Can we see the justice and the righteousness of Christ in the Old Testament? Which is the difference between the justice in the old and the New Testament and in which way will God judge the people who lived in those times?

To get some insight on this topic, we need first to have a look on a passage found in Ezekiel 18:1-4

The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, 2“What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying:

‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes,  
And the children’s teeth are set on edge’?

3“*As* I live,” says the Lord God, “you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.

4“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

We can see the proverb they were saying in Israel stating that the fathers have eaten sower grapes and the teeth of the children were set on the edge. With this proverb they were saying that there is a consequence that the children were going to bear depending on what their fathers did. There were consequences that were going to be inherited from one generation to another. There are various passages in the Old testament saying that the children were supposed to pay for their father’s sins and sometimes to even inherit their curse (Exodus 20:5). What God was saying here, was that this wasn’t going to be heard any longer as there was going to be a change that God was going to bring. This change was that each person was going to face and pay for his own unrighteousness. Of course, that the sins of the fathers pass on their children, but today we all have opportunity through Christ to get delivered and freed. Even if the sins pass on to the others and all of us have been born with a sinful nature, we all choose to walk willingly in those sins, meaning that we are responsible for our own choices. The blessing is that we have an opportunity through Christ.

4“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. Ezekiel 18:4

This is something that we see happening in the New Testament. It means that God here was speaking for the times that were about to come – the times of the New Testament. In the times in which we live today, each soul, each person needs to give an account in front of God for his own actions. This is what also God desires; that everyone can have an opportunity to repent, by hearing the good news of the gospel. In many places in the book of Ezekiel and in the Old Testament in general, it speaks about the promises of the times that were about to come. God was telling already His nation about the messiah. That was one of the main and most fundamental promises of the Old Testament.

Let’s read the next verses from the same chapter.

5But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right;  
6If he has not eaten on the mountains, nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor’s wife,  
Nor approached a woman during her impurity; 7If he has not oppressed anyone, *but* has restored to the debtor his pledge;  
Has robbed no one by violence, *but* has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; 8If he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, *but* has withdrawn his hand from iniquity *and* executed true judgment between man and man; 9*If* he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully—he *is* just; he shall surely live!” Says the Lord God.

In these next verses of Ezekiel 18, we notice that it gives something like a list of righteous deeds that a man needs to perform, so that he can live and be approved by God. We know from various passages of the Old Testament that the people living in that time, the people of the nation of Israel weren’t able to keep up with all of the commandments. No one actually was able to fulfil all the law and righteousness by himself. Same is today. No one can really be righteous by himself and fulfill all the commandments to perfection. We always fail at some point. How then can someone be saved and approved by God? Because Jesus says in the New Testament that even if we didn’t do something physically, but we even did it in our heart, then we still sinned (Matthew 5:27,28).

It looks like chapter 18 of Ezekiel is exhorting people to perform something for God and is exalting the deeds we can do. But it is not quite so in all of it, because we know that we are not capable by ourselves to perform that to the standard that God requires from us. There are many other passages also suggesting that the Old pact and testament is not enough that there is something else needed to complete that. That was the coming of Jesus and the New Testament. He is the one accomplishing and completing all. He made all of this possible through His death on the cross and resurrection.

If we can be righteous and we can walk in God and put his commandments in practice, is possible by His grace alone. The grace is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 8:3, 4). In this way is possible to be righteous as these passages from Ezekiel tell us.

17“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. Matthew 5:17

This is what Jesus was saying about the law. That He came to accomplish it. There wasn’t and it is not any other way for us to accomplish and practice the law. We can see some other verses of the Old Testament.

10Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalms 51:10

How can someone be able to practice this? How can someone have really a clean heart? This passage was written by king David in a petition for repentance after he sinned. To have a clean heart is something that the New Testament is talking and focusing more about. We can see here how people inspired by God were already writing about the promises of the New Testament, about what was about to come. David wrote this psalm by which we can be still inspired today and get an insight on how to humble and repent in front of God.

We see that when the Bible speaks about practicing the word and walking in His statutes, is giving us as a solution and way His grace. People talk of practicing His word sometimes, but I think that what a believer needs to talk more of, is the grace of God as this is the way in which this can be done. The Pharisees surely talked a lot about following the law and this was right, but they actually couldn’t manage to walk in the right way in front of God.

