RIGHTEOUSNESS – IS A GIFT AND A GOAL

If righteousness is a gift, why does God command us to pursue it?

The bible is not systematic theology. So, some bible subjects have confusing references which is the case with righteousness. Eph 2:8-10 states by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. First, we read we cannot make ourselves righteous before God by keeping enough laws, performing enough religious works, or trying to erase our past sins through better behavior. However, in the same verse we read we are God's workmanship created to walk in good works.

There are many scriptures that tell us to walk by the Spirit pursuing and practicing righteousness, while bearing fruit, enduring, and overcoming. So, is accepting the sacrifice of Christ's considered our complete gift of Salvation or is righteousness something God expects to be developed in us as a goal during our life? Different denominations take different positions on works verses faith, and they both say they have scriptural support and they both remain divided to this day. How is that maintaining a good spirit until we attain the unity of the faith? If we neglect one position and only support the other isn't that the wrong scriptural approach? Shouldn't we be looking for a possible deeper truth that can support both and therefore harmonize the scriptures? That just a basic hermeneutical rule for bible interpretation.

So, read on and find the solution that bears witness with you that the Bible is true from both perspectives. God's Gift will provide what we need to reach God's Goal.

- We are justified by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23–26
- God saves us according to mercy, not because of righteous works we have performed. Titus 3:5–7
- Yet believers are commanded to pursue righteousness. 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22
- The person practicing righteousness is righteous, just as Christ is righteous. 1 John 3:7
- God disciplines us to possess the peaceful fruits of righteousness. Hebrews 12:10–11

GOD'S GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS EMPOWERS TRANSFORMATION NOT IMMEDIATE PERMANENT SALVATION

This distinction is important. God truly forgives the sinner who comes to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Our acceptance cannot depend upon first becoming righteous enough to deserve His acceptance. Scripture does not present salvation as legal fiction where Christ's lifetime of external human merit is passively credited to our account to excuse our lack of personal righteousness. Rather, God's forgiveness establishes the relationship with Him necessary to begin producing righteousness in us. Genesis 1:26 shows from the beginning

before the fall it was God's intention to make Adam and Eve like Himself after he created them.

- Abraham believed God's promise, and God counted his faith as righteousness. Genesis 15:6
- Paul contrasts earning works with believing in God who justifies the ungodly. Romans 4:1–5
- God's righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not through works of law. Romans 3:20–24
- Paul wanted to be found in Christ, possessing righteousness through faith, not the law. Philippians 3:8–9

God's Gift gives us no reason for boasting, and neither does God's gift of Christ eliminate everything Scripture says about the righteousness God intends to activate in His people.

NEW COVENANT IS FORGIVENESS AND A PROMISE TO EMPOWER

This becomes especially clear when we follow God's promise from the Old Testament into the New. Israel's problem was not simply that the people needed their ongoing sins forgiven. God wanted obedience, not sacrifice, meaning God expected change inside. Read Genesis 1:26 again. They became corrupt individually and as a nation. After years of patience, they received the judgment of dispersion, and that multiple times even though the priests were sacrificing their animals. As Judah was going into captivity, God in His grace promised them a New Covenant.

He promised: "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes." God would help supply what fallen human beings cannot produce for themselves. His Spirit would provide the divine power necessary to change a life into what He desired, a people becoming like Him for fellowship and use.

After Jesus was glorified, God placed the administering of His New Covenant under Him. Jesus received from the Father His promised Spirit and poured forth what the disciples experienced in Acts chapter two, fulfilling John the Baptist's prophecy that Jesus would be baptizing people in God's Spirit. God's power activated the Great Commission through the ascended Christ to the entire world.

- God promised a New Covenant in which His law would be written upon the heart. Jeremiah 31:31–34
- "I will put My Spirit within you," enabling you to walk in My ways. Ezekiel 36:26–27
- Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Promise of the Father. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5
- Jesus received the promise of God's Spirit and poured it forth. Acts 2:32–33
- The ministry of reconciliation given to Jesus is now given to us. 2 Corinthians 5:18
- Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. Romans 8:13–14

The spiritual progression seen here is not just legal Salvation. In includes grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, spirit-led living, righteous fruit, and spiritual maturity before resurrection. Jesus himself learned obedience by suffering before His glorification.

