
Perfect Righteousness

By David Wilkerson

August 19, 1996 There is only one kind of righteousness that God accepts - and that is perfect righteousness! Nothing else will stand in His presence on Judgment Day. Unless our righteousness is absolutely perfect, He cannot save us, justify us, recognize or accept us.

Yet, is there anyone brazen enough to think he can stand before the throne of Jesus Christ and present something of his own doing - good works, good behavior, all the dos and don'ts he observed - and call it perfect righteousness? No - never! Such a man will find himself on that day wearing filthy rags!

There are two kinds of righteousness. First, there is the righteousness of man. This righteousness is a life-and-death battle to remain above temptations - a struggle with only partial victories and many horrible defeats. It consists of great efforts to do good, to avoid evil, to please God by rising up from our failures and trying to do it right the next time. I think of the old gospel song, "Try Me One More Time, Lord." It says, "Lord, I've failed - please, try me one more time!"

Yet, in the end, a legal, man-made righteousness is a terrible struggle, mixed with torment. Whenever temptation turns into failure, we fall into total despair, as though God has totally forsaken us. We become caught in an endless cycle of sin and confess, sin and confess... We are always uneasy in the presence of God, constantly aware of having done things that are wrong. We feel we never measure up to the righteous standard of God.

Indeed, many Christians have never broken free from this struggle. The apostle Paul says of these: "they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2). In other words: "These people mean well. They truly love God and try to please Him. But they are ignorant of what He has provided for them in Jesus Christ!"

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (verse 3).

Do you submit yourself to the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ? Or do you still think you are somehow able to mold, polish and work on yourself, so that eventually you can say, "I'm okay, Lord. I can't really think of anything in my life that is wrong."

The truth is, even if you've kept 99 percent of the law - even if you've broken just one point - you would still be condemned before God! You don't have a righteousness He can accept. Even if no one could point a finger at anything in your life, your every action still has to come from an absolutely clean heart that springs from God's pure love. If not, you can't be acceptable before God!

Paul's desire was to: "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

There Is a Righteousness That Is Wholly Acceptable to God - and Is Available to Every Believer!

The only righteousness that is acceptable in God's eyes is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ our Lord. And it is a righteousness that can be had only by faith!

The writer of Hebrews introduces us to the truth that this righteousness is the inheritance of all true believers. It is something Jesus has left for us, something which belongs to us, a legacy: "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

Noah became an heir not by building an ark, but by what he believed and preached. He grasped this knowledge of righteousness which God had revealed to him - a righteousness that is by faith - and he became an heir of a perfect righteousness!

Beloved, you and I were given a great inheritance when Christ departed the earth. He left us a title and deed to His very own perfect righteousness. Of course, Jesus lived in absolute poverty while on this earth; He owned no land, no money. But He left us riches greater than the diamond mines of South Africa, greater than the oil fields in the Middle East, greater than the gold and silver buried under America's mountains. Jesus gave us an inheritance that can make us far richer than any person on the face of the earth. It is an inheritance to a perfect righteousness that allows us to stand before God uncondemned!

Once you understand this inheritance, you can stand against every devil and demon in hell. Satan will not be able to accuse you before the Father, before your brethren, before your own conscience - because you are an heir to the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ!

When Elijah went up to heaven, he left Elisha his cloak. Likewise, when Jesus went up to the Father, He left us His own garment - His own perfect righteousness! He cast it upon us, as surely as Elijah cast his garment upon Elisha. The prophet's action was a type and shadow of what was going to happen when Jesus was translated to the Father. Indeed, we are heirs to a wonderful garment of righteousness that covers us completely - making us acceptable in God's holy presence!

This garment is our inheritance - and God expects us to value it! He expects us to seek after it, to be willing heirs to His legacy. You may remember what happened when King Ahab came against Naboth, coveting his vineyard. Naboth valued his vineyard so much, he rejected Ahab's offer to buy it, saying, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee" (1 Kings 21:3). He said, "God forbid that anyone should take my inheritance from me. It's mine!"

I believe the most important thing you can seek God for in your life is to understand that this inheritance is yours - and that it's waiting to be claimed! The knowledge of the perfect righteousness of Jesus will put you on a rock that is unshakeable. It will end all your useless struggles and put you in God's presence justified and accepted.

