

'RIGHTEOUSNESS' AND 'HOLINESS'

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The problem is everywhere, and the world, not just America alone, is full of it: sensuality, sexual impurity. Advertising, TV, everywhere you turn—there it is. Many crimes committed are the result of sexual impulses, and multitudes of men are in prison as the result. How to overcome when these sexual impulses are built deep into our human nature? Thoughtful people realize that this is the number one problem of the human race. Pain, degradation, innumerable evils follow sexual immorality. Can we scare people away from sexual sin by tales of AIDS?

Only yesterday I discovered something I had never read before, and I must share it. It's in a letter a wise person wrote in 1894, her Letter 102 of that year: "The purity, the holiness of the life of Jesus, . . . possess more power to reform and transform the character than do all the efforts put forth in picturing the sins and crimes of men and the sure results. One steadfast look to the Saviour uplifted upon the cross will do more to purify the mind and heart from every defilement than will all the scientific explanations by the ablest tongue. This is my teaching of moral purity. The opening of the blackness of impurity will not be one half as efficacious in uprooting sin as will the presentation of these grand and ennobling themes. . . . [Other approaches] create sensuality in place of uprooting it. The Bible, and the Bible alone, has given the true

lesson upon purity" (Ellen White, *The Australian Years* 131, 132).

That's exactly what Jesus said: "I, if I be lifted up [on the cross] will draw all men unto Me" (Jn. 12:32, 33). Are you struggling with sexual fantasies and temptations? There at the cross you will find the answer. Look—long and steadfastly.

Nearly 120 years ago the Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to the leadership of my church. It became known as "the message of Christ's righteousness."

Note: it was not the "message of Christ's holiness." There is a vast difference between "righteousness" and "holiness."

The Lord Jesus Christ was "holy" at His birth (cf. Luke 1:35); but He was "righteous" at His death (cf. Rom. 5:18). The glorious "plan of salvation" stretches between the "holiness" of Jesus at His birth and the "righteousness" of Jesus at His death on His cross.

For example, we read of the "holy angels," but we never read of the "righteous" good angels who did not fall with Lucifer; they are always "the holy angels."

The difference is spelled out clearly in Romans 8:3, 4, describing what happened in between Christ's holy birth and His righteousness at His death on the cross: "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."

From His holiness at His birth, the Lord Jesus “took” upon His sinless nature (which He had brought from heaven) our fallen, sinful nature and “condemned sin” in that fallen, sinful nature; that’s how “holiness” was transformed into “righteousness.”

No angel ever performed that feat, because no angel ever took “sinful flesh” to contend with, as we must do and as Christ “took” upon Himself. The vaults of heaven rang with the praise of Jesus Christ who accomplished that mighty deed; He proved that One can take our fallen, sinful nature or flesh, live in it, and yet “overcome” sin, defeat it, condemn it, in that same fallen, sinful nature (cf. Rev. 3:21). Satan, the great Enemy of God’s universe, has been defeated forever!

Jesus Christ is an Evangelist: He wins souls. He is winning “144,000” who will “overcome” as He overcame (cf. Rev. 3:21). These people “follow the Lamb [the crucified Christ] wherever He goes” (14:1-5). You and I are invited; let’s do something that wasn’t done 120 years ago—let’s wholeheartedly receive the most precious message.

So fully has the Son of God identified Himself with us fallen humanity, that it’s difficult to take a scalpel and separate the heart cries of Jesus in the Psalms from the heart cries of King David. For example, in Psalm 22:1 David cries out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” But then we discover that Jesus cries the same dereliction as He hangs on His cross (Matt. 27:46). Then as we read further in Psalm 22, lo and behold, we find that the entire psalm records the heart cries of Jesus up to the

moment of His death when He cried out, “It is finished” (*asah*, the last word in the Hebrew, which means “it’s done!”).

But how could Jesus Christ, the sinless One, pray the same words that the guilty, bloodstained sinner David prayed? Wasn’t Jesus “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26)? He should be as far away from feeling like the despicable sinner, David, as day is from night!

But wait a moment: isn’t His “name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23)? Isn’t it “unto us” that this “Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa. 9:6)? Didn’t the Father “so love the world that He gave” Him to us forever? Don’t we “see Jesus . . . made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death” (Heb. 2:9)? How could He “suffer death” unless He came inside our skin, as it were? He is “not ashamed to call [us] brethren” (vs. 11)! He had to be “*Made* perfect through sufferings” (vs. 10). But wasn’t He “perfect” all along? In holiness, yes; but He had to go through a process of education for 33 years in order to qualify to cry out sincerely from a broken human heart every word of Psalm 22!