The Gift is not God pretending that we have already become what He wants us to become. The Gift is God's provision that enables us to become what He intends. Genesis 1:26.

ABIDING IN CHRIST REQUIRES OUR CONTINUOUS DEPENDANCE

Jesus confirms this teaching in the parable about the Vine. He does not describe salvation as a transaction completed in one moment and then tell His disciples to wait for heaven. The parable represents continuing to "Abide in Me" by explaining a branch cannot produce fruit by itself. Its life and supply come through the vine. In the same way, believers cannot manufacture God's righteousness through independent human effort. Jesus also does not teach that fruit automatically appears by itself. When He says without me you can do nothing, He is saying spiritual fruit does not appear simply by grace nor human effort. That means dependence upon Christ is continuing, not merely His by sacrificial righteousness.

- The branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it must abide in the vine. John 15:4
- Jesus said, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit." John 15:5
- Jesus connects abiding with continuing in His love and keeping His commandments. John 15:9–10
- Fruitfulness brings glory to Yahweh as the source and identifies mature discipleship. John 15:8

The believer does not produce righteousness independently of God. Neither does God eliminate the believer's responsibility to respond.

OUR PART IS PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S PROVISION BY GRACE

We must submit to the will and leading of God through Jesus. Scripturally we cannot stop and profess final salvation as a one-time act. Paul tells believers to Work out your salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure. That means that if God is at work in you, then you are working with what God is continually supplying. Human participation does not replace grace. It is the response that God's grace makes possible.

- Work out your salvation with fear and trembling because God is working in you. Philippians 2:12–13
- Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16
- Those who belong to Christ are to live and walk by the Spirit. Galatians 5:24–25
- Present yourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Romans 6:12–13
- Paul labored recognizing God's grace was working with him. 1 Corinthians 15:10
- Paul says his striving was God's power working mightily within him. Colossians 1:28–29

Therefore, righteousness is neither God doing everything while man remains passive, nor man producing righteousness by his own moral efforts.

THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS VISIBLE TRANSFORMATION

The purpose of righteous fruit is not merely to provide evidence that God once performed an irreversible legal transaction finalizing our final maturity and preparation for eternity. God intends to change us, or scripture would never say Christ came to destroy the works of darkness in us. The New Testament uses multiple terms like growth, transformation, fruitfulness, spiritual maturity, and overcoming. It is not trying to claim we are already there by one act. God is wanting to help produce in us something that was not there before.

- We are transformed into Christ's image from glory to glory. 2 Corinthians 3:18
- We are to be transformed through the renewing of our minds. Romans 12:1–2
- God's discipline trains us to produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hebrews 12:10–11
- These fruits of the Spirit become visible in our character and conduct. Galatians 5:22–25
- God's objective is growth into maturity measured by our stature of Christ. Ephesians 4:13–15
- Paul labored until Christ was formed in believers. Galatians 4:19

The Gift: Yahweh brings forth the life from the seed. Jesus is now the spiritual vine from heaven. We are the earthly branches bringing forth fruit through the glorified Christ in this world. Christ's fruitfulness is the Goal. Those who are led by the spirit of God are the sons of God Romans 8:14 tells us.

SCRIPTURE WARNS US ABOUT HAVING A FRUITLESS LIFE

This cannot be ignored from the parable of the vine or other scriptures. If righteous fruit were simply the inevitable proof of an irreversible status already possessed, many New Testament passages would have to be redefined or ignored. Therefore, biblically, the Gift and the Goal must be understood together. The Gift provides what is necessary. The Goal reveals what God intends His provision to produce.

In the parable, Jesus claims that branches who are "in Me" will bring forth fruit since they are "in the vine." However, a branch that does become fruitless will eventually wither and is taken away to be burned. The writer in Hebrews gives us a more literal clarification. He describes people who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted God's good word, and experienced the powers of the coming age but then fall away, makes it impossible to renew them to repentance again. These descriptions cannot be casually reduced to people who have never been genuinely born again, especially when placed next to Jesus' parable about the vine.