Now, if God has provided you with such an inheritance - whereby you can stand before Him with a perfect righteousness in Jesus Christ - then you should want it! It should be an inheritance nobody can take from you. No devil should be able to lie it out of your spirit. No man should be able to steal it from you. No emotion should drain you of it.

Because God said it, you've got to lay hold of it! You need to seek it, go after it, allow your soul no rest until you get your hands on it. "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

When God Created Adam, He Knew He Would Abuse His Free Will and Sin!

God knew that Adam would abuse his free will, bringing rebellion, sin and death upon the whole human race. Indeed, through the sin of one man, all humankind stood before the Lord as sinners.

But God loved us - and from the foundation of the world He had a plan by which sinful humanity could be reconciled and accepted as righteous in His presence. In fact, God kept coming to man - but man hid himself because his conscience condemned him. Yet the Lord, in His infinite wisdom from the beginning, always had a plan. That plan was the giving of His own dear Son as a sacrifice, to ransom us from sin!

Justice demanded a penalty for sin: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). And that penalty - death - would be paid by Jesus Christ on the Cross, with His own blood. God said He would gather the aggregate sins of all humankind - in every generation - and lay them to the charge of His Son. Jesus would become the sacrificial lamb. Only then would God's justice be satisfied!

So, even as sin was laid on all humankind by one man, so grace was passed on to us all by one Man: "For as by one man's disobedience were many made sinners, so by the obedience of one [Christ] shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

By Adam's sin, we all were made sinners. And by Jesus' sacrifice, we are made righteous. Jesus ransomed us - He paid the price - so that the devil would have no claim on those who repent and trust in Christ and His completed work.

Now, all along God knew that man could not keep or fulfill His divine law. He had instituted the law to bring order to the human race, lest we destroy ourselves. The law was for our own protection; it was to make us realize that in our own strength and righteousness, we could not stand before a holy God. The law was a mirror God held up to us, saying, "Let me show you what I expect, what My justice requires. Here is My law - and here is where you've failed - where you're living in sin! You've failed at this point, this point, this point.... No one is righteous enough to fulfill My law!"

The Pharisees tried to fulfill the law. They observed more than 600 regulations, from the washing of hands and pots to refusing to touch a Gentile. They tried to keep all the law - believing that one day they could stand before God and say, "I kept all Your laws. I did this, this and this. Now You are obligated to save me."

But no one can expect his good works to merit justification. God's Word answers, "If you've failed just one point of the law, you've failed the whole law!" If you expect God to accept you for your good behavior - your good deeds, your self-denial, your sufferings - forget it! You'll never be able to keep the whole law.

Because we couldn't meet justice's demands to fulfill God's law, Jesus came to earth - and He perfectly fulfilled the law of God, to the very letter. He never failed one point of it - and He did it all out of pure motives of love. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

When Jesus ascended to the Father, He presented to Him an absolutely perfect righteousness. His perfect obedience had fulfilled all the demands of the law. And His blood was presented in full payment for our sin. Here stood a Man in the presence of God whose righteousness was perfect - and therefore acceptable to the Father.

So, Satan had no accusation against Jesus: "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). Jesus said, "The devil can't point at anything in Me. I fulfilled the law - I paid the price of sin with My own blood - and I now stand before the Father in perfect righteousness!"

And now, because of His sacrifice, none of the charges of the law can be held against us!

God Can Accept No Other Righteousness but Christ's Perfect Righteousness!

It is impossible for God to accept any righteousness other than Christ's. No other human could ever meet the requirements; no person could walk the same path or pay the same price He did. Only Jesus' righteousness will stand before God: "...all our righteousness are as filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6).

This matter of understanding how God justifies His people is not for babes. It is a truth for full-grown believers! Yet so many Christians are still babes, drinking milk. All they understand is forgiveness of their sins. So few go on to the meat of the Word of righteousness!

"For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:13-14).

Milk is for babies - and babies need constant attention! They feel good only when Mother is in the room. And when Mother leaves, they cry out with fear. They have to be able to see her, feel her, touch her to feel secure.

