

SOUL FOOD - The Things You Need To Know About Your Bible - Pt 14

Sunday, March 28th, 2021 - 6:30 p.m. - Teaching #2089

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TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS - LIVING IN GOD'S GYMNASIUM

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

We've studied the first three steps Paul lists in these two verses describing how God's Word becomes "**profitable**" in making us men and women of God. All of them are important, and so is the order in which they are presented. By that I mean the work of the Spirit through the Word is incredibly **powerful** and **effective**. But it isn't **random** or **accidental**. We need to **know** the process of the Spirit with the Word so we don't **impede** or **short-circuit** the process of divine transformation.

The **fourth** step in producing Biblical change is described by Paul with the term **righteousness** - the Word is profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and now finally, for **"training in righteousness."** But before we analyze this fourth step we need to clear up some misunderstandings about the different ways that word **"righteousness"** is used in the Scriptures.

1) **WE NEED TO MAKE SURE WE UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT WAYS THE WORD "RIGHTEOUSNESS" IS USED IN THE SCRIPTURES**

This first point will cover all of today's teaching and a bit of next Sunday's as well. And the reason for pausing here is simple. There is a basic theology of righteousness that gets processed in the Scriptures. And it's because the meaning of this word, in the New Testament especially, is rarely thought through that the average understanding of eternal punishment and reward at the end of this life goes something like this: **bad** people are punished in hell and **good** people go to heaven.

And you need to know that this is only true in a very, very limited sense. One of the reasons people in this world - and very many in the church - have almost no understanding of **sin** and the need for salvation through Christ Jesus, is they have a very limited grasp of the term **"righteousness"** as it is used in the Bible.

That's what we're going to begin to study today. The word is actually used in **three** different ways - two of them **positive**, and one of them **negative**:

A) **FIRST, ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, THE BIBLE TALKS ABOUT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS:**

Isaiah 64:6 - “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”

Romans 10:3-4 - “For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, [righteousness] they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Matthew 23:28-33 - “So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. [29] Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, [30] saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' [31] Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. [32] Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. [33] You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?”

Now, the striking common feature of all those strong words of Scripture is they are directed against people who **profess**, and, in an **outward** state, even **possess** a certain brand of **righteousness**.

Probably the best description of that righteousness is in the **Romans 10** passage. Paul defines the kind of righteousness most admired by the man on the street. It is the righteousness of people who want to make an approach to God, the Creator, without acknowledging Jesus Christ. Even if they don't think the process through in those religious terms, they surely seek to **establish their credibility morally** on the basis of the fulfillment of their own inner potential, or, like the Pharisees, their righteousness heritage and background.

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Those are the two trademarks of the religion of the common man. He ***ignores Jesus Christ***, and he seeks to ***establish his own*** standard for pleasing God. He creates a god - not the God of the Bible - who will be pleased and pacified by virtues of ***tolerance, human love, acts of charity, and being "true to oneself."***

Please don't think Paul's words in those verses from Romans 10 are just of some vague, theological interest. They encapsulate something very common in today's church. I hear it said in ***this*** church. People who don't worry if they ever darken the door for worship tell me they love Jesus. People who couldn't list the books of the Bible, who never take time to seek God, who are sexually immoral - all of them talk of how much they ***love*** Jesus. They've established their ***own*** righteousness - their ***own*** definition of ***love*** for Christ. And they think that their ***profession*** is actually creating some kind of spiritual reality before God - and it ***isn't***.

Here is a Biblical truth that is deeply offensive to the modern mind. God isn't obligated to accept whatever people sincerely offer Him as their form of righteousness. When God isn't approached ***on His terms*** whatever else we offer isn't acceptable. This is a lesson God has been trying to teach from the beginning of time. We have no excuse except our own pride and willfulness for missing it.

Any true conversion experience must come to terms with the sinfulness of any kind of spiritual pursuit that leaves the unconditional Lordship of Jesus Christ out of the picture. Not even ***religious devotion***, apart from a living commitment to Jesus Christ has saving value.

God has been reinforcing this truth right from the very first forms of worship and sacrifice in the Bible. Right from the offerings of Cain and Abel we learn God doesn't accept whatever kind of religion we want to bring him. One offering was accepted. One was

rejected. There was no difference in the **sincerity** of the worshipers. The issue was **following God's instructions**, not sincerity of heart.

This is the Bible's answer to the questions people have about the need for **nice people** to hear about Jesus and accept His grace and Lordship to be saved. Of course your unsaved neighbor is nice. He's probably very polite. He may give more to the poor than you do. He may hold his own beliefs about God and morality with great sincerity and devoutness.

Leaving Jesus out is eternally fatal. This was what Jesus was referring to in the Matthew 23 passage when He accused the Pharisees of being the **sons of those who killed the prophets**. They claimed righteousness, but they never embraced the message of the prophets. What was the message of the prophets? The prophets told of a future day when the Messiah would come - the **suffering, bleeding Lamb of God** who would die for the sins of the people.

Jesus said the Pharisees **rejected** the message of the prophets just as surely as those who had literally put them to death years before. The Pharisees were full of **self-righteousness**.

Paul talked about this in his own conversion:

Philippians 3:2-7 - "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; **as to righteousness, under the law blameless**. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

There is no time to comment on all those verses. My only point is there is a kind of

righteousness (**self-righteousness**) that is totally contrary to God's will and counterproductive to genuine inner humility and holiness. The **"dogs"** Paul talks about are the **religious** people piously working their way around a plain and simple reliance on and devotion to Jesus Christ, God the Son.

And then Paul says he used to live that way too. In fact, in terms of the outward practicing of his religion, Paul says he devotion was **"blameless."** And notice that he actually uses that word **"righteousness"** - **"...as to righteousness, under the law blameless"**(6).

This **"righteousness"** was what Paul had to forsake. We need to forsake more than our sins. No one can truly come to God genuinely without confronting and forsaking self-righteousness.

Perhaps I can sum it up this way. We've been studying this for weeks in my Christian Education class in the Family Room as we've been going through Galatians. Every Christian needs to know there are **two** ways to miss out on saving grace in Jesus Christ, God the Son. One we know more about, the other less.

First, we can break God's law - His holy will for our lives - and thus sin. We lie. We are selfish. We don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We are greedy. You know how this list of sins grows. We break the law in some way. We transgress. And the law offers no forgiveness. No grace. It just pronounces guilt. Either in the pages of the Bible or through the voice of our own conscience, we experience guilt. Not just guilt **feelings**. Real **guilt**.

But there's a **second** way many miss out on saving grace. You can do it without being visibly immoral. It has to do with where you place your **trust** for acceptance with God. You can assemble the good deeds of your life - your devotion to humanitarian efforts - your passion in the keeping of the outward deeds and ceremonies of your religion - whatever it is - you can perform these things vigorously and spotlessly. And you can actually rely on the assembling of these things to create your ladder to heaven and the throne of God.

To the extent that anyone fails to turn to God's redemption in Christ Jesus God's wrath

remains on that person, regardless of how many orphans they feed, or commandments they keep - **John 3:36** - **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”**

This simple rule here is this. God only allows salvation on terms for which only **He** receives glory. If any glory goes to **me** for my righteousness deeds, that righteousness is unacceptable to God. In other words, salvation isn't just for really **bad** people. Suddenly we **all** need Jesus. We can't accrue our own good deeds to please Almighty God. In fact, the very **attempt** to do so makes us children of divine wrath. We need Jesus indeed.