

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

What is True Righteousness?

by Jim Rector

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE RIGHTEOUS?
SO MANY PEOPLE ARE APT TO JUDGE BY
THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE-EASILY AWED
BY THE "GOOD WORKS" OF MEN. BUT DO
OUR GOOD DEEDS ACTUALLY CONSTITUTE
TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS - THE KIND YOUR
BIBLE DESCRIBES? WHAT IS THE REAL
KEY TO BEING RIGHTEOUS. DON'T MAKE
THE CLASSIC MISTAKE OF ASSUMING YOU
KNOW. YOUR SPIRITUAL SALVATION IS
AT STAKE!

Are you a righteous person? What does that really mean? The Bible speaks so often of righteousness. It must therefore be vitally important, but how are we to understand it. Being righteous is or should be the goal of every Christian. David once wrote:

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry...The righteous cry, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Psa. 34:15, 17).

There is no question that the state of true righteousness is **THE** desirable condition in the life of a Christian. But what is righteousness - the kind described in the Scriptures? And how can one achieve such a blessed state?

It is noteworthy to recall that the Word of God so often defines its own concepts. For instance, if you want to know what sin is, just turn to I John 3:4 and read that, "**Sin is the transgression of the Law.**" Most people find this definition just too simplistic for their taste. They prefer to complicate matters. It is, however, just such succinct verses as this one that helps true Christians to comprehend even the most difficult of Biblical teaching. On the issue of *righteousness*, the Bible once again provides the straightforward answer. Notice Psalms 119:171-172:

"My lips shall utter praise, when You have taught me your statutes. My tongue shall speak of Your Word; FOR ALL YOUR COMMANDMENTS ARE RIGHTEOUSNESS."

This is the Scriptural definition of righteousness - All the commandments and statutes and principles of God. In other words, as Christ told Satan, "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by EVERY WORD that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).** The Laws of God are not merely some archaic set of do's and don'ts, neither are they simply suggestions as to how one might choose to act. The Law of God is the full expression of His own perfect, righteous character - His sinless state of mind. As long, however, as those commandments are confined to mere stone, as in ancient days, or pages of paper today, true righteousness cannot be achieved.

NOT OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

It might come as a shock to many, but God is not the least bit interested in **OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS!** But surely, you ask, doesn't He want us to be righteous? Yes, but it is impossible to please God by just trying to do good on our own. Notice what Isaiah wrote:

"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as FILTHY RAGS and we do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away" (Isa. 64:6).

Think about this description. God's opinion of Israel's attempts at righteousness was to compare them to **FILTHY RAGS!** The puny efforts of mere human beings to do what **THEY** think is right always fall flat before the perfect, sinless character of Almighty God. Paul once told the Romans:

"What then? Are we (Jews) better than they (Gentiles)? No, in no wise; for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE: There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:9-12).

Human righteousness is utterly nothing, even though it always tends to appear pretty on the surface. It is paled into absolute insignificance when compared with the righteousness of God. From His perspective, human beings are small, weak, unimportant little pieces of clay, whose lives are puffed up in their own blinded eyes, but are really being lived in futility and frustration. They are all going **NOWHERE!!** Mere human attempts to be righteous do not please God.

It is so unfortunate that most people equate true righteousness with human goodness. The man or woman who participates in feeding the hungry or helping out the homeless is warmly embraced and honored as a righteous person, perhaps even a Godly person. Those who give large sums of money to help the poor or who sacrifice a great deal of their time and energy to support various charitable undertakings are generally celebrated as great benefactors and philanthropists. We look up to such people. We admire them. Often, we even worship them. Like human beings from the beginning of time, we tend to always look upon and judge things by their outward appearance - the physical, fleshly expression. God tells us, however, that He looks on things quite differently. Remember that when Samuel came to anoint the next king of Israel, he was most impressed with the apparent qualifications of Jesse's older sons. But God told him:

"Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the OUTWARD APPEARANCE, but the Lord looks ON THE HEART" (I Sam. 16:7).

God's concept of righteousness is so much deeper than what masquerades as human goodness. It is spiritual in nature and finds its fullest expression in things of the Spirit. We must be extremely careful not to confuse the outward show of the flesh with the true, inward heart of the Spirit.

Unless one has been called and chosen by God, has the Holy Spirit of God, is obeying the Laws of God and has Christ truly living in him, then it really doesn't matter what his other works might happen to be. They are all merely deeds of the flesh - even if they seem to be great and good works, wonderful, humanitarian efforts. Human goodness serves only a **TEMPORARY PURPOSE!** It is limited and does not accomplish the full objective that God has in mind for His servants. We are called to **RISE ABOVE THE PHYSICAL!** Remember that our job is **SPIRITUAL!**

There is a particular passage of Scripture that is often quoted in connection with doing certain good works. It is found in Matthew 25. It speaks of feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty, ministering to the sick and visiting those in prison. Most of us are familiar with this example. After Christ had finished his discourse, he added that if we do these things unto even the least of our brethren, then we have truly done it unto Him (Matt. 25:40). But how are Christians really supposed to interpret and understand these instructions? Do they refer only to physical works? Is this all the Messiah had in mind? **HARDLY!!** The ruling Sadducees and Pharisees of His own day were full of such outward good works, but He roundly denounced them for their unrighteousness! Notice how Christ described His own mission to this earth. I believe that the following verses actually provide us with the correct basis for understanding the instructions of Matthew 25:

