



The Truth about Righteousness by Faith

The subject of righteousness is the central theme of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Yet many Christians find it to be a difficult concept to fully understand or explain. Beliefs run the gamut from a religion of righteousness by works and behavior in order to please God and merit salvation, to the opposite extreme of believing that the righteousness of Christ covers our unrighteousness, and that we will sin until Jesus comes and changes our nature. But what we believe about this subject is a life-and-death matter, for when Jesus closes His work in the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, every person will have become a finished product of what they have believed, and there will be no more chance to receive pardon and cleansing from sin. O that none of us would be among those who find out too late that the grace of God covers no unconfessed, unrepented-of sin in our lives.

"I saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful and were looking to the time of refreshing and the latter rain to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight. O how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter! They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God." EW 71.

"Just before we entered it [the time of trouble] we all received the seal of the living God. Then I saw the four angels cease to hold the four winds, and I saw famine, pestilence, and sword, nation rose against nation, and the whole world was in confusion." 7 BC 968.

"What is the seal of the living God, which is placed in the foreheads of His people? It is a mark which angels, but not human eyes can read; for the destroying angel must see this mark of redemption. The intelligent mind has seen the cross of Calvary in the Lord's adopted sons and daughters. The sin of transgression of the law of God is taken away. They have on the wedding garment, and are obedient and faithful to all God's commands." 7 BC 968.

"As mercy's sweet voice died away, fear and horror seized the wicked.... Those who had not prized God's word were hurrying to and fro, wandering from sea to sea, and from North to East, to seek the word of the Lord.... What would they not give for one word of approval from God!" EW 231.

"The great mass of professing Christians will meet with bitter disappointment in the day of God. They have not upon their foreheads the seal of the living God. Lukewarm and half-hearted, they dishonor God far more than the avowed unbeliever. They grope in darkness, when they might

be walking in the noonday light of the word, under the guidance of One who never errs." 7 BC 970.

"Ministers take their texts from the word of God but preach smooth things. To this the natural heart feels no objection." EW 273.

This means that many Christians who sincerely believe that they are under the umbrella of righteousness by faith will be greatly disappointed when they stand before the judgment bar of God. We cannot trust our salvation to human teachers, no matter how popular or educated they may be. Only if they are following the complete teachings of the Bible can they be counted as God's messengers of truth. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20, KJV.

"The law. Heb. 'torah,' denoting all the revealed will of God. This is the common biblical term for the inspired writings of Scripture, particularly those of Moses.... The prophets of God were His witnesses, or spokesmen, and the 'testimony' they bore was His message of wisdom and life." 4 BC 144 [not EGW].

Through the centuries God has had men who spoke for him the continuing development of His truth for their generation. The Bible is a collection of these inspired testimonies. Both the Old and the New Testaments are continuing light shed more and more to the perfect day of Jesus coming. [Prov. 4:18.]

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Ps. 19:7. KJV.

Again we see here the importance of the combination of both the law of the Lord, and the testimony of God's chosen prophets who give additional insights and information concerning God's will for us, and the application of the law to our daily experiences.

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.... We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Pet. 1:16; 19-21. KJV.

God has always wanted His people to understand His will for them, and how to apply it to their daily lives. The scriptures especially point forward, both in the Old and New Testaments, to the culmination of history, the end of the great controversy, and the coming of Jesus Christ in all His glory. It is no surprise, then, that God has promised to the final generation, His remnant church, a prophet who would bring light from Jesus which would enable them to understand how to be ready for His coming.

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Rev. 12:17. KJV.

Later, in Revelation 19:7-10, the angel Gabriel was sent to the prophet John to assure him -- and us -- that the work of the spirit of prophecy will be successful, for it produces the final cleansed remnant, the bride of Christ:

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he saith unto me, 'Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he saith unto me, see that you do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'" KJV.

Think of it! The mighty angel Gabriel, the one who is next to Christ, and who took the place of Lucifer when he fell, counts himself as one with God's people throughout the ages who have had the gift of prophecy in their midst [see Rev. 1:1-3, 9]; but especially emphasized in this context are the final people of God who will be victorious over sin and Satan at the end of time, and thus become the cleansed bride of Jesus. It is this group -- the remnant -- who has responded to the light shining from the spirit of prophecy for their generation and consequently are fully prepared for the wedding supper of the Lamb.

This reminds us of the parable of Jesus concerning the ten virgins. The wise virgins woke up, trimmed their lamps, -- which represents the Bible, and poured in the extra oil which they had brought with them. I believe the extra oil to represent the instructions received from the spirit of prophecy which lights their way through the cleansing from sin and prepares them to wear the white robe of Christ's righteousness. Those who have the extra oil will understand how to participate in the cleansing of all sin from their lives and from the books of heaven during the closing work of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary when He blots out the sins of His people from the records of heaven.

And yet, at this very time in history, many of God's people are turning away from the spirit of prophecy, either by neglecting to read it, or by refuting it all together. I truly believe that one of the major reasons why the spirit of prophecy has fallen into disuse by many is because Ellen White emphasizes the necessity of having victory over sin through the power given to us by Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. Here are a few examples of such statements from her pen:

"When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us." DA 668.

"None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths." 7 BC 911.

"The ripening of the grain represents the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ." TM 506.

