



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3-21-1905

RIGHTEOUSNESS —BY FAITH

by Jim Buller

A series on faith would not be complete without a article on Righteousness by Faith. This topic has been saved for last, because hopefully, a better understanding of faith will make this concept clearer. Perhaps, one reason we have struggled with understanding Righteousness by Faith, is a lack of good *working definitions*, (as opposed to theoretical definitions), for both “righteousness” and “faith.” To begin with, we will focus on “righteousness” since the rest of this series has been about “faith.” (See “Preparing to Stand” numbers: 14, 30, 38, 40, 41, and 43.) We will also consider a collective definition for “faith,” then put the two together, and take a look at a story in Scripture which illustrates how it works.

“Righteousness,” is fairly easy to define —although the concept may not be as easy to grasp. Rather than being some ethereal spiritual quality, righteousness is simply *doing the right thing*. “Righteousness is right doing.” (*Christ's Object Lessons*, page 312.) God's righteousness, (in the ethereal spiritual quality sense), is a result of His infinite knowledge and love. He *is* righteous *because*, in His infinite wisdom and love, He *always does* the “right” thing. *Only* the Almighty Creator God would be able to *know* what would be best for *each one* of His creatures throughout the entire universe. And because of His infinite love, He not only knows, but always *does* what is best, for everyone and everything concerned.

We, on the other hand, have trouble doing the right thing, if for no other reason than our limited vision and selfish human nature. If we are honest, we have to admit that our selfish human nature is rarely inclined to even be concerned with what is *best*, for ourselves or anyone else —we simply want to do whatever we desire. But even if we *are* concerned about what is best, what we might *think* is right usually is not —simply because of our limited vision. The truth of Proverbs 14:12 being obvious, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

We would be wise to follow the counsel given in Proverbs 3:5-6. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and let Him direct your paths.” Although this may seem simplistic, if we would humbly recognize the inadequacies of our own understanding, and instead

trust and follow God's wisdom and instructions, we would end up doing what is right and best.

Defining "faith" is a little more complex. To summarize the other articles in this series, "faith": ① Believes that God's way of unselfish love is better than our own selfish way. (See Isaiah 55:8-9, 1 John 4:7-8, John 15:1-8, and Hebrews 11:13-16.) ② But, it does not just *believe* God's way is better, it *chooses* God's way. (See James 2:19, 23, and Hebrews 11:6.) ③ Faith also recognizes that even though we may choose God's way, on our own we are powerless to actually *do* what is loving and unselfish. (See Romans 7:15, 18-19, John 15:5.) ④ Therefore, it leads us to surrender to the indwelling Spirit of God. (See John 14:16-17, Acts 1:8, Ezekiel 36:26-27.) ⑤ Trusting God's promises to complete the work He has begun in us to sanctify us and keep us. (See Philippians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, Jude 24.)

"Righteousness *by faith*" therefore, is doing the right thing *because of* our faith in God. Thus, rather than relying on the way things might seem to us, we choose to trust *God's* wisdom regarding what is best and right; and humbly recognizing our own inability to do what is right, we rely on *His power* working in us and through us to produce right actions. As the apostle Paul declared in Romans 1:16-17, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the *power of God* to salvation for everyone who believes, ... For in [the gospel] the *righteousness of God* is revealed ... as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" (Emphasis supplied.)

As *by faith* we focus on abiding in Christ and surrendering to the Holy Spirit's working, we can claim the promises: "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and *He* will lift you up." "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them." "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (James 4:10, Acts 1:8, Ezekiel 36:26-27, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.) In this way, "the righteous requirements of the law [are] fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:4.

Righteousness *by faith* relies both on God's wisdom, to reveal what is right, and on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, to enable us to actually do the right thing. Thus, as we abide in Jesus and are filled with, and controlled by, the Holy Spirit we will be righteous. This is not to say we will never sin again, as we will always, (even into eternity), be fully capable of choosing to step away from faith. Thus, in order to *always* do what is right, we need to develop the habit of *always* choosing to stay in Jesus.

The experience of the disciples on the night Jesus was arrested, gives us an excellent Scriptural example of how this works. Although they had already been with Jesus for several years, they still had not learned an important lesson—that the kingdom of God is all about loving and unselfish service. Thus, on the way to the upper room, they were arguing about who was the greatest. Now, Jesus was obviously

the greatest, so their argument was actually about who would be *second* greatest. The “triumphal entry” had only added to their desire for importance, as they expected Jesus to set up His kingdom soon. Like a bunch of little children crying, “Me first!” they continued the debate even during the Last Supper! (See Luke 22:24.)

Then, Jesus washes their feet. The One who was obviously *the greatest* does the job of *the lowest*! The job none of them would *think* of doing —especially considering the current argument. As Jesus washes their feet, they are convicted of their pride, their self-importance, their selfishness, and unworthiness; and the Holy Spirit is able to soften their hearts. (See John 13:6-8). Then, as Jesus tells them *why* He washed their feet, they realize in a new way that His kingdom is really all about unselfish service, and *not at all* about being the greatest or the most important. So except for Judas, who still had his own agenda, they all re-surrendered themselves to God.