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and

stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of Isaiah the prophet. And when he found the place where it was written: **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 preach deliverance to the CAPTIVES, and the recovering of sight to the BLIND, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Second Coming)" (Luke 4:16-18).**

Do you see how clear the message really is on this question? Christ came to **PREACH** - that is, proclaim, to teach, to show forth, to publish, the message of the coming Kingdom. His job was so obviously of a spiritual nature. The food that he gave was spiritual truth and the hungry were those dying of spiritual lack and starvation. The prisoners to whom he ministered were not merely criminals in physical jails, but those in spiritual chains, prisoners of sin and of Satan the devil. The primary emphasis of his work was always spiritual. **SO MUST IT BE WITH US TODAY!**

As shocking as it may sound, it does not take the power of the Holy Spirit to physically feed the hungry and clothe the poor. To do so is right and good, to the extent that it is possible to accomplish, but the main focus of a Christian's life must emphatically be firmly grounded in the spiritual aspect of things. Notice how the apostle Paul put it to the Corinthians:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing" (I Cor. 13:1-3).

Isn't this a truly amazing passage of Scripture? How often it has been overlooked or misinterpreted. Paul clearly understood that the great outward show of righteousness was not the real thing. Oh, it was surely impressive, and those who were engaged in such acts were highly praised, but it did not profit them at all!

What *good* person do you admire the most? In so many cases, it is the one who has attracted enough attention to him or herself to be easily recognized. It is common for human beings to be in awe of human goodness, but very difficult indeed to discern spiritual goodness. The person who spends his time, energy and effort teaching the truth of God is often overlooked or hated or even persecuted. Yet from God's point of view, that person may be doing an incomparably greater work than any of the world's greatest benefactors or philanthropists! With mankind, however, this distinction is often very hard to perceive and is therefore seldom made. We like to **SEE** and **HEAR** and **TOUCH** - we like what our five senses tell us. But if all we are interested in is accumulating human righteousness, taking confidence in our own accomplishments, boasting of our own physical works - then we don't even need the Holy Spirit!! That special power is given by God so that we might perform **SPIRITUAL LABOR** and produce **SPIRITUAL WORKS!**

Yes, our righteousness must go far beyond the mere physical. It must exceed by leaps and bounds the carnal expressions of human good works. The ancient Pharisees had good deeds in abundance. They were very careful to give lavishly to the poor, the hungry and the destitute. Their good works were legendary. As far as God was concerned, however, **THEY STANK!!** Speaking of their appearance of righteousness, Christ told his disciples:

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall EXCEED the righteousness of the Pharisees and the scribes, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 5:20).

The entire section of Matthew 5-7 comprises the heart and core of Christ's New Testament teaching on the Law. God's commandments are not just a set of physical requirements - regulations that are to be rigorously enforced upon a carnal people. Their fullest intent is spiritual in nature, and they are the very expression of God's love, His own personal state of mind, His own approach to life. The important thing in our calling is not our own accomplishments, our own righteousness, but the true righteousness that must come from our Father in heaven through the Saviour. As Paul so aptly stated:

"Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having MY OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is OF GOD by faith" (Phil. 3:8-9).

THE SOURCE OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

In an especially moving psalm, David speaks of the origin of true righteousness. In Psalm 24, he writes:

"The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM THE GOD OF HIS SALVATION" (Psa. 24:1-6).

It is the righteousness of God Himself that Christians must continually seek. Christ said the very same thing in Matthew 6:31-34. In this passage, the whole question of physical vs. spiritual is addressed:

"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek you first the Kingdom of God, and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Godly righteousness or goodness must necessarily come from God. That only makes good sense, doesn't it? Throughout Paul's writings, strong emphasis is consistently placed on the righteousness that comes, not from within a human being, but from above. This is particularly true in the book of Romans. For instance, Paul opens this special letter by saying:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD revealed from faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:16-17).

There should be no reason for doubt or confusion as to where true righteousness originates. It is clearly outside ourselves. Paul teaches that it not only come from God, but is given as a gift. It is not something therefore that we can earn or work up on our own. He again told the Romans: **"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and the GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).**

There is absolutely no mistake, sin, shortcoming or imperfection in God's character. But how does the righteousness of such an extraordinary Being actually become a part of a mere human being? Ah, this is the real mystery of the ages! The answer is that God's Son is clearly involved in the process. Notice what Paul wrote to the Philippians in this regard:

"And I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH ARE BY JESUS CHRIST (Yahshua), unto the praise and glory of God" (Phil. 1:9-11).

The righteousness of God, the perfect character, the right approach to life, the spiritual state of mind, the power to be like the Father in heaven, all come to human beings as a gift from God through His Son. It is the Saviour's life and presence that provide the key ingredients. Paul explained this carefully to the Romans, by saying:

"There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1-4).

