

God Demands Personal Righteousness

“...except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20)

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Introduction

The greatest need of the day is for God’s people to live righteously, separating ourselves from the sinful, wicked ways of the world! “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil;. . .” (Exodus 23:2). “. . .be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2).

Unfortunately, not all Christians have continued in such a separation. This is true even though God has extended His grace by giving us the opportunity of salvation **through** the obedience of His divine word, and thus expects us to be “peculiar people.” “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

It is **ONLY WHEN** we are convinced that there **IS** a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid that we **WILL** live righteously! It is more than simply “saying” we want to enjoy heaven and avoid hell. We must actually “live a life” that shows that desire; a life of righteousness! Understanding this, Christ warned, “. . .except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). It is important to recognize that His application of this truth is to individuals! Yes, I can influence others to righteousness, but I can’t be righteous “in their stead.” Nor can they be righteous for me!

To fully understand what Christ means we must know something about the scribes and Pharisees. Jewish scribes were, “. . .a class of learned men who made the systematic study of the law and its exposition their professional occupation. In the NT they are generally called ‘scribes’, corresponding to the Heb. *sopherim*. They are also called ‘lawyers’ and ‘doctors of the law’” (Tenney 761). Pharisees were the most influential of three prominent societies of Judaism at the time of Christ (ibid. 647). “Josephus, a contemporary Jewish historian, aptly describes them as ‘a body of Jews who profess to be more religious than the rest, and to explain the laws more precisely’” (ibid. 647). They “formalized the religion of the Scribes and placed it into practice. This is why the Scribes and Pharisees are often mentioned together in the NT” (ibid. 647). Both, the Scribes and the Pharisees “bitterly opposed Jesus and His teachings,” and “He in turn condemned both their theology and life of legalism” (ibid. 647, 648)

Jesus made clear His thoughts concerning their unrighteousness when He declared, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that

which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matthew 23:25-28). After reading of such scathing rebuke, is there any wonder as to Christ's disdain of them? There should be no trouble for us to understand why our righteousness must be greater than theirs! As I said earlier, we must do more than talk righteousness, we must show it!

For ourselves, for our families, for our nation, yes, even for the world, God demands of YOU, and He demands of ME, personal righteousness! For heaven to be ours in the final day, we must reject that which is unrighteous while embracing the righteous! By doing so, we, our nation, and our world will gain much more than we could ever lose! "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34). With this in mind, let each of us make sure that we are truly letting our Christian lights shine, as we strive to live righteously in an unrighteous society. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; . . ." (Philippians 2:14-16 a).

As we consider God's demand for personal righteousness,
Let Us Learn Some Lessons from Previous Generations

From Noah's generation we learn, in part, that God's patience ran out when man continued going deeper and deeper into sin. ". . . God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7). From this example it is crystal clear that those who reject God's grace will be punished. This truth is made even more clear with the following verses: Genesis 6:13 ". . . God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth."; Genesis 6:17 ". . . behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." On the other hand, those who accept God's grace will be blessed because of their obedience. "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Genesis 6:8). "But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee" (Genesis 6:18). God demanded personal righteousness, and it was those who were righteous that were saved in the ark!

From the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah we learn, in part, that God does not hide from His children what He will do. "And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do" (Genesis 18:16, 17)? His messengers told Abraham about the judgment that was about to befall the two cities (v. 20, 21). God will spare cities and nations

“because of” the presence of a few righteous people. “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes” (Genesis 18:23-26). For 45? (v. 28); For 40? (v. 29); For 30? (v. 30); For 20? (v. 31); For 10? (v. 32). THE ANSWER WAS ALWAYS YES! However, regardless of His love and patience, there will come a time when God’s patience will run out and the rebellious will be punished! “Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground” (Genesis 19:24, 25). The only hope for those in Sodom and Gomorrah was personal righteousness, but not even ten righteous individuals could be found. It is also my only hope, and your only hope!

