

TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS - LIVING IN GOD'S GYMNASIUM (Part 2)

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."

Remember where we are. Last Sunday we began a rather detailed study of the term "***righteousness***" in the New Testament. I said in our last teaching that unless Christians understand the way that word is used (three ***different*** ways) they will never be able to fully and properly understand either the New Testament teaching on ***sin*** or ***salvation***. A careless understanding of ***righteousness*** in the New Testament will lead to the mistaken understanding that ***bad*** people go to hell and ***good*** people go to heaven. And, in reality, the Bible teaches no such thing.

The idea that bad people go to hell and good people go to heaven fosters the idea that getting ***ready*** for heaven involves ***quitting*** bad deeds and piling up good ones. And in reality, it is precisely ***relying*** on good deeds that ***keeps*** people from getting to heaven. So this is no small, unrelated subject we're studying today.

So, after studying the first three steps for transformation in our text - ***teaching, reproof,*** and ***correction,*** I started out last week in our study of Paul's fourth benefit of the Word of God in our lives - what Paul calls ***"training in righteousness."*** We saw that the word "***righteousness***" is used three different ways in the Bible. The first was negative and has nothing to do with what Paul calls ***"training in righteousness."*** The negative use is described by the prophet Isaiah in **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."***

We fall so far short of the glory (and the glorious standards) of our infinitely holy, transcendent God that even the best things we do are about as appealing as polluted, moldering clothing. Even the good things we do are tainted by self, pride, and sin.

But we're not done yet with our study of Biblical *righteousness*. There are two more ways the word "*righteousness*" is used in the New Testament, and we need to have a good grasp of them both.

2) THERE IS IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

And the all-important point here is this. If God *rejects* self-righteousness (however sincerely offered), this imputed righteousness is the kind He loves and *accepts*:

Romans 3:21-24 - "But now the *righteousness of God* has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the *righteousness of God* through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace *as a gift*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...."

2 Corinthians 5:21 - "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the *righteousness of God*."

Notice the repetition of that key phrase, "*the righteousness of God*." In Romans chapter three Paul says God had always revealed His gracious intent to *provide* the very righteousness He *required*. That was the whole point of the Old Testament account of Abraham being told to offer his own son Isaac to the Lord. At the very last minute, we are told, *God provided the lamb*.

Last Sunday we saw how the Pharisees were of the same mind as the crowd who killed the prophets who came with this message of imputed grace and righteousness in Jesus Christ. Fallen man has always rejected God's terms of righteousness. People still do the same today.

Imputed righteousness is the righteousness received, apart from works, through commitment to the reality and adequacy of the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. We are "*declared righteous*," Paul says, before the throne of God.

No one, not even our own hearts, can accuse or condemn us, because God has declared us clean: **Romans 8:31-34** - "What then shall we say to these things? [You need to have something to say to doubt and condemnation] **If God is for us, who can be against us? [32]**

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Make sure you see the connection of important ideas in those verses. The only way to **peace with God** and **freedom from fear and doubt and condemnation** is the central place given to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the imputed righteousness of God.

3) THERE IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SANCTIFICATION

Now we're coming to the kind of righteousness Paul is winding up with in **2 Timothy 3**. And we'll get back to that text in closing in just a minute.

The Bible talks about this kind of righteousness in a way that confuses many Christians. If **imputed righteousness** emphasizes the **inadequacy** of human works, the **righteousness of sanctification** emphasizes the **necessity** of growth in Christlikeness:

Romans 6:19 - “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as **slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.**”

1 John 2:28-29 - “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. [29] If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who **practices righteousness has been born of him.**”

These kinds of verses raise problems for many believers. In a nutshell, the issue is this: **How can righteousness be both freely given, and yet rigorously required?** How can God be both **gracious** and **demanding** at the same time?

To answer those questions properly we need to make sure we fully understand what happens at

genuine conversion. Conversion must never be reduced to a mere decision to **“accept Jesus”** (a phrase never used in the Scriptures). Accepting Jesus is fine as long as we **know** all that we are accepting and humbly **follow** the Lord as deeply as He leads.

Imputed righteousness cleans the slate of my sin and guilt. Whatever my past was, it can no longer separate me from the presence of a holy God. God justly dealt with my genuine guilt in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross:

2 Corinthians 5:21 - “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

What a blessed exchange! We should continually rejoice in this marvelous grace. But that grace must do something deeper than make me **thankful**. When God saved me, He did more than just change my **record**. He changed my **heart**.

In other words, if Christ saved you at all, He put in you a voracious, love driven hunger to obey Father God in everything just as **Jesus** lived **His** whole life, not to do His **own** will, but the will of the Father who sent him. He lived to please the Father in everything He did.