Remember that the Messiah came from God in heaven. He was with the Father in the beginning of creation and was the very agent used to actually make the universe. He Himself is called the **"beginning of the creation of God"** (Rev. 3:14). Paul tells us in Philippians 2:5-8 that Christ willingly gave up His great power and eternal life, His equality with God, to come to this earth as a mere human being, to experience life in the flesh, to suffer, to teach, to set an example, to fulfil the work His Father ordained Him to accomplish. His death on the cross made reconciliation between sinful humanity and the Godhead possible. His blood was so precious that, in God's eyes, it is capable of washing away and atoning for all the sins of the whole world. Faith in that sacrifice is absolutely required before the process of spiritual conversion can begin - but that is only the beginning! What Paul shows us is that while the death of Christ paid the penalty of past sins, and acceptance of that blood justifies us in God's sight, that there is still more - much more involved in the plan of salvation. The Messiah is not still in the tomb! The grave was unable to hold him! God the Father raised him up and he lives eternally, seated at the right hand of the Father. He is the Christ of the **EMPTY TOMB!** That is precisely why Paul taught the Romans:

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be SAVED BY HIS LIFE" (Rom. 5:10).

The world's perspective is that salvation is a one-shot deal, a one-time decision on a person's part, and that from that point on, they are saved. Some call this philosophy, **"Once saved, always saved."** The Scriptures, however, teach something quite differently. Most people stop at the cross

of Christ, but the Bible reveals that that was only the beginning! The process of salvation indeed commences with the sacrifice of our Saviour. Faith in this great act squares our past in God's sight. This is what cleanses us and allows God to begin working with us - but it most emphatically doesn't stop there! Paul plainly teaches that we are saved by or through **THE LIFE OF CHRIST!!** Now, we are getting to the real heart of the matter. This is so often the missing dimension, the overlooked fact. The Messiah lives, but not just for Himself - He lives for you and me!

THE KEY IS CHRIST

How is the righteousness of God actually imparted to a human being? What is God's method for accomplishing this seemingly impossible task? Paul gives us the answer in his epistle to the Galatians. Here he says:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I but CHRIST LIVES IN ME: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

By an outright miracle, totally incomprehensible to the human mind, the risen Christ is able to live within a begotten child of God, while still in the flesh! The Holy Spirit that is granted upon repentance and baptism, is the very **MIND OF CHRIST!!** It is the spiritual essence that carries within it the power, the insight, the love and the righteousness of God Himself. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we are partakers of the very genes of our Heavenly Father! This Spirit unites with our own human mind, so that Christ is said to actually live within a converted person. As Paul told the Philippians: **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).**

Human beings, apart from the true indwelling of the Spirit of God, are utterly incapable of obeying and pleasing the Father, no matter how *good* they may seem to be. If the righteousness we possess does not come from the very life of Christ within our minds and hearts, then we have yet to really receive that special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Most people merely assume that they have God's Spirit. They will not use the Scriptures as the yardstick by which to determine this fact. They just take it for granted, perhaps because they feel that they have had a *religious* experience of some sort, or maybe have faced a crisis and have sworn to change their ways! People have all kinds of notions on this subject, but God has only one calling and one baptism and one Spirit. Most people are simply not yet chosen by God in this age. God's first harvest is a small one. After Christ's return and the Kingdom is established, then will come the great fall ingathering, when all the world will be granted the opportunity for spiritual salvation. God says that then He will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh and will remove the veil that has blinded the entire world for millennia. He will bind and removed Satan the devil, and all mankind will be given the perfect chance to truly come to know Him in a way never before possible.

Paul again expressed the absolute need for Christ in a Christian's life - not just as an object of worship or as an ideal or even as a Saviour - but as the living, indwelling power of God within every true servant. Notice how he put it:

"And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouable in His sight; if you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel which you have heard...even the mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God

would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; WHICH IS CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY" (Col. 1:21-27).

The power to obey the spiritual intent of God's Law, as expounded in the *Sermon on the Mount*, to overcome not just murder, for instance, but also hatred - to root out not just adultery, but also lust - this power comes only from the Son of God actually living **INSIDE US** - within in our own minds. This is precisely how true Godly righteousness is imparted to a human being. It is not within us, of our own power and effort, to keep God's perfect Laws, yet the Scriptures clearly reveal that righteousness is the keeping of the spiritual commandments. The only way this can be accomplished is through the living power of Christ in each of us. He is the one who is able to live perfectly, not you or me. So, if we then are indeed converted, we must come to say with the apostle Paul, "**the life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.**" The life of a Christian must therefore be the very expression of the literal mind, power and life of Christ in and through him or her - **AND NOTHING LESS!**

If it is true that Christ actually lives within a true Christian, how can it be that Christians are still capable of sinning? How is it possible that a Christian would not immediately become perfect? We need to note one very important point - the fact that Christ may live in a person does not define the extent to which He lives in that individual. That does involve something on our part. We have to bring to the relationship a definite contribution. In other words, we also have a part to play in our own salvation. Anyone who teaches otherwise is either guilty of Scriptural ignorance or desires to lure people with a false, smooth message that involves only the easy believism of a *do-nothing* Christianity!