Likewise, the believer who remains on milk lives in constant dread of his salvation. He is never at ease with the heavenly Father. Instead, he's always uptight, thinking God is ready to send him to hell every time he fails. He does not know or understand his position in Christ - and therefore he never knows the peace of God. He cannot believe that God is fully committed to save and keep him.

Paul is saying there is meat available to us - food that will cause us to grow into maturity, to become men and women in Christ, to develop into full stature as believers. Beloved, this meat is the truth concerning Christ's perfect righteousness! Understanding it allows you to remain secure in your salvation. You don't have to fear that God will forsake you every time you slip and fall. No - you will have victory!

But if you don't have this truth, the devil will play havoc with your feelings. He'll lie to you and push you around. Unless you have this truth as a foundation under everything you believe, nothing will be right in your doctrine, your theology, your life. You can't even obey God until you understand it!

You have to be convinced that nothing you can ever do will produce an acceptable righteousness before God. It has to come from another source! When I stand at the judgment seat, I have no other plea but the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

How Does the Righteousness of Christ Become Our Very Own Righteousness - So That We Can Stand Accepted in God's Presence?

We will never be justified or accepted as holy and righteous before God, unless we stand before Him

with Christ's perfect righteousness as our own. After all, that is the only righteousness God will ever recognize. So, how can we receive Christ's perfect righteousness?

It becomes ours by imputation. The heavenly Father imputes it to us through our faith.

"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works..." (Romans 4:6). Paul quotes David as saying, "The richest, most blessed, most peaceful man on earth is the one who understands he has a perfect righteousness imputed to him - without works!"

"(Abraham) staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God...And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed..." (verses 22-24).

This righteousness has to be imputed to us. It is not ours by infusion. In other words, God doesn't just pour it into us. No - it is never our righteousness; it has nothing to do with what we have done or accomplished. It is always His righteousness, imputed to us - credited to our account.

The word impute means "to regard or esteem, to consider, to attribute to a person something he does not have, to reckon or credit to one's account." When Jesus imputes His righteousness to us, God looks upon it as our very own. No, we did not earn it. Christ did it all - and He credits it to our account!

This imputation comes by faith alone. We can't work for it or merit it in any way. Rather, because of our faith in Jesus and His redeeming work, the Lord credits the righteousness of Christ to us - and we are reckoned as perfect in Him. That's right - you and I are credited with the same righteousness that Jesus obtained here on this earth. By confessing our sins and having faith in Him, we stand before God with an imputed righteousness. And it is a perfect righteousness that is of faith and not of works:

* "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace..." (Romans 4:16).

* "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness..." (10:10).

* "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no (distinction)" (3:22).

* "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (verse 26).

I ask you: Is there anything good in you that would cause God to send His Son to die for you? No - it was an act of complete mercy and grace! God initiated it Himself. We were sinners, aliens, against Him. Yet, even then, God sent His only begotten Son to take on all our sins. It was all by grace! "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (verse 24).

Oh, what a wonderful thing the power of faith is!

First, God's Word tells us that Christ paid for the sin of humankind at the Cross, with His own blood;

that He fulfilled the law and removed the curse; that He ransomed us from the claims of hell and the devil; that He lived a sinless life, keeping the law at every point; and that He will present us before the Father with a perfect righteousness.

Then the Word tells us we can have Christ's perfect righteousness attributed to us - that God will consider us as perfectly righteous in Jesus - if only we will believe what He has accomplished for us! Please understand - I am speaking of those who have repented of their sins.

Oh, how my flesh recoils at the simplicity and ease of it all! The flesh cries, "No way! It can't be that easy. I have to help - I have to pay something. After all, I still have problems in my life. I still struggle with sin. I haven't yet come to a place where I believe God is pleased with me. I can't expect Him to consider me righteous I still have so many things needing improvement. I need to clean up my act first."

Certainly there may be tears on our part. We have to be humbled and broken. But a river of tears alone will not save anyone. A lifetime of struggles will not save anyone. God says, "It must be by grace through faith. No flesh shall glory in My presence!"

* "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17).

* "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5).

* "...righteousness...which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

My faith has to rise above all my fears - above all satanic lies, all feelings, all circumstances - and rest in what God's Word declares. And His Word says that by repentance and faith in Christ, He looks upon me as having the perfect righteousness of Jesus. He accepts me "in the beloved" as holy and righteous!

