. Here are some examples.

In Psalm 31, verse 1 David says, *‘Deliver me in your righteousness.’* David appeals for deliverance. In other words, God’s righteousness brings salvation. It’s about God doing what is right on behalf of his people. God vindicates them as they run to him for help, such as in Psalm 143, verse 11: *‘For your names’ sake, Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.’* Here David doesn’t say that God’s righteousness should inspire him to keep out of trouble, but he looks to God and his righteousness to do something for him.

Then there’s also a connection between God’s righteousness and his love and faithfulness. That’s in Psalm 36, verses 5 and 6: *‘Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep.’* God’s righteousness is something very active.

But there’s another idea that’s linked to it in the Old Testament. We find this in David’s confession of sin in Psalm 51, verse 4: *‘You are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.’* The link, then, between God’s righteousness and his justice is a very important one. King Solomon’s prayer in Psalm 72, verses 1 and 2 was that God would, *‘Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.’* This means that the guilty have to be punished and the innocent declared not guilty, because God is just and right in judgement.

So the Old Testament, or the Holy Scriptures as Paul refers to them in Romans chapter 1, gives us a fuller picture about the righteousness of God.

Next time we’ll think more about the impact of this theme, the righteousness of God, and how it affects the gospel in the New Testament.