The good work of salvation is initiated by God the Father. It is said that unless He draws us to Christ, there is no way possible for us to come to Him. He sets things in motion in our lives. He also provides the perfect sacrifice for sin in the person of His own Son, along with the written instructions for success. He grants the Holy Spirit, by which the Messiah is able to live within us, enabling the very mind of God to be formed and triggered in our human lives.

We, however, also must bring something to this whole equation. Of course, ultimately all things redound to the glory and credit of God. He is, after all, responsible for everything, including human life itself. Still, when it comes to the method He has chosen to utilize in calling and perfecting human beings, it is true that we each do play a direct part in our own salvation. Not that we earn it. The Bible teaches us that salvation is a free gift - but that gift is not immediately realized. We have to wait for it. While we wait for the salvation of God, we have something else we must do. We must be **PREPARED** to receive eternal life! We must allow Christ to **LIVE IN US NOW** to the fullest extent possible. There are certain factors which we must contribute to the entire process.

A. SUBMIT TO GOD

God gave ancient Israel the following instructions. Its value for Christians has not diminished in the least through the years:

"Now be you not stiffnecked, as your fathers were; but YIELD YOURSELVES UNTO THE LORD, and enter into His sanctuary which He has sanctified forever" (II Chron. 30:8).

When God commands us to yield to Him, the Hebrew in this case actually means *to give one's hand to*. In other words, this phrase has the connotation of a little child putting his hand into the strong, sure hand of his loving father, so that he might guide and protect him along the way. This is the attitude which we must bring to our relationship with the Father of Spirits - complete submission and willingness to give up our own hold on our lives, our wants, even our very destinies. Remember the words of Christ:

"Verily I say unto you, Except you become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore that shall HUMBLE HIMSELF as this little child, the same shall be the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3-4).

Whether you or I choose to submit ourselves to the Spirit of God is, to a great extent, up to us. Some do this more than others. James wrote: **"Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:7);** and Peter taught: **"All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility...Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (I Pet. 5:5-6).**

To the extent that we are willing to yield to God, to the extent that we are truly willing for God to take full charge of our lives, to that very same extent will our relationship with Him be real, fulfilling and meaningful. At any given point in our daily lives, we have the opportunity to submit to God or not. None of us does this perfectly every single time. We all are still fleshly, whether we like to admit it or not. We have not yet become totally spiritual. As Paul taught:

"Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

If we are willing to face this issue in our lives - come to real grips with it - then God can and will begin to truly work in us. Until that time, however, it will be only a futile struggle. Submitting fully to God is the key that triggers the power of Christ in and through a human being. So often, we only **ASSUME** that we are yielded to Him, but we still retain our own control over all aspects of our lives. We still insist on being the masters of our own fate. We still want to dictate the terms. Oh, we usually don't dare do it openly or defiantly, but subtly. God sees this attitude in us. He recognizes it. So often we allow our knowledge to overpower and cloud our perspective on our own lives. Many times we confuse our understanding of the Bible and our association with a church with Godly character and a true relationship with the Father. They are **QUITE DIFFERENT!** Sometimes we are guilty of letting our *good works* get in the way of God's workmanship! Our efforts at being *righteous* are puny indeed and cut no ice with God. He is not interested in such vain attempts to be *good*. He knows full well that the only hope we possibly have of being righteous is to submit to Him completely and allow Christ to literally live in us on a moment by moment basis. No other substitute will suffice.

We must permit God through Christ to work out His will in our lives. Isaiah compared us, you will recall, to clay in the hands of a master potter. He said: **"But now, O Lord (Yahweh), you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the Potter; and we are all the work of your hand" (Isa. 64:8).** Clay, you know, has to be pliable in the hands of the potter, otherwise it is of no use to him. That is what it means to be submitted or yielded to God. We must be in such a state of mind that He can literally mold and shape us into the very character of Christ. That means that we must accept whatever comes our way without grumbling or complaining or blaming God, the way ancient Israel so often did. We must take our trials in stride, realizing that no matter what transpires in our lives, we are clay in the hands of our God and He is working out His divine will in and through us. Notice how Hebrews 12 describes this process:

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our father, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds. You have not

yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto children. My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you ENDURE chastening, God deals with as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in SUBJECTION unto the Father of Spirits and live? For verily for a few days did they chasten us, after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of RIGHTEOUSNESS unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:1-11).

Yielding into God's hands means that we let Him put us through our paces - form and shape us as He desires - try and test us as He wills. Submission to God in the face of severe trial is so hard for human beings, but it is the very key to successfully coming out of every setback a victor - having learned the lesson and passed the test! Remember, if you are not willing to submit to God and put yourself squarely into His hands in all matters, then you will suffer the consequences. You will be making it all the more difficult for God to deal with you. You will be wasting precious time and losing out on the chance to build every day with **GOLD, SILVER & PRECIOUS STONES!**

You do not have to settle for less than the **VERY BEST!!** You have been created, called and chosen to be prepared for glory - the highest possible glory. What you do with this calling is in your own hands. Will you make that commitment, that decision to go all the way with God - trust Him implicitly, lean on Him in all matters, seek His wisdom and knowledge and understanding, discover His will and allow Him full sway over your life, not boasting in your own righteousness, but permitting Christ to live richly and fully through you in the most effective way possible? Will you go beyond the mere call of duty and become a truly profitable servant? Of what value, I ask you, is a haughty, smug, self-righteous servant? His master cannot even deal with such a one. Neither will your Master in heaven! Truly seeing oneself as God sees him, humbling of the ego and submission under the mighty hand of God - these are the beginning steps in the journey, the keys that unlock the power of Godly righteousness within a person. There is no other way. This is the first step toward fulfilling your responsibility to your heavenly Father. If you desire true Godly righteousness, if you really want to be like God, then this is where you and I must begin.

B. DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

God teaches us through the prophet Zechariah: "**Turn you unto me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you**" (Zech. 1:3). This is really just another way of saying what is recorded in James 4:8: "**Draw near unto God and He will draw near to you.**"

What this means is simply that once a person has been truly called, has repented and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and has humbled him or herself squarely under the hand of God, then he or she is expected to do something else - namely, **DRAW CLOSE TO HIM!** There are certain specific measures that ensure that human beings can indeed come close to the invisible God and stay there, even though He inhabits an entirely different and unique dimension. But it does take desire and effort and it is not easy, neither is it meant to be! The second key, therefore, to unlocking the power of Christ and his righteousness in us is to use the means God has provided to draw and remain in close contact with Him at all times. This is our responsibility and we must view it in that light, otherwise we will always tend to relegate this to the back burner of life. When Solomon dedicated the Temple, we read God's powerful response. Please take note:

"And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place to Myself for an house of sacrifice...if My people which are called by My name shall HUMBLE THEMSELVES and PRAY AND SEEK MY FACE and TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (II Chron. 7:12,14).

What a perfect formula for success with God! Humble oneself - pray & seek God - and turn from sin. This is, in reality, the complete 1-2-3 spiritual program in a nutshell! And it is certainly most interesting that God wanted the very same thing for His people then as He does now! He is perfect and He never changes.

God has given us certain specific tools with which to work. The proper and consistent use of those tools will allow us draw ever closer and closer to the Father. God is admittedly an invisible Being. We cannot see Him or hear Him or discern Him physically. Oh, true enough, we see certain physical evidence of His existence, but the deeper spiritual aspects of God must necessarily be spiritually sought after and spiritually revealed. The basic tools for drawing closer to God should be familiar to most of us. The way of God is really quite simple, is it not? It is just a matter of **DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT!!**

- 1. FERVENT, HEARTFELT PRAYER**
- 2. DILIGENT BIBLE STUDY**
- 3. DEEP MEDITATION ON SPIRITUAL MATTERS**
- 4. OCCASIONAL FASTING COMBINED WITH PRAYER**

There are no substitutes for these four basic principles, therefore, accept nothing but the real thing in your life! Nothing can possibly replace these tools. We either are going to use what God has provided or let it lie idly on the ground and rust away.

Prayer must be done daily and preferably several times a day. It is doubtful that any of us spends too much time in prayer! Prayer should be accomplished early in the day, before other things crowd their way in and prevent us from being as effective as we should be. God leaves the manner in which we pray up to us. The Bible does not tell us precisely how to pray or how often or how long. If we, however, permit God's Spirit to work in us, the mind of Christ will lead us or incline us to pray. If we resist the urge, it will pass and we will have lost an opportunity that cannot be recaptured. **DON'T ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN!!** Don't permit the motivation to pray to escape unfulfilled. Pray early and long, like David did. You may think that you don't need to spend a lot of time in prayer, but if you do, you are decidedly wrong! Experience has shown many of us that devoting ample time to heartfelt prayer is utterly invaluable to spiritual growth. It is the first line of defense in a Christian's spiritual arsenal.

Prayer is especially necessary, indeed mandatory, when anyone is tempted to sin. This is when we must pray the hardest, the most fervently. To refuse to do so will almost always result in our weakening in the resolve to resist sin. We will start to compromise and not even notice it. When we do see it, we will tend to excuse our actions and rationalize our behavior. Before long, we will be like wheat in the hands of Satan, and he will sift us and scatter us to the wind! Beware of this constant danger. Paul spoke of putting away the "**sin that so EASILY besets us**" (Heb. 12:1).

When one is under temptation, he or she should go immediately to God in prayer and ask for the strength to resist and for the deliverance that only He can provide. If you were about to die, believe me, you would be begging for help and mercy. Well, which is worse, to die in the flesh or in the spirit? We had better get our priorities in order! Sin is infinitely more dangerous than some physical disease. Sin has to be met head on, nipped in the bud, cut off at the pass! There can be **NO COMPROMISE!** I have heard some utter the old, timeworn excuse, *Well, God will just have to understand me!* I shudder to think what God truly feels when He hears a child of His make such a

statement. What they are actually saying is that God is a liar and a weakling and has gone off somewhere in hiding. He's not around. I don't see Him and I'm weak, so He'll just have to understand. Baloney! Of course, such reasoning allows a person to seemingly get away with sin, to actually enjoy the pleasures of sin for a moment and justify it all as not really being that bad anyway. This is absolutely **BACKWARDS!**

If we are children of God, then Christ must live in us. Is Christ a sinner? Will He commit sin through us? Of course not! Don't we see that we cannot tolerate sin in our lives? When we recognize it, we must go right then and there and beg forgiveness and put it away forever. Yes, I know that we still commit sin from time to time. God is indeed very merciful. But do not ever let your guard down. Stay close to Him in prayer, ask for deliverance from all evil. Stay in touch with God at all times, on His wavelength. If you are not fervently praying every day, you will never succeed in this endeavor. You will, however, very possibly succeed into fooling yourself that everything is just fine between you and God. Those who remain in such a spiritual condition are in for the rudest of awakenings! A day of reckoning is fast approaching!

