

Call to Obedience #270
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**"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.
Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:43).**

FRUIT OR FLATTERY

By Reimar Schultze

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God..." 1 John 3:7, 10

This passage has been getting my attention for years, yet I never heard anyone preach on it in my fifty years of Christianity.

All that Christians ever hear, it seems, in reference to righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. It is preached frequently, extensively, and vigorously. And not only has the marvelous righteousness of Christ taken a prominent place in our preaching but also in our hymnology. Further, in light of this great emphasis, a comparison is inevitably made to our righteousness as being nothing more than filthy rags.

This writer in no wise intends to demote the righteousness of Christ by which he himself was saved, but what he intends to do is to show that next to the righteousness of Christ and the filthy-rag righteousness of the unsaved, there is a righteousness of the righteous that needs some desperate attention.

"Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God..." and "he that doeth righteousness is righteous..."

John, the beloved apostle, perhaps the most intimate with Jesus, tells us all here that we not only need the righteousness of Christ to get us to heaven, but we also need righteousness in our own lives.

If that should cause you to want to pick up stones to stone me, remember that if you should proceed to do so, you would not only stone me but also John, Peter, Paul, and Jesus himself. This doctrinal statement of the need of our own righteousness following our conversion is also held by Jesus and these apostles. Let's have a look at some of their statements:

Peter: "But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35).

Paul: "Awake to righteousness, and sin not..." (1 Cor. 15:34), and "...increase the fruits of your righteousness" (2 Cor. 9:10).

Jesus: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

Looking at the whole of Scripture, let us consider one of the purposes of the entire holy Word: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for...righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Our righteousness cannot save us. When we come to Jesus as sinners, we bring nothing with us to purchase our pardon—absolutely nothing! All our works, even those praised by men, will avail absolutely nothing to reconcile us to God. In Romans 3, Paul brilliantly describes the miserable state of the lost:

Verse 10: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."

Verse 11: "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God."

Verse 12: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Verse 13: "Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips."

Verse 23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

Verse 20: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

We are saved by grace, by God's merciful favor toward us. Hallelujah! He is able and willing and anxious to forgive us all our sins. Jesus is more willing to save you than you could ever be. All he wants from you is the confession of and repentance from your sins, faith in his sacrificial work on the cross for you, and the dedication of your life. He wants you to invite him into your heart (Rev. 3:20), and if you do so, he will come in and begin to have fellowship with you. Hallelujah #2!

But, my dear friend, after Jesus has come into your life, he expects you to keep yourself clean. Jesus did not come into your life for you to continue in sin. He did not come into your life for you to go back to the same sins you did before. Unfortunately, the early Christians, shortly after they were saved, reverted to a theology of permissiveness. Hence, Paul gets into their thinking like this: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1–2).

There is a God forbid to all sinning once we have received the Lord Jesus, for Jesus did not only come to forgive us but also to save us from a sinful life. And John chimes in with Paul's God forbid in his epistle like this: "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Willful sinning is of the devil. It has no place in the Christian's life. Every willful sin is putting another nail into the body of Jesus Christ, crucifying him afresh (Heb. 6:6; 10:26–27).

We are saved by Jesus' righteousness, but now, Jesus expects us to do righteousness even as he did. In fact, our doing righteousness is the very proof that we are born of God: "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 John 2:29). Righteousness is an evidence of our rebirth.

And what is righteousness? Righteousness is doing the right things. Righteousness is doing God's will, that which pleases God. Where do we get the power to do righteousness? We get it from the Lord Jesus. At the rebirth, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, the sperma (seed), into our lives so that we can be righteous even as he is righteous! Tremendous! Therefore, "...he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he (Jesus) is righteous" and "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed (sperma) remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:7, 9).

My friend, Jesus expects the fruits of righteousness in your life. "He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none" (Luke 13:6). Jesus is looking for fruit in your life. In this parable, he said that the man came back three times to look for fruit on the fig tree, and finally, when he did not find any, he told the vine dresser to cut down the tree (v. 7). Is this ever serious!

In Matthew 21:17, we read of another fig tree. It had leaves but not fruit. In fig trees, the fruit precedes the full development of the leaves. When Jesus saw leaves but no fruit, being hungry, he cursed the fig tree, and it withered away. The foliage of the fig tree represents outer things, the rituals, the religious observances and habits. The fruit represents purity of heart, the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22–23, the inner things. Jesus is hungry for the fruit of righteousness, internal and external. "...except your righteousness shall exceed the

righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

So, what is righteousness? Again, it is doing the right things. It is living as Jesus did:

When Jesus saw a beautiful woman, he did not look again. That is righteousness!

When Jesus was hit on the one cheek, he offered the other also. As an example, when your husband tells you that, once again, you are not keeping the house clean, you don't respond by telling him that he is always late for supper. That is righteousness!

Jesus was tired, yet he pressed on to pray and to witness. That is righteousness!

When Jesus was offered all the world and the things of the world, he refused them. That is righteousness!

When Jesus could have told on the weaknesses and sins of Judas to the other apostles, he refused to do so. That is righteousness!

Jesus was reviled, but he reviled not again. He could have called upon ten thousand angels to defend himself, but he did not. That is righteousness!

When Jesus was pressed to condemn a sinful woman, he did not condemn her but rather forgave her and admonished her to go and sin no more. That is righteousness!

Our Lord loved all of his disciples unto the end; our Lord had faith when everything looked dark; he had compassion on the poor; and our dying out every moment to Self in order to do God's will as Jesus did it—that is righteousness! My friend, Jesus is righteous, but he expects us to be righteous also.

There are just too many Christian men who are harsh and unkind, prayerless, and glued to ungodly television programs who, when asked for their hope of heaven, say: I can live like this because I depend upon the righteousness of Christ. Likewise, there are many Christian women who are unsubmissive, nagging, and gossiping who base their eternal security on the righteousness of Christ. Friends, it is entirely appropriate to exult in the righteousness of Christ, **but let us realize that flattering Christ about his righteousness when ours is still filthy will keep us off the streets of gold forever.** Unfortunately, throughout the centuries, the church has developed this doctrine of flattering Christ about his righteousness, by which she thinks she can squeeze people into the pearly gates no matter how they live. Consider the words from the hymn, I Am Satisfied with Jesus (by Benjamin Baylus McKinney, 1886–1952):

I am satisfied with Jesus, He has done so much for me:
He has suffered to redeem me, He has died to set me free.
I am satisfied with Jesus, But the question comes to me,
As I think of Calvary, Is my Master satisfied with me?

Let me close with a dictionary definition of flattery: "an act or instance of complimenting somebody, often excessively or insincerely, especially in order to get something." Shall we call this sweet talk? We cannot get to heaven by sweet-talking Jesus about his righteousness. We also need to live righteously, for the Scriptures say, "whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God..."

Had the people in Noah's days heeded his message on righteousness, they all would have been saved. Are you heeding God's message on righteousness today, producing the fruit of righteousness, or is your life only a flattery of the righteousness of Christ? I know you are satisfied with Jesus, but is your Master satisfied with you? Is it possible that God would save our nation from disaster if her people would choose to do righteousness?

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).