Nation after nation throughout history have fallen from their greatness, because of their rejection of God’s truths! “The Roman Empire was one of the greatest of history. Yet, she fell! When Gibbons wrote his history of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, he gave these factors that contributed to their fall. (1) Rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the sanctity of the home. (2) The mad craze for pleasure. (3) The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form” (Jones).

The greatest nation since the Roman Empire has been our own — the United States of America. Sadly we are seeing many of the same factors in our beloved country. How can we keep our country from falling? You and I are the keys; we CAN change our nation when WE – along with other faithful Christians – fulfill God’s demand of personal righteousness! On the other hand, if any of us are not faithful to God, we are a big part of the problem! “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). The question then is, “Am I a part of the problem or a part of the solution?”

God Has Always Given His People a Pattern to Follow!

Jesus Christ is the example, the pattern, the answer, for us. God expects us to be “. . .conformed to the image of His Son. . .” (Romans 8:29). “. . .he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (1 Corinthians 5:15).

Regardless of the situation we are in, we should always act in such a way that “. . .Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:21). We will do so only if we make His mind ours — through the study and application of His word (Philippians 2:5). By making His mind ours, He will become “. . .our life. . .” and we will thus be able to “put to death” those things in our lives that cause “. . .the wrath of God. . .” to come “. . .on the children of disobedience” (Colossians 3:4-6). So, let each of us **determine above all else, to faithfully** “. . .follow his steps: Who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:” (1 Peter 2:21, 22). By

doing so we will be “. . . partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

It is important to know that although we will through obedience escape the corruption of the world, when we live like Him, we can expect to be persecuted. “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;” (John 15:20). As hard as such persecution may be to bear, if we do not live like Him; according to His standard of righteousness, we can expect God to reject and punish us. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:24, 25). So, let us make every effort to use His standard to guide every aspect of our lives, so we will “save our lives” (and souls) rather than “lose them” — as well as to help others save theirs — and bring our country back from the brink of disaster!

As we strive to meet God’s demand for personal righteousness,
Let Us Ask the Following Questions *Before*
Participating in *Any* Amusement or Activity.

What does the Bible say about this activity? If you don’t know the answer, find it. It will be better to miss out on something that would have been OK, than to lose your soul if it isn’t!

What did Jesus do? “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Would I want to meet my Lord doing this? “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

Will this harm my influence for Christ? “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matthew 5:13). “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light” (Luke 11:33-36).

Will this hurt me spiritually or physically?

Will this cause another to stumble? “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” (Matthew 18:7).

Conclusion

What the church needs the most is PEOPLE who are CONVINCED that there is a HEAVEN to gain and a HELL to avoid! What the world needs the most is PEOPLE who are CONVINCED that there is a HEAVEN to gain and a HELL to avoid! Why? Because those who do not believe in heaven and hell — whether in or out of the church — will not live righteously. Those who so live, hurt not only themselves but all mankind.

Let us therefore: (1) Learn the needed lessons from the past. (2) Apply God's pattern to all that we do so that we will meet God's demand for personal righteousness. (3) Ask and answer proper questions about what we support and participate in. By doing so, we can assure ourselves of: (1) The knowledge and ability to live righteously in an unrighteous society! (2) Thus, meeting God's demand for personal righteousness! (3) Therefore, receiving the eternal rewards that God has promised to His righteous children; being able to enter into the kingdom of heaven! On the other hand, if we do not do so, we will assure ourselves that: (1) We will lack the knowledge and ability to live righteously in an unrighteous society. (2) Thus, we will fail God's demand for personal righteousness. (3) And as a result, fail to receive the eternal rewards that God has promised to His children, because, ". . .except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20)!

Based upon YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW, which situation are you in? Does YOUR righteousness ". . .exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"? Will you be able to enter the kingdom of heaven, or will you ". . .in no case enter. . ."?

God holds YOU responsible for the answer – and the outcome!

Works Cited

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