

The Righteousness Of God

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:19-21)

In the current culture of our evangelical churches in America, it seems to be the norm that, very quickly after a person has walked forward and prayed the “sinner’s prayer”, that new convert is encouraged to “just get out there now and tell others about Jesus, start doing good things, showing your neighbors that you love them, and especially inviting them to church”.

And all those things are good and excellent things to do, but folks, I fear that most new converts won’t really know what to say or to do as they witness.

Why would that be so? It’s because, if most people are like me, when I first gave my heart to Christ at salvation, I really didn’t know Him very well. Yes, I knew things “about” Him, especially that He was my only means of salvation. But I really didn’t “know” the “Person of Christ”. And I certainly didn’t know enough about Him, and His ways, or about these scriptures to immediately begin to teach Christ to others.

The “example” set by the Apostle Paul has been my best understanding concerning the path we ought to follow in those immediate days, weeks and months after we have given our heart to Christ. Yes, Paul did go and do some minor amount of ministering soon after his conversion, but then He quickly went into seclusion, by some estimates as long as 12 to 14 years, during which time the Holy Spirit taught Paul, in detail, about all that He was supposed to be teaching others.

Now, granted, God had a very special and “high-profile” ministry in store for Paul, and most of us will not have nearly as profound and wide-spread a ministry as God was calling Paul to undertake. And we probably will not have need to “seclude ourselves” for a long period of time as Paul did.

But the “example” is still a good one for us to follow. For us to step forward and begin to tell others about the things of Christ, we really ought to know that we are giving them the Pure and Holy truths of God, and that takes “study” and that takes “discipleship”.

In 2 Timothy 5, God commands us to . . .

¹⁵ Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Think back with me, and recall how you felt and thought in those beginning days of your salvation, even perhaps before that moment that you actually knelt and prayed that “sinner’s prayer”. Your heart was being convicted of sin and drawn to Christ by God the Father and by His Holy Spirit.

During those beginning days, I must confess that my whole attention was focused, not upon Christ, but on “myself”. I really didn’t know what I needed to do, I just knew I couldn’t continue to live in the lost and miserable condition I was in.

May I say that again! During those early days of struggle, I was so completely caught up in my own “self”, that wanting to know about who God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were, was simply not part of my thinking. All I knew was that I needed some relief from the heavy burdens of sin that I was carrying.

Looking back over all those struggles, I know now that it was the blessed Holy Spirit who was bringing much of that misery to my soul, convicting me of sin and righteousness and judgment. Yes, he used some of my friends and family to direct me towards Christ. But it was Him, the Holy Spirit, who brought me to that final moment when all that I knew was that I had to get my soul inside whatever Christ was offering to me, a place where I could be “safe”, and I could find relief for my troubled soul.

But even then, even after I had surrendered and given my heart to Christ, it was still several months after my salvation that I began to realize that I ought to begin to move on forward in my new-found salvation, on forward in my understanding of who God was, on forward from “standing there just inside the doorway of salvation”, and on into an actual relationship with Christ, that I should actually get to know this Savior who had just redeemed my soul.

And folks, I do fear that that is a “step” that many people fail to ever fully take. Yes, they are saved, but barely. They are “brides” of the “Bridegroom”, but they never get to actually know the “lover of their soul”. They are standing just inside that “narrow gate”, but never dare to venture down that “narrow path” of knowing and loving and walking with the Person of the Lord Jesus.

And that is such a terrible and unfulfilled way to live a Christian life! It is like a new bride who never moves in and lives with her new bridegroom. She is content for him to live somewhere else, and only visits with him when she needs him. Again, what a terrible and unfulfilled way to live a Christian life!

All throughout these scriptures are words of sweet invitation for us to “step on forward”, and to get to know and to love this “Lord our God”. A passage that comes to my mind often is in Matthew 11, where Jesus says to us,

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Do you hear what Jesus is saying to us in these words? Once we are saved, we are then His “sheep”, the “sheep of His pasture”, safely inside the confines of His watchcare. But yet, we are often still carrying burdens, and especially “habits”, perhaps old ones that came with us into our salvation.

But dear friends, sheep were never intended to be “burden bearers”. They are not built to handle a heavy load. And Jesus knows His sheep well, the “burdens” that each of us try to carry with us each day. And He invites us to come up close to Him and let Him carry the heavy part of our burdens.

Jesus used many such metaphors and parables, implanting vivid images and “word pictures” within our minds to help us understand the relationship we are to have with Him.

One of my most favorite of those “word pictures” is that of our being a “Bride” and Him being our “Bridegroom”. Because that is what you and I are folks! At the first moment

of our salvation we became the “brides” of the most wonderful “Bridegroom” that any “bride” could ever hope to know and to love.

Which brings the question, “why do we not move on in with Him, on ahead from just inside that doorway of our initial salvation, on from being so consumed with “self”, on into a real relationship with this Blessed Bridegroom we have become united with?”

Again, this is the step that so many, many Christians, though fully saved, still for some reason, are hesitant to go ahead and fully take. This, folks, is “surrender”, “absolute surrender”.

We must remember that marriage, under western cultural standards, is not the way God intends a bride and a bridegroom to be. Here in America, we have this “equal in every way” standard that dominates the minds of most every husband and wife. And that kind of mindset can sometimes get in the way of a humble and loving and intimate relationship.

Equality in the relationship between a “bride” and a “bridegroom” has firm biblical basis, yes. But that is not all that God has prescribed for our marriages here in these scriptures. He has also set some other standards and requirements.