That word “made” is pregnant with enormous meaning: “In all things He had to be *made* like His brethren. . . . In that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (vs. 18). He was “*made* of a woman, *made* under the law” (Gal. 4:4, KJV). He was “*made* in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7, KJV), He became truly a man “in the [same] likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom.

8:3), “made . . . to be sin for us,” who “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).

What does it all add up to?

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became “the Son of man,” your Savior “in the flesh.” He knows 100% empathy with you. Here’s a double negative that makes a powerful positive: “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Don’t turn your back on Him even for a day!

“Our beloved brother Paul” (cf. 2 Peter 3:15), yielded his brilliant mind to the control of the Holy Spirit.

(a) One result that we thank the Lord for is Paul’s Romans chapter five.

(b) He discerned the real significance of Christ’s sacrifice on His cross: not only did Jesus clear us from guilt so that we stand before the Father neutral now with the guilt of sin gone; Jesus did far more.

(c) He “justified” us.

(d) That means He imputed to us judicially the full benefits of the amazing righteousness of Christ; it means that now we stand before the Father with the “mind of Christ” (cf. Phil. 2:5).

(e) “Righteousness” is far more than mere “holiness.” “Holiness” is what the sinless angels possess but at best it is a term with neutral meaning; in the Bible it is applied to the sinless angels (and of course, to the Father); but now that it has captivated the human race, “holiness” is not good enough.

(f) “Righteousness” is holiness that has met the problem of sin in fallen human flesh or nature and has triumphed over the sin.

(g) That’s why the unfallen angels are not spoken of in the Bible as being “righteous,” but are merely “holy.”

(h) No one in the Bible is spoken of as being “righteous,” but only Jesus Christ.

(i) That means that in His incarnation among us, the flesh or nature which Christ “took” upon Himself has to be our fallen, sinful flesh, or nature. If that were not true, it would be impossible to speak of Christ as being “righteous;” In that case He would be only “holy.” (That’s how important is this truth of the nature of Christ in His incarnation—that He “took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature”!)

(j) He will be rewarded at His coming with a host of redeemed former sinners who have overcome sin by the grace of Christ; although they all have inherited our fallen, sinful nature, they will have triumphed over sin in that fallen, sinful nature!

(k) That triumph is yours by the “faith of Jesus” through His “much more bounding grace,” grace that abounds far greater than our sin!

One of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to converted people is discernment, which in simple language means the ability to recognize the truth in difficult situations. A detective can recognize an incriminating clue in a murder case. That’s discernment, something most of us don’t have.

The apostle John gives us a clue to recognize the difference between a false prophet and a true one, between a false Christ and the true Christ: He says

“test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn. 4:1). In other words, don’t let yourself get fooled! You don’t want to end up taking the mark of the beast! John’s clue? “Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist” (vs. 3). That word “flesh” is *sarx* in the original, the same fallen, sinful flesh that all human beings have: Jesus came in that likeness of sinful flesh, and “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). And what is the blessed fruit of that accomplishment? Vs. 4 says, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.” That’s an interesting word—“righteousness.” It’s *dikaïoma* in the original. The usual word for righteousness is *dikaïosune*, which in the NT always means the righteousness of God, of Christ, imputed to the believer. But *dikaïoma* is different—it’s actual righteousness of the believer, imparted, not merely imputed.

The lady wears a leopard skin coat, it’s imputed, it’s not hers; the leopard wears the same coat, it’s imparted, a part of him. The reason why the long-awaited marriage (wedding) of the Lamb has not yet taken place is that His Bride hasn’t gotten ready; He is ready, she is not. But Revelation 19:8 tells how at last the church will not only have imputed righteousness, but will have *dikaïoma*: “To her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” No, they won’t save themselves and they won’t have any merit; but their *dikaïoma* will at

last honor their Saviour, will give Him “glory” (vs. 7). Do you want to get “ready”?

The question comes up: “What is the difference between imputed righteousness, and imparted righteousness?” The question is momentous, for it opens the door to vast understandings of truth.

The Greek word for imputed righteousness is *dikaïosune*, a good word to learn, to know, to write in your Bible margin. It is always only the righteousness of Christ—He is always its ultimate value. He is the only God in the universe who possesses genuine righteousness because He went to the cross and there died the “second death.” None of the inhabitants of the vast unfallen universe possesses real righteousness, for none except Christ has died the “second death.” No unfallen angel possesses “righteousness.” They have only “holiness.”

The reason? To choose of His own free will to die the second death motivated by genuine love (*agape*) is alone genuine “righteousness.” The Islamic God (their Allah) rejects the cross of Christ, rejects the love revealed there; thus rejects *dikaïosune*, which is defined as “the righteousness of saints” (Rom. 8:4).