True, without His imputed grace and righteousness I could never achieve my own standing before Him. I could never be saved by my own good works in a thousand years. But, once I **have** received His freely bestowed grace, the **foundation is laid** for the total transformation of my whole being. The change isn't just **inward**. It manifests itself in an **outward, visibly transformed life**.

Here are the key truths the church needs to understand out of all this theology of righteousness:

A) GOD CALLS ALL OF US TO FORSAKE ANY ATTEMPT AT PLEASING HIM APART FROM FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST

There is a zero tolerance on God's part to anything that minimizes the central place given to Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord.

B) IF WE ARE SAVED AT ALL, IT IS ONLY THROUGH EMBRACING THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

Our own works, apart from Jesus Christ, are still just *filthy rags*.

C) IF FREE GRACE AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS DON'T LEAD TO HOLY LIVING, MY SALVATION IS BOGUS

This whole process doesn't happen over night. I know that. But the direction of the Christian is consistently settled: **Titus 2:11-12** - "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age....*"

For now, just remember those two words in **verse 12** - "...*training us...*"

4) HOW DOES THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SANCTIFICATION GROW IN MY LIFE?

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."

Remember, in moving on to this fourth step, Paul is assuming the proper place has already been given to the first three - *teaching, reproof*, and *correction*. Hopefully all of these are happening in this room right now. Insight comes. Then you feel the push-back of your own desire. That's reproof. What you do next is crucial.

The word translated *training* is *paideia*. It's the word Paul uses when he talks about bringing up children in the "*discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). And the idea in that passage is children won't make it with instruction alone. There must be *structures* and *patterns* and *practice* in the ways of the Lord.

Because of the Fall a child's learning requires more than just *information*. That's because whatever you want to put into a child's life, *you are working against something else*. The

Bible says ***“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.”***

In just the same way, none of us is going to be ***totally inclined*** to growth in righteousness just because we know the truth. We will all love righteousness in ***principle***. But when the pursuit of righteousness begins to cost our own personal pride or pleasure at some point, growth in holiness can get costly. Sometimes teaching and reproof need to sting before we're ready to submit to ***training in righteousness***.

That's why Paul wraps up this process of ingraining God's Word the way he does. Whatever God reveals of His truth - whatever He exposes of our sin - whatever He speaks of His correction - we will have to go into ***training*** to make it happen consistently. We need ***“training in righteousness” (3:16)***.

Please bring your mind and wrap it around this truth. Nothing is fully learned in the Sunday service. Hopefully, we're ***exposed*** to the truth on Sunday. We will, if we're wise, make the ***decision*** to obey the truth on Sunday. We should always decide to act on the truth ***right away***, before we ***forget*** what we've heard. But those initial responses only lead up to the ***personal training in the habits of holiness***. Nobody can do that for you.

Many people ***quit too soon*** in their spiritual endeavors. Many people make the mistake of assuming that because ***imputed righteousness*** was freely given apart from their own works, ***sanctifying righteousness*** will come the very same way. But it won't.

In any area of sanctified living, we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, train in the specific area of righteousness until a ***holy habit*** gets fully formed. That's where the idea of ***training*** in righteousness comes in. And, even secular experts tell us, it takes about forty days to ingrain a habit.

All our habits are like this. Those of you who smoke can look back on how awful your first cigarette tasted. But, unfortunately, you stayed with it until you were hooked. You probably didn't think much about putting the toothpaste on your toothbrush the last time you brushed. It's just a natural habit. But have you ever watched a two year old try to do it?

Imagine what this world would be like if people quit building other habits in life like they gave up on their training in righteousness. We'd live in a world where nobody would know how to tie his own shoes! Without the power of habit you'd have to think through every time you get into your car - "Do I put the key in the ignition first? Or do I put the car in gear first? Is the brake pedal the long narrow one on the right? Or is it the chubby rectangle on the left? And what in the world do "D" and "R" mean?

O the blessing good habits are! And this is what Paul is describing in that phrase "***training in righteousness.***" Hear this final word from Paul:

1 Timothy 4:7 - "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. *Rather train yourself for godliness....*"

The silly myths will tell you there is some other way to be outwardly righteous. That word "***train***" is "***gymnazo***" (***goom-nad-zo***). It's where we get the word ***gymnasium***. And make no mistake about it. That's the only way sanctifying righteousness comes. You've got to get into God's gym. You don't ***receive*** a prayer life. You ***build one*** like you build muscles. You don't ***receive*** discernment. You ***build it*** as you use the truth you know - **Hebrews 5:14** - "***But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.***"

You won't shake some sinful habit with a light effort. God will give you strength, but He won't ***do*** it for you. Those habits usually drop off about as effortlessly as the last twenty pounds on a diet. You have to go to the gym.

And so the Bible says sanctifying grace comes. It will be this way through your whole Christian life until Jesus comes again. The next time someone asks you to help out in the church in some area, get your runners on and follow Jesus to the gym. He wants to make a really great Christian out of you.