This Perfect Righteousness Is Not Imputed by Degrees; It Is Given Only in Its Fullness!

When you receive the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, you receive it all. There is no "50 percent perfect" righteousness or "90 percent perfect" righteousness. If it's perfect, then it's all there! Sanctification is the Holy Spirit helping us to become in practice what God sees us to be by faith.

Let me give you a truth that may once and for all dispel your attempts to compare your righteousness to somebody else's.

In my younger years, I always compared myself to certain others who appeared to be holy. These people always seemed to be aglow - always upbeat, smiling, seeming much more Christlike than I. I never thought I measured up to their holiness. So I prayed, "Lord, make me righteous like Brother So-and-so. How wonderful it must be to live that way for You!"

How wrong I was! Almost every person I felt that way about eventually fell. They weren't who I thought they were. Indeed, I have learned that nothing is as it appears; no one is quite as evil or quite as good as he may seem. Rather, there is only One who is truly righteous - Jesus Christ our Lord - and

His righteousness is perfect!

If we are in Christ, then we have His righteousness - and it is not attributed to us by degrees. No one receives more or less of it. It is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ - and by faith we receive it in its fullness!

We are to measure ourselves by His righteousness alone - and not by anyone else's supposed righteousness: "...but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). "...according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach unto you" (verse 13).

Paul is saying here, "There's a rule you can use to measure yourself. It is this: Everyone who truly repents and believes in the perfect righteousness of Christ - who comes to Him in faith, believing in His work on the Cross - is made perfectly righteous in the sight of God. You may not have everything worked out yet. There is still a daily work of sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit. But you are accepted in the beloved - imputed with the very righteousness of Christ!"

Dear saint, it is time you stopped putting yourself either up or down as measured against others. God has imputed to you the full measure of the perfect righteousness of Christ: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

God Speaks of a "Sorer" Punishment for Those Who Reject His Offer of Righteousness by Faith!

Although Jesus offers us His perfect righteousness, many refuse it. They refuse His pardon, His peace, His justification from the law, His adoption into the family of God - embracing instead their own form of righteousness by works. Scripture says of them: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

The Pharisees rejected this offer. And so do many Christians today. On Judgment Day, these will stand in line before the throne, wearing only the ragged garment of self-righteousness. They'll ask themselves, "What do I have to offer the Lord?" And when their turn comes, they'll say, "Lord, I've cast out devils, I've healed the sick, I've done mighty works in Your name."

But He will answer, "I never knew you, you workers of iniquity! You've never had the perfect righteousness of My Son. You have only a righteousness that is by works - and I don't know that kind of righteousness. I won't accept any righteousness except that which is by faith in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ!"

Beloved, I refuse to live that way! Jesus Christ has left me an inheritance, and I claim it. It's mine!

Scripture says, "...the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). If you can accept this truth of the perfect righteousness of Christ, you'll have the boldness of a lion. You'll never fear any person again. You'll never look at someone else's life and feel unworthy. You can say, "I have the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to me by faith! No, it's not mine - it's His. But it's accounted to me by Jesus Himself, so I may call it my own!"

It's time to stop your struggling. If the devil comes to you and says, "You're no good, you have

no righteousness," you can answer: "Of course, I'm no good. Of course I have no righteousness in myself. But I do have the righteousness of Jesus Christ! Yes, I've failed God. But I have an Advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ the righteous!"

When you stand before the Lord, you won't have to tremble, thinking, "What am I going to offer Him? What did I do right or wrong?" No - you'll be thinking, "I've got nothing in myself to offer Him - because I've got His righteousness, by faith!"

Does this mean Christians are not obligated to do good works? Not at all. Justification by faith, and the imputed righteousness of Christ, sets the soul free to work in holiness and do good works flowing out of a surrendered, loving heart. Good works done in slavish fear bring no glory to God. Walking in true holiness is possible only to those who have laid hold of their inheritance - Christ's perfect righteousness - because they are no longer imprisoned by fear and condemnation.

I work, not to merit righteousness, but because His perfect righteousness is mine by faith. And now I am free and released to serve Him as a bondservant of love.

Now, by the power of the Holy Spirit promised in the New Covenant, He turns me from all iniquity and empowers me to live out the righteousness He credits to me. Hallelujah!