Imputed righteousness is a legal or “judicial verdict of acquittal” (Rom. 5:16, REB) achieved by the Son of God because He has died the “second death” of the world (yes, of the universe). What He has accomplished is alone the legal or ultimate tender of character—value that the universe can know. Scripture assures us that the “unfallen inhabitants” of the universe appreciate that divine sacrifice of

agape and ascribe unending praise to the Son of God (cf. Rev. 19:1-7). It's time that those who profess to keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus also learn to appreciate or "comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depths, and height; and to know the *agape* of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18, KJV).

Romans tells some News so profoundly Good that we humans can hardly take it in. Even theologians stumble over it, like the builders stumbled over the great stone that was quarried to be the headstone of Solomon's Temple (Matt. 21:42; Ps. 118:22). The problem is what Paul says: Christ became the "last" or Second Adam, reversing the condemnation that the first Adam brought on the entire human race. For "all men" He turned Adam's condemnation into justification, or a legal acquittal. "That News is too Good to be true," some objectors say.

Well, here's what Paul says:

"God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many [Greek, all], its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many [Greek, all] by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ. And again, the gift of God is not to be compared in its effect with that one man's sin; for the judicial action, following upon the one offence, issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace . . . issued in a verdict of acquittal. . . . As the issue of one misdeed was condemnation for all men, so the issue of one just act is acquittal and life for all men" (5:15-18,

NEB). The KJV says, "the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

Someone asks, "We need 'justification by faith,' but isn't this 'justification by birth'?" No more than Adam's condemnation comes upon us all "by birth"! Jesus took it all upon Himself, so that His title is, "Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). The same "all [who] have sinned" are "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24). This is why He sends His rain and sunshine on the just and the unjust alike. It's why we live.

One very wise writer says, "The sinner may resist this love, may refuse, . . . but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus, . . . to the foot of the cross in repentance." The only reason why Esau was lost is that he "despised" and "sold" the "birthright" that God gave him (Heb. 12:16, 17). Jesus is not merely your "wanna-be" Savior; *He is*. Stop resisting Him.

Imparted righteousness is a different word in the original language—*dikaioma*. It is the gift of Christ's righteousness finally appreciated, received into the heart so that the soul can never be moved, it now hates sin with such total hatred that he or she would rather die forever than yield to a sinful temptation; it is a sharing with Christ that *agape*, being a "partaker with Christ of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

For example: I give you a check for a thousand dollars and you have the check in your hands; but in fact you don't even have a dime. The money is still in the bank in my name. You only have an

imputed \$1000, worthless to you until you take it to the bank and “cash” it.

But even the paper money is worthless unless it is backed up by what is of monetary value—gold, silver, or platinum. We could say that only that in your possession is value imparted. Until then money anywhere has had only imputed value.

Someone deeply perturbed has written in spiritual distress. She was reared in a strict church long ago that preached high standards; she became discouraged, thinking that she could never measure up to those requirements for salvation, so she left the church.

Then in the providence of God, she discovered that the gospel is good news of what the Lord Jesus has done for us, that His love for us is active, not passive, that He will hold us by the hand rather than leave us to hang on in our own strength, in short, she found that “it is easier to be saved than it is to be lost,” that resisting the Holy Spirit is itself is hard work.

The good news of the gospel encouraged her, so she came back to church.

Then she discovered the book *Ministry of Healing*, page 452, where we read that “the struggle for conquest over self, for holiness and heaven, is a lifelong struggle. Without continual effort and constant activity, there can be no advancement in the divine life, no attainment of the victor’s crown. . . . The way of return can be gained only by hard fighting, inch by inch, hour by hour. We cannot be off guard even for a moment . . . Should we come to

the close of life with our work undone, it would be an eternal loss.”

Yes, it sounds scary, even while we know that it has to be common-sense-true that there is no “vacation” release from following Jesus and bearing His cross. Jesus “said to them all, If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). What appears “difficult” is closeness to Jesus; and His yoke is “easy.”

Then why this plunge back into the icy waters of apparent discouragement? It’s not discouragement: listen:

All this wonderfully high standard is absolutely true: but “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). The Lord Jesus as our Savior motivates us by His love to keep His commandments. If the Preamble is joined to the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1), reminding us that Christ has delivered us from Egyptian dark bondage, then the Ten apparently difficult commandments become Ten wonderful promises.

Don’t turn your back on the good news of what Christ has done for us; thank Him, cherish it. The good news is better than you think; no standards are lowered; instead, the grace of Christ is multiplied “much more” than sin has abounded (Rom. 5:21).