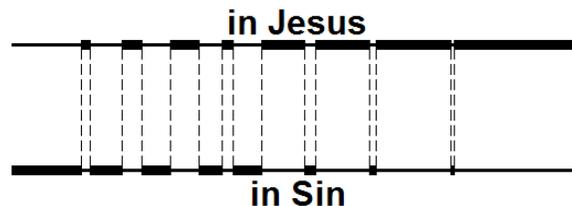
Because at this point in time they had responded and surrendered to the moving of the Holy Spirit, allowing His grace to change their hearts, Jesus was able to say to them “you are clean, but not all of you.” John 13:10. Except for Judas, they were “clean” —that is, without sin. Rather than seeking their own selfish interests, they have put their faith in Jesus. Thus, they are declared “righteous.” A little later, after Judas leaves the group, (John 13:30), and they are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus repeats His statement so there can be no mistake. He tells them again, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” John 14:3.

From our way of thinking, this is amazing. Jesus knew they had been selfishly arguing just a short while before. He also knows they will leave and betray Him in just a few short hours, (see Mark 14:27). But, because at this point in time they were all by faith surrendered to God, He was able to say they were “clean” —without sin, “righteous.”

Fortunately for all of us, Jesus doesn’t stop there. In His very next sentence, He gives the secret of how to *stay* righteous. He says, “*Abide in Me*” —or as some translations put it, “*Remain*,” or “*Stay in Me*.” (John 14:4 emphasis supplied.) Jesus knows our weakness and inability, and that our only hope is to continually remain in Him, constantly relying on *His* wisdom and power.

The following diagram may help to explain how this works. The top line represents abiding by faith in Jesus. The bottom line represents being out of Jesus, and therefore in sin. Time progresses from left to right. Spiritually, we are either one place or the other. There is no space in between, as, “No one can serve two masters.” (Matthew 6:24.) Due to our sinful human nature, we all start out “in Sin.” But in time, the Holy Spirit gets through to us, and we come to Jesus. However because of our previous habits and the alluring power of sin, we don’t stay in Him very long, and next thing we know, we’ve slipped back into sin. Then we respond once again to the Holy Spirit’s influence and return to Jesus. Yet Satan distracts us, and we fall into sin again. And so, as life goes on, we go back and forth. However, hopefully as we think about where we *really* want to be, and keep re-consecrating ourselves to Jesus, allowing the

Holy Spirit to work with us, we will spend less and less time “in Sin,” and more and more time “in Jesus.”



To put this together with the story of Jesus’ disciples: When they were arguing about who was the greatest, they were “in Sin.” After they responded to Jesus as He washed their feet, they were “in Jesus.” But then, as they forsook Him and fled at His arrest, they again slipped back into sin.

As noted earlier, although we may not be sinning when we are in Jesus, by our conscious or unconscious choice, we will always be fully capable of slipping back into sin. If we are honest, we will recognize how easily and quickly this can happen, and this knowledge should give us a strong sense of our weakness and cause us to hold on all the tighter to our only Source of strength. Thus, we will never *feel* that we are “righteous” or without sin. Instead, a true understanding will cause us to *feel* our inadequacy and our complete need of being kept by God’s power.

Thus, as by faith we continue to abide in Jesus, the day *can* come when we slip into sin for the last time. It is doubtful that we will recognize when this happens, because we will only sense our weakness and complete dependence on His keeping power. But at that point, because it would then be possible for Jesus to say about us, “he that is righteous let him be righteous still,” probation could close for us as an individual, and we would be safe to take to heaven. (Revelation 22:11.)

In writing this, it is my prayer that we will all develop the habit of continually choosing by faith to surrender to the Holy Spirit’s leading and abide in Jesus.

Selected Ellen White Quotations Related to Righteousness by Faith

Christ's Object Lessons, page 159

No outward observances can take the place of simple faith and entire renunciation of self. But no man can empty himself of self. We can only consent for Christ to accomplish the work. Then the language of the soul will be, Lord, take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul.

Steps to Christ, page 70

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use

me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee." This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to Him, to be carried out or given up as His providence shall indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.

Christ's Object Lessons, page 332

Do not disappoint Him who so loved you that He gave His own life to cancel your sins. He says, "Without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:5. Remember this. If you have made mistakes, you certainly gain a victory if you see these mistakes and regard them as beacons of warning. Thus you turn defeat into victory, disappointing the enemy and honoring your Redeemer.

Review and Herald, May 12, 1896

Those who are in connection with God are channels for the power of the Holy Spirit. If one who daily communes with God errs from the path, if he turns a moment from looking steadfastly unto Jesus, it is not because he sins wilfully; for when he sees his mistake, he turns again, and fastens his eyes upon Jesus, and the fact that he has erred, does not make him less dear to the heart of God. He knows that he has communion with the Saviour, and when reproved for his mistake in some matter of judgment, he does not walk sullenly, and complain of God, but turns the mistake into a victory. He learns a lesson from the words of the Master, and takes heed that he be not again deceived.

Testimonies to Ministers, page 79

The perils of the last days are upon us. *Satan takes the control of every mind that is not decidedly under the control of the Spirit of God.*

Testimonies for the Church Vol. 4, page 355

Without Christ we cannot subdue a single sin or overcome the smallest temptation.

Steps to Christ, page 69

You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for growth and fruitfulness. Apart from Him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in Him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from Him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

The Desire of Ages, page 98

In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. ... It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness.

Steps to Christ, pages 64-65

The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan's delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the Spirit of God is arousing you.

Christ's Object Lessons, page 152

The sense of need, the recognition of our poverty and sin, is the very first condition of acceptance with God.

Steps to Christ, pages 57-58

If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.

Steps to Christ, pages 71-71

When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections--to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth 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." Galatians 2:20. Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. If you will leave yourself in His hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him that has loved you.

Maranatha, page 98

If you are right with God today, you are ready if Christ should come today.