And He has given us some instructions, and commands, and word pictures within these scriptures to help us with our understanding. Words and commands such as those in Ephesians 5, where we are told,

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Tell me husbands, do you, each day, “cleanse” your sweet wife with the “washing of the water of the Word”, so that she might be without spot or blemish as she walks before the throne of God? You should!

And in 2 Peter 3, we read . . .

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

Husbands, are you considerate as you live with your sweet wife? Do you treat her with utmost respect? Are you ready to protect her from all the wiles of the devil as she goes through her day? You should!

In these words of scripture, God reveals to us His plan for the relationship that should be held dear between a bridegroom and a bride. And in these words, I have found that, as the bridegroom, I have a far greater responsibility than just being an equal partner in my relationship with my bride.

And so, it is with the Lord Jesus. He took the initiative to do everything that it took to save and to sanctify my soul. And He continues daily in His intimate watchcare over me as His bride.

But I, as the “bride” must be willing to receive His blessed love and watchcare over me. I must “surrender” my “self”, and especially my pride, into His loving care. And not just a little, but completely, “absolutely surrender”.

I recall many years ago, when I read a book by that name “Absolute Surrender”, written by Andrew Murray. And its words helped me to realize that there was so much more to this Christian life and to my relationship with Christ than just the benefits it offered to me personally. I realized that I needed to “give up self” and to give my heart in “unconditional surrender” to Jesus Christ, and to allow Him to become “Lord of my life”.

And no, that is not a “one-time transaction”. It is a daily surrender. That’s part of what God calls our “Sanctification”, and it is “good”, so very, very “good”.

And folks, as we do begin to truly surrender ourselves into His loving care, something very “mystically sweet” begins to take place. With each new surrender, we begin to want to surrender even more, and more. And we find that the words of Philippians 3 are taking place, and we cry out,

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11)

Folks, now is the time for each of us to take this step of “absolute surrender”. And as we do, it is then, when as we read verses like these here before us today, our first thought will be not about “self” and about how I can benefit and “improve self”. But rather, it will be about how I can please and bless my beloved Savior.

Dear friends, these words within this bible are so much more than just an “instruction booklet”, a “self-improvement course” that each of us must go through. These are the “Words of Life”, and they bespeak the very nature of the Person of Jesus Christ being revealed to us. And we ought to not only want to get to know these Words of truth, reading them and memorizing them daily, we ought, all the more, to want to get to know the very Person of Christ Himself.

And as we do, we’ll come to understand that there is a far greater purpose behind our need to know Him than just for the purpose of meeting our own needs. And that purpose is given to us right here in these words we are studying today.

Here in verse 20, God, tells us the “purpose”, the “why” behind His instructions, and that purpose is for us to reveal and to “produce the righteousness of God”.

Yes, these behaviors and responses, of being “slow to speak, quick to hear, and slow to anger,” will make us a better person. And yes, these behaviors and responses will help us to bless our dear wives and husbands, even our neighbors. But as good as that is, that is not the “first” and “most important” reason for us to do those good and “right” things.

Our first desire must be to accomplish and to produce the “righteousness of God”. It is the “righteousness of God” that must come first in everything, in all that we think, in all that we say and in all that we do.

Another passage that bespeaks these same instructions so well is in Colossians 3. There God tells us that . . .

17 . . . whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17)

And then also, in 1 Corinthians 10:31 we read,

31 . . . whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Folks, there is a “why”, a “supreme why”, behind everything that we will ever think, or say or do, and that “supreme why” is to “produce the righteousness of God”, to bring “glory to God”.

Again, yes, Godly behavior is “good”, really “good”, and it will bless ourselves, our families, and everyone around us each day. But those blessings are secondary to the “first” reason for our behaviors and responses. Our behaviors and responses should always be first and foremost to reveal and to “produce the righteousness of God”, to bring glory to Him.

. . . Now, before we end this message for today, I want us to go back and revisit some of the first words we said this morning, that of being careful, as we share our new-found faith with others. That yes, a “childlike” witness, like the kind of witness a person might give when they first get up off their knees from praying that “sinner’s prayer”, is well-meaning. But folks, those well-meant words might unintentionally lead that next person to believe things they should not believe.

Too often, that is where people immediately go astray in their knowledge and understanding of God, believing half-truths about God, about His righteousness and about His holiness.

While “childlike” faith is truly good, God really does not desire for us to remain forever “childlike” in our “knowledge” of Him. Again, God commands us instead to
15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

As children of God, you and I really do need to move on forward and get to know the Lord Jesus well. And that can only come from daily and ongoing study about Him,

using these scriptures. It is in these words of scripture, and nowhere else, that real truth is learned, truth that is able to help that next person you might witness to on into the “safe” hands of Christ and His salvation.

The latter part of verse 21 tells us to

receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
(James 1:21)

As we read and study the precious words of scripture, the Holy Spirit within us “implants” those truths within our minds and souls. And it is as His “implanted word” takes up residence within us that we are then able to “Go ye” to our loved ones, to our neighbors, and even to the uttermost parts of the world and minister with confidence and accuracy the Person of Christ.

And remember, it is not “our words of witness” that will save another person’s soul, it is instead the precious “words of God”, the “gospel”, that has that power within them.

May I close with some of my most favorite words in all these scriptures, words that tell us about that “special power” that resides within the “gospel of God”. Hebrews 4 . . .

12 . . . the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

Please! Please! Read your bibles every day folks!

Let’s pray!