When you pray, pray as if your very life depended upon it, for it surely does! When you pray, pray as if God was real and really present, for He surely is! When you pray, pray from the heart, putting everything you have into it. Remember that, even though He was the perfect Son of God, it is said of Christ that he prayed with strong crying and tears (Heb. 5:6-7). How much more then should we beseech God in heaven every day! Don't allow yourself to slack off in effectual prayer. James says that prayers of intensity prayed by righteous men and women count for much with God. He takes notice. He pays attention. He bends His ear. If you want to *avail much* with God, pray with all your might. Pray in detail. Pray for others - not just general blanket prayers, but specific petitions and requests on behalf of others in need. Do not neglect fervent prayer. When this begins to slip, you are truly in spiritual danger.

Spend plenty of time in prayer each day. Use the so-called *Lord's prayer* as a model and pattern for your prayers. Make certain that you spend time in praise and thanks to God. Paul spoke of praying night and day. Do the same in your own life. Open up your heart to God. He is, after all, your spiritual Father. Talk to Him on a personal, one-on-one basis. Therefore, be honest, genuine, straightforward. Come clean before Him. Drag out everything that you tend to hide and face all the issues, especially the deep, personal ones that are so often the most difficult and painful. Talk to God like David did in the Psalms. Reason with Him, plead with Him, discuss all things with Him intimately. Treat Him like He was **REAL**, not just some vague ethereal grandfather figure hidden away somewhere in never-never land!

How you pray is entirely up to you, but you must allow God's Spirit to lead you in this matter. Personally I try to set aside at least an hour each morning for prayer, but that is my choice. Yours may be different. Certain situations call for more or less prayer. And please do not confuse a prayerful state of mind with ample time actually spent on your knees in fervent prayer. Many people fool themselves on this point. You cannot have a truly prayerful state of mind unless you are regularly incorporating real prayer time into your daily schedule. Remember that it is you and me who **NEED PRAYER**, not God! We are the ones who desperately need to draw ever closer to Him.

Paired with fervent prayer is diligent Bible study. This is also imperative for Christian growth. It is the second of the special tools that God has provided, allowing us to draw ever closer to Him, to understand just what He is thinking, what His will is on every important issue of life. It is through the Scriptures that God speaks to our hearts. It is the source of all spiritual knowledge. Paul counselled his young protegee Timothy in this regard, saying:

"And that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in RIGHTEOUSNESS: that the man of God may be PERFECT, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:15-17).

How can we possibly afford to neglect so great an opportunity? I have suggested before that all of us ought to give serious thought to devoting at least a tithe of our time each 24 hour day to prayer and study - more, if possible. God does not expect us to be studying the Bible every minute of the day and night, but if we were to commit at least 2-2 1/2 hours per day in serious prayer and study, I cannot tell you how valuable it would prove to be for our spiritual lives.

Is that too great a burden? It shouldn't be. After all, we are only talking about eternal life, spiritual salvation! Do we even dare to shirk such a responsibility? Studying the Bible is difficult for many and perhaps the thought of it is even boring to some. If so, shame on us! God's written Word is one of the most precious gifts He has given us. We all need to assess just how important and **REAL** this calling is in our lives. You need to answer that question for yourself before God. If we insist on neglecting even the small part we have been given to play in our own relationship with God and with our own salvation, then ultimately God will reject us. No one wants to be in such a situation, and there is never any reason for it.

I don't mean to be too harsh in my statements on this subject, but I would rather err on that side of the issue than be guilty of simply letting it all pass without comment. I do not mean to legislate in these matters either. You and I are free moral agents and we must come to terms with our relationship with God and down what pathway we are going to travel. You can pray for as long or as short a time as you wish. No one will ever make you do what you refuse to do - at least, not until God sets His hand to shake the heavens and the earth. Then, under those horrible conditions, many will finally wake up and repent. **NOW** is our time to wake up and get our spiritual lives in gear.

So I urge you to spend plenty of time in prayer and study every day. **MAKE TIME** for these most important activities. They are spiritual **LIFE TO YOU!** Approach Bible study seriously. Get focused. Study with a purpose in mind. Don't just read. Have a plan, a goal in mind. Take notes. Write out your questions. Study with other brethren of like mind. Do whatever it takes to get you involved in the profitable study of God's Word. The more you do it, the more engrossing it will become. Share your knowledge with others. See the reason for your study. Make sure that it is translated into your daily life. In other words, use what you learn. Help teach others in whatever way may be possible. Not all of us are gifted as teachers. That is fine, but prepare to always be able to give an answer for the hope that lies within you. Furthermore, our greatest asset when it comes to helping others is so often the **EXAMPLE WE SET!** The right kind of Bible study will always equip us to live our lives as shining lights to others.