We find other verses in Psalm 24

3Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
Or who may stand in His holy place?  
4He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,  
Nor sworn deceitfully.  
5He shall receive blessing from the Lord,

Psalm 24:3-5

Here we see again something that without the grace will not be possible. Who is the one worthy to ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who is worthy to enter there? No one actually. The one who was able to accomplish this was our Lord Jesus. He had completely pure heart and clean hands. He is also the one who can enable us to do it. He began, He set the mark and the example in which we need to walk into and opened a way for us through His sacrifice. An example that is too high for us, but that’s why He also promised us His Spirit through which we can be empowered. Through Him is that we can enter into the hill of the Lord and be saved. Through Him is that we can finish the race in the right way and be accepted. God is going to save us through His grace, but this grace will also work in us and make us people with clean heart and hands, because these are the people that God accepts. I mean that the work of the grace doesn’t just save without leaving any sign in the life of the believer, but also transforms our heart. Obviously even as believers we are still living in a sinful body and in a sinful world and we can fall, but we don’t belong to the sin anymore. We don’t persevere into it. God is giving us a solution. I am saying this because many people can say that have been saved by grace and that was it, but I think that the real grace of God, I mean when God really reaches a person, keeps on working and performing His work in him.

17“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them,* he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:17-20

From this passage we see that He didn’t come to destroy the law or the prophets, but to accomplish them. Throughout the whole Old Testament we see the promises about His coming, about the One who was going to help us to accomplish the law, I mean to obey His word. Without this it is impossible for us to do it. In Him is the fulfillment of the law. His sacrifice is justifying us and making us righteous in front of God. This sacrifice is also leaving a sign in those who have accepted it. They are righteous, their nature is changing. Still sinning and having sin into them, but without willingly following it.

17Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17

V. 19 of Matthew 5 says:

19Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them,* he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:19

This verse confirms that Jesus still wants from us in some way to accomplish the law, to practice His commandments and word. Something that is impossible with our own strength as we said. This verse tells us that the salvation is not a matter of a cheap grace that only saves at the moment without leaving any sign of change in us. We are speaking about the God almighty the creator of the heavens, of the universe and the earth. Don’t you think that such a mighty God wouldn’t leave any trace or sign in the person in which He has been working? Of course He will. Even in the weakest person there could be. His grace is more than sufficient and is making us to love and follow His commandments.

20For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

The next verse is speaking about the righteousness we need to have, and this mustn’t look as something impossible to us. It is impossible for us of course, but with Him it is possible. This is the work of His grace. A work that is performed inside someone’s heart, because it is there that the righteousness needs to reside. Not only on the outside. The Pharisees were looking for a righteousness that is on the outside only. They were keeping certain laws and commandments that could be seen on the outside and had a religious appearance. Jesus often rebuked them saying that the cup needs to be cleansed on the inside also and not only on the outside, meaning that the righteousness should be on the inside, in the heart.

25“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Matthew 23:25, 16

Notice that it says that once the cup is clean on the inside, it will be such on the outside too. This is the righteousness that Jesus is talking about. The one that the Pharisees were not having and the one through which we can exceed theirs. This is only possible through Jesus. No one can control his heart from not having bad feelings or thoughts. Many times when we speak about sin and about falling into such, we think of something that we did with our actions, with our hands, but when Jesus talks of it, it looks like He speaks of something that comes in our thoughts and desires first. This is the one that contaminates us and it is considered as a sin in front of God. This is the one that if we don’t control, will grow in something bigger and will be too late then and the consequences will be much harder. That’s why He was speaking about a justice on the inside, about cleaning the cup on the inside. Not only to prevent sin from growing further but also because God is looking for such justice – on the inside. **Obviously, speaking about the sins we commit on the inside, we will find ourselves often falling into them, but then we will at least have a reason to repent and to depend on God’s righteousness, seeing that we are sinners and that we need His forgiveness and righteousness as we are not righteous by ourselves**. This will not only prevent it from growing further, but it will let us see that we are sinners and that we need Him. It is not the same when people are not acknowledging this kind of sin, (the one on the inside), and in the same time they consider themselves as righteous persons just because they don’t perform certain actions on the outside. This is the issue the Pharisees were having, They considered themselves as righteous because of that.

27“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:27, 28

This is one of the examples about sins that we can commit in our thoughts without doing them just physically. As we said before, we can often find ourselves in this situation, and obviously God can help us to go through it and overcome it, but this is also with a reason, so that we can know that we cannot be righteous by ourselves and we need Him to make us such. Because no one can actually control his heart from some things. We can manage to control in part some actions and some outwardly attitudes, but what God actually looks at, is our heart. Only with His help we can obtain such a justice. Because when we are in His presence, when we are close to Him, our thoughts and attitudes are pure. This is possible only through the sacrifice He did for us. And not only because our thoughts are pure, we will be saved, but by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Speaking about the sin, I need to trust in Jesus and ask Him for help whenever I have something wrong coming to me.