Note: The bride of Christ must be in full agreement with Him on every principle of life.

"No one will have any excuse for sin. If you fail of overcoming, there are reasons for this. Ye will not obey God's will, ye will not pray; ye will not strive; ye will not fight evil habits and unholy thoughts.... Repent now, confess, forsake. A day of fire and storm is about to burst on our world." TM 455.

"Many have to a great measure failed to receive the former rain.... They expect that the lack will be supplied by the latter rain.... They are making a terrible mistake.... The heart must be emptied of every defilement and cleansed by the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin... that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now.... Only those who are living up to the light they have will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it." TM 507.

"The seal of the living God will be placed on those only who bear a likeness to Christ in character." 7 BC 970.

"In the great day of judgment, no man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of natural humanity will be vindicated, for he could not enjoy the perfection of the characters of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning has not that faith that will give him an entrance to the kingdom of God." 3 SM 360.

"In all who submit to His power, the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them." DA 107.

"Pressing close to His side and holding communion with Him, we become like Him." TD 96.

The writings of Ellen White have many statements such as these, and our natural human hearts feel rebuked and condemned, and desire to avoid all such statements that would make us uncomfortable with our present spiritual condition. Many nominal Christian churches feel the same way about the Old Testament, and rely upon the New Testament to satisfy their desire to be saved by a religion that comforts them in their sins.

Paul's writings especially are often misconstrued to mean that all we have to do to be saved is to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and believe in Him, and then our sins will be covered by His blood and His righteousness. But if the writings of Paul are carefully studied with an open mind and heart to truth, we will find that God is consistent throughout the Old and New Testaments in expecting obedience to His statutes, and striving for holiness of character.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.... And this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ -- to the glory and praise of God." Phil. 1:6; 9-11.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed -- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence -- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

"Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe." Phil. 2:12-15.

"All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but those who obey the law who will be declared righteous." Rom. 2:12, 13.

"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." Rom. 3:31.

"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?...

"Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness?... You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness...

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reaped leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 6:1, 2; 11-16; 22, 23.

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?... Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong.... Our prayer is for your perfection.... Aim for perfection." 2 Cor. 13:5-9; 11.

Ellen White is simply a second witness to these Biblical concepts:

"We cannot do evil, and work wickedness, and yet stand justified before God at last. Now is our day of probation, and we are now to perfect characters that will stand the test of the judgment. When Christ comes, there is to be no change of character;.. Those who are alive and remain...will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, if their characters are blameless and pure. Transformation of character must take place during the precious hours of probation." ST 8-29-1892.

"Character cannot be changed when Christ comes... Character building must be done in this life." TM 430.

"When He comes He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will all be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. Those who have preserved their bodies and spirits in holiness, in sanctification and honor, will then receive the finishing touch of immortality. But those who are unjust, unsanctified, and filthy will remain so forever. No work will then be done for them to remove their defects and give them holy characters. The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation. It is now that this work is to be accomplished for us." 2 T 355.

Although God has always required His people to strive for obedience to his requirements and for holiness of life, there are indications throughout the scriptures that the final generation will cross the finish line of character perfection. Here are some examples:

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure." 1 John 3:2, 3.

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy -- to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forever more!" Jude 24, 25.

"May he strengthen your heart so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." 1 Thess. 3:13.

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." 1Thess. 5:23, 24.

"He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." 1Cor. 1:8, 9.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus...."

"And this is my prayer; that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ -- to the glory and praise of God." Phil. 1:6; 9-11.

"The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid." Zeph. 3:13.

"But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult." Isa. 45:25.

"In those days, at that time, declares the Lord, search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare." Jer. 50:20.

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.... See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." Mal. 4:1, 2; 5, 6.

"These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." Heb. 11:39, 40.

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Heb. 12:14.

"Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." 2 Cor. 7:1.

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord. In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour

grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for his own sins; whoever eats sour grapes -- his own teeth will be set on edge.

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the Lord. 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the Lord. 'So I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'" Jer. 31:27-34.

So we can see from these sample texts that God's plan of salvation includes the perfection of the character of His people by the time He comes. It is also quite clear that the final generation will have a special time of cleansing and purification, led out by Jesus through the working of His Holy Spirit. It will be His final work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Through the trials that we go through, our characters will be purified and we will come into full agreement with God on every point. Many people will refuse to go through this cleansing process, for they want to be saved in an easier way. Satan will lull them to sleep, and they will wake up too late, like the foolish virgins who had not enough oil in their vessels to prepare them to be ready for the wedding feast.

That oil represents the Holy Spirit; and though they had their lamps, representing the Bible, they did not study thoroughly how to be prepared for the wedding feast, and they were left behind in darkness. But those who do study and prepare, will be miraculously protected by God through the time of trouble that is even now upon us. Jesus knows who are His own, and the protection of holy angels will be assigned to shield God's people from the wrath of the enemy, while others are languishing and dying from pestilence, sword, and famine.

"There is by our side a witness, a heavenly messenger, who will lift up for us a standard against the enemy. He will shut us in with the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Beyond this, Satan cannot penetrate. He cannot pass this shield of holy light." COL 172.

May each of us be diligent students of the word of God and make the preparations necessary to be covered by the blood of Jesus in the days ahead so that we will be safe under the angel's wings until He comes to receive us into His heavenly kingdom.

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