Just a word also about meditation and fasting. Meditation is really that prayerful state of mind that should be maintained at all times. We can meditate on the things of God throughout the day. David extolled the virtues of meditation on God's Law. Read the 119th psalm, for instance. You may request a **FREE** article on this subject entitled, *The Unsung Christian Weapon*.

And let us not forget about fasting, although most of us probably would like to do so! Fasting is a valuable tool that God has given us to draw closer to Him. Until one has truly given this tool the benefit of the doubt, combining fasting with prayer and study, then there is simply no way to calculate its spiritual value. All of God's servants, both men and women, from Christ on down have fasted and we have the record of it in the Scriptures.

How often should we fast or how long? This is left up to us. I cannot dictate to you on this issue. I do believe that fasting is valuable if it is done fairly consistently in a person's life, although I would hesitate to specify precise numbers. In this matter, let God's Spirit lead you. If you would like to receive a **FREE** tape on this subject, send for the message entitled, *Why Should You Fast?* I suggest that you make a detailed study of fasting, going into every passage on this topic from the

Scriptures, especially Isaiah 58, where the spiritual side is discussed. Fasting for the right reasons has the potential of literally changing your life forever!

Please do not fail to recognize that God has indeed provided us with definite tools to help us fulfil the part we have to play in His plan of salvation. This is **OUR RESPONSIBILITY. DO NOT NEGLECT IT!!**

C. RESPOND TO GOD

The final area of spiritual responsibility that I will cover in this paper concerns our personal responsiveness to Christ in us. Remember now that we are discussing how the power of the Saviour is **TRIGGERED**, how the **RIGHTEOUSNESS** of Christ in us is tapped and expressed. The first key is to be fully **SUBMITTED** in humility to God. The second key is to make certain that we use the tools God has given us to **DRAW AND STAY CLOSE** to Him at all times. Now the third key, and the one most likely to be lacking, is to allow ourselves to be **MOVED TO ACTION!** As Paul told the Romans: "**Not just the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the DOERS of the Law shall be justified**" (Rom. 2:13).

God's people have to be **DOERS!** This calling does not permit any of us the luxury of kicking back into the easy chair of spiritual life. Christ was a doer. He said that both he and his Father were **WORKERS** (John 5:17). His own example is the sterling representation of how devoted and active a true Christian must be. If we have followed the first two steps, then this third one is now made possible, and it involves the unleashing of Christ's power in and through us. Is Christ **ALIVE?** Is He **ON THE JOB?** Is He **ACTIVE?** We know that He is - then He must surely be so in each of those in whom He lives. That only stands to reason. James put it this way:

"Be you DOERS of the word and not hearers only, DECEIVING your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and straightway forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect Law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:22-25).

The apostle Paul cautioned the people of his day about being responsive to the call of God in their lives. His advice still holds true for us today as well:

"Wherefore as the Holy Spirit says, TODAY if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. TAKE HEED, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God...So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest (Kingdom of God), any of you should seem to come short of it...As it is said, TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS" (hEB. 3:7-12; 4:1,7).

Responding to the voice of God is also a part we personally play in the plan of salvation. Many times, the Holy Spirit speaks to us, but we are sidetracked or are oblivious or for some other reason are insensitive to the call. A great deal of the problem in this area of spiritual growth has to

do with experience in the faith. There will always be differences among God's people in their ability and/or willingness to respond to the power of Christ in them. We are actually able to limit that power and we often do, never even realizing it. Paul discussed this problem in Hebrews 5 as follows:

"For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again what be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that uses milk is unskillful (inexperienced) in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of USE have their senses EXERCISED TO DISCERN BOTH GOOD AND EVIL" (Heb. 5:12-14).

It takes a certain amount of time and training in the Word of God to refine our spiritual senses and cause us to become careful discerners of His will. People in the Church will always vary in the degree of responsiveness to God, simply because we are all in a process of growth and are moving at different rates of speed and development. That is why there will always be those who are spiritually stronger than others and Paul instructs those who are indeed stronger to help the weaker, so that all can grow up to the fullness of Christ. The race we run is not against each other. We are to always be helpful to our brethren as we travel down this hard road into the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, we need to stop judging and even condemning one another. I have witnessed this dismal spiritual problem among God's people for decades. Feelings of spiritual superiority or inferiority should be banished from the Church of God forever! There is simply no room for it - and if Christ is indeed living in us, it will not be present. How dare we sit in judgment of each other! Paul strongly warns us to **JUDGE OURSELVES** (I Cor. 11:31)! I urge everyone to seriously take his advice in this matter.