Sometimes there are questions like how were people getting justified in the Old Testament if Christ hasn’t died on the cross in that time yet. You can hear certain answers saying that they were probably observing the law and God was justifying and judging them according to that, but I am not quite sure about it. I personally believe that the people in that time having relationship with God and revelations from Him and were justified, were having that because of His grace. They were having a touch of it. You can see already some people writing about the Spirit of God in the Old Testament and about forgiveness of sins. Somehow the sacrifice of Jesus, even though not performed yet, was operating in them. The grace and the forgiveness of God is the only way He has established for the humanity as all are sinners and all need Him. The law itself was pointing to the grace and the sacrifice that was going to be performed one day. The work of the law was, and it is to show us our incapability, to show us that we cannot perform it by ourselves, that we need a help. What we read today in the Bible in its entirety also shows us that we cannot make it by ourselves. The sacrifice Jesus performed 2000 years ago was premeditated before the foundation of the world and by it also the people from the Old Testament were shown mercy and had survived. God was counting this sacrifice as already done in a way. Obviously when the appointed time had come, major blessings were poured out.

19but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 20He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 1 Peter 1:19, 20

Another verse speaking about the times that were going to come and the promises that were going to be accomplished in the New Testament is found in Ezekiel 36:26, 27

26I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them.*

Notice that it says that He **will give His** people e new heart. It speaks about future times. About what was about to come. Something that happened already in the days in which we live through Christ. The change needs to happen on the inside, in the heart. V. 27 says: “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them.”*

Only in this way we can walk in His statutes and keep His word. This will cause us and enable us to do it.

By all of this that we said, we see that the problem lies in the heart and it is there where God needs to operate. Out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). No one actually can control His heart from having bad thoughts for example. We can control certain outwardly manifestations, certain actions, but when it comes to our thoughts and heart, we cannot control it. That’s why we need to trust Him. That’s why it is by faith and not by what we can achieve.

With all of these examples we saw that the Old Testament speaks quite a lot about the Messiah, about Jesus. There are prophesies not only about His coming as a person, but also the work and the purpose He came to accomplish. This is the work in the spirit and the soul. He came to bring us freedom.

And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives  
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,  
*To* set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
19To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

20Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Here we see Jesus citing a passage of the Old testament that is found in Isaiah 61 speaking of a prophecy about the work He was going to perform, and pointing the liberty He was going to bring. The liberty of the sin. What is interesting, is that if we look at the whole passage in Isaiah 61, we will see that when reading it, He stopped at the beginning of v.2 at the phrase “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” and after said: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

2To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, Isaiah 61:2

He did this because at the time of His coming, He came to bring the freedom from the sin, the one which is most important. Many people at that time didn’t quite understand the essence of His message and thought that He was going to come straight away to free them from all of their enemies such as the Romans at that time for example who were oppressing them. That wasn’t going to happen before they knew and understood the real purpose for which He came, and that was to forgive and to free them from their sins by dying for them. That’s why He said: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your eyes” and closed the book afterwards. The next part of the verse saying “and the day of vengeance of our God” was speaking about the vengeance of God, and this will eventually happen one day, but at His second coming when He will indeed free His nation and everyone else believing in Him from the people oppressing them and from the evil of this world. In that day He will put an end to all the evil, scandals and sin. This won’t happen though before the times get accomplished. The times given to people to repent. Before understanding this kind of freedom, He won’t free them from the rest as well.

31Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31

This is the freedom He came to bring and what He wants to accomplish in us. As we said before He will obviously come one day with all of His power and might to deliver them from all the evil and all their enemies, and this will happen at His second coming, but the main purpose with which He came and the main work that He wants to accomplish is the one in the spirit. This is what the most of the scriptures indicate speaking about changing our heart and causing us to walk into His statutes.

29Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair?

30“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,” says the Lord God. “Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. 31Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!”

Ezekiel 18:29-32

Here we see how chapter 18 ends. With a petition of God toward people to repent. He is not pleased when people get lost. They will get lost if they persevere in their own ways, but meanwhile He is waiting for them and exhorting them to come to Him. By this passage we see that it is possible to walk righteously as this chapter was telling us in verses 5 – 9, only when we repent and convert. This is how we can receive a new heart. A new heart that is pleased when it walks in His ways. Only in this way it is possible, otherwise we will always keep on loving and walking into our old ways. This passage is very similar to Acts 2:38, 39 where Peter was inviting the people to repent and convert to God.

38Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38, 39

So, by all of this we conclude that we cannot put into practice the word of God, unless we have this new heart and nature. It is by grace that we can walk in His ways and even then we are still vulnerable to sin and can be attacked by it and fall, but we can hear Him then supplicating us and admonishing us, to turn and to repent.

For why should you die, O house of Israel? 32For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,” says the Lord God. “Therefore turn and live!” Ezekiel 18:31, 32

A believer doesn’t persist in the wrong way, but nevertheless this is not by his own strength, but by the mercy of God.