Take a long look at your life from God's perspective for a moment. He sees you as a little clay model, having no possible value in and of yourself. You have a desperate need of Him and His power and special touch in your life. He loves you, in spite of who and what you are, and has made elaborate preparations on your behalf, because He has something very special in mind - **ETERNAL LIFE** in His own divine family! So His objective then is to create spiritual sons and daughters. He has provided everything necessary to reconcile you to Himself. He has given you His instruction book and the ability to understand and apply what is written. He has taken the very power He used in creating the entire universe and given you a portion of it, and through that indwelling Spirit, Christ Himself can and will live thorough you.

Now He expects and requires that you play your small, but highly significant part in the whole process. He simply wants you to fully submit your own will to Him. You would think that this would be easy, since you are merely nothing but a piece of clay, one of the least things on the face of the earth! But, alas, He did give you a carnal mind, and ego, and it is not naturally subject to God, so it proves to be a difficult task. He says to you that it will all be made easier and more profitable if you will only take the time and effort to draw close to Him through prayer and study - and that by consistently doing these things, you will become sensitive to His presence and power and will in your life, enabling you to properly respond to His voice, to stir yourself up and take hold of the golden, priceless opportunities available to you.

God insists, however, that we remember that He and He alone is the one responsible for our spiritual success. He has guaranteed that complete victory will be achieved in your life and mine, but only after certain experience has been gained and certain lessons have been learned. We really should not have any major worries, although we admittedly do from time to time. God plainly says for us to stop looking at the physical side of things. Remember that even Peter himself actually walked on water as long as he kept his eyes focused on the Messiah. It was only after he looked around at his surrounding circumstances that he became afraid and began to sink! There is a profound lesson there for us.

God tells us through David to completely trust in Him and lean upon Him and cast all our cares on His broad shoulders. He willingly comforts us in all our troubles and will forgive all our sins and shortcomings. Recall what John wrote: "**If we sin, we have an advocate (Christ) with the Father**" (I John 2:1). God says to you and me, **HANG IN THERE** unto the end - Continue in the way of faith - Quit worrying about the flesh! After all, brethren, we simply cannot make it on our own, so quit fretting about it! Put your trust in your God, your life in His hands. Let Him have His perfect will with you, take you where you need to be, make of you what He desires - His will, **NOT YOURS** be done! He has promised **NEVER** to leave or forsake us, no matter what transpires.

Is it really that simple? **ABSOLUTELY YES!!** But we will always tend to make it more difficult than it has to be. Our carnal minds are the enemy of God. They mislead us and deceive us. They cause us to look at the physical side of life and gauge our spiritual progress by it. How utterly ridiculous and incongruous! The physical mind looks to its own strength and resources, and when we fail, then we are depressed. Well, of course! We approach the whole thing in the wrong manner. It is a matter of spiritual insight, catching the vision, of belief and trust, of discovering the profound reality of God and His Spirit, of what he is really doing in our lives. We must walk by faith, and not by sight!

CONCLUSION

Paul constantly faced a monumental problem throughout his ministry, and it came from some of his own countrymen - the Jews. These people had the written code and prided themselves on the strict keeping of that rigorous physical law - but they made a great mistake. They were completely confused over what true righteousness really was. He wrote the Romans, saying:

"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith? But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For THEY STUMBLING AT THAT STUMBLING STONE: as it is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and a rock of offence; and whosoever believes on Him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 9:30-33).

You see, the Jews had all the physical attributes. They had the written law. They had the record of Moses and before him, Abraham. They had the Temple and the priesthood, but they lacked something that caused them to utterly fail in their vain attempt to please God. Something got in their way - and what happens when something gets in the way - we stumble over it, we fall down! These outwardly righteous Jews stumbled and fell over the *rock of offence* - over the Messiah Himself! Christ is the only source of true spiritual righteousness. The Jews excluded Him and thus their brand of righteousness, though it appeared so good, was like filthy rags to God! I urge you to take note of this fact, because it is so perfectly applicable to our lives as Christians today!

What then is true righteousness? True righteousness is fully living by every Word of God. How is it achieved in human beings? Only through the indwelling power of the Living Christ Himself. How does the Saviour come to live within a person? By God the Father first directly calling and personally choosing the individual. Then by doing what is necessary to receive the Holy Spirit, namely **REPENT, BELIEVE, OBEY, BE PROPERLY BAPTIZED AND HAVE HANDS LAID ON**, according to the Scriptural commands and examples. Finally, what governs the extent to which Christ can and will live in us. **WE DO!!** How? By **SUBMITTING** fully to Him in all things;

by **DRAWING CLOSER AND CLOSER** to Him through prayer, study, meditation and fasting; and by becoming increasingly more **RESPONSIVE** to the lead of the Holy Spirit in our lives on a daily basis.

The fact that we are called and chosen for such an unspeakable blessing is clearly God's doing. He has provided all the necessary tools to get the job done. From that point on, however, our own personal relationship with Him is, to a great extent, what we make of it. The part we play in the process of spiritual growth determines the extent to which Christ will live and work in us. Your personal closeness to God is, therefore, **UP TO YOU!** Whether you build with gold, silver and precious stones, or wood, hay and stubble is clearly **UP TO YOU!** The choice is yours and mine and God sets that choice before us every day of our lives. Indeed, He cries to us today - **CHOOSE LIFE!**

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