- Every branch "in Me" that does not bear fruit is taken away. John 15:2

- The person who does not abide is cast out as a branch, withers, and is ultimately burned. John 15:6
- Paul warns against an unbelieving heart falling away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12
- Partakers of Christ must hold firmly to the beginning of our confidence to the end. Hebrews 3:14
- Believers can experience God's supernatural powers and still fall away. Hebrews 6:4–6
- It compares land producing both vegetation and thorns to be burned. Hebrews 6:7–8
- We are not to shrink back to destruction but to continue in faith. Hebrews 10:35–39

Considering these scriptures, grace should never be used as an attempt to neutralize God's warnings. God's provision is real and our participation is mandatory as well. Ignorance, willing refusal, or abandoning these truths will also become an erroneous reality.

JESUS EXPECTS CONVERSION AND OVERCOMING

Jesus makes this clear in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 to every church. If you have an ear to hear, know that there are promises contained in them specifically to overcomers. His repeated message is not, "Remember, your position is secure." He tells individual members to repent, hear, hold fast, remain faithful, and overcome. That means Jesus is not presenting conversion as God's end purpose for a believer. It demonstrates that the process of being sanctified is spiritually beneficial.

- Believers are commanded to remain faithful unto death. Revelation 2:10
- And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Revelation 12:11-12
- He attaches repeated promises to "the one who overcomes." Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21
- Jesus tells His people to hold fast what they have until He comes. Revelation 2:25; 3:11

When churches make conversion the destination rather than the beginning, believers may never be adequately taught to seek, receive, yield to, and walk in the provision God promised for their continuing spiritual life. Jesus did not merely call people to begin. He called them to follow, abide, bear fruit, remain faithful, and overcome.

FINAL JUDGMENT WILL REVEAL RESPONSES TO GOD'S PROVISION

Scripture also refuses to separate our present lives from God's future judgment. The final judgment is repeatedly described as being according to what people have done. That does not mean righteous works purchase forgiveness or that they put God into our debt. It means our response to God's spiritual provision matters. Paul says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive according to what we have done in the body. Revelation ends with Jesus saying that He is coming with His reward to repay each person according to his deeds.

- God renders to each person according to his deeds. Romans 2:6–8
- We will all appear before the judgment seat for what was done while in our body. 2 Corinthians 5:10
- Whatever a person sows he will reap. Believers must not grow weary in doing good. Galatians 6:7–9
- The dead are judged according to their deeds. Revelation 20:12–13
- Jesus comes with His reward to repay each person according to his work. Revelation 22:11–12

Therefore, we should be careful about reducing judgment to an irrevocable gift that we think we already possess. The warnings and promises in scripture should be allowed to stand with their full force during the time we live here on earth.

SALVATION'S GOAL IS TO BECOME LIKE GOD

The New Testament can speak about salvation as something God has already accomplished for us, something presently operating in us, and something still awaiting final completion. We should not try to collapse all three into one moment theologically. Believers have genuinely received God's grace. We genuinely belong to Christ. God is still working supernaturally in His people now; but God's complete purpose has not yet appeared. We are still being transformed. We are still walking by faith, and we are still overcoming this world until the end—as Jesus had to do—until our mortal bodies have put on immortality.

- Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. Genesis 1:26
- The gospel is the power of God to those who are being saved. 1 Corinthians 1:18
- Believers are to work out their salvation because God is working within them. Philippians 2:12–13
- This is the will of God, your sanctification. 1 Thessalonians 4:3
- Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy; for I am holy. 1 Peter 1:16
- As Christ is, so are we in this world. 1 John 4:17
- Final victory comes when our mortal body puts on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:50–54
- Creation and God's children await the redemption of the body. Romans 8:19–23

So, should we be saying, "I am already everything God intends me to become" or would this be a better biblical confession? God has graciously given me what I could never provide for myself, and by His continuing provision, I am becoming what He intends me to be – like Christ."

TO ADVANCE GOD'S KINGDOM TAKES HIS SUPERNATURAL SUPPLY

The practical application of this is God's super our natural. Christianity is not merely trying harder to become a good person. Neither is it merely believing that God sees us as already perfectly righteous because Christ died for our sins, while our actual spiritual condition

becomes secondary or unimportant. God wants sons and daughters who learn to live from His supply. So, we must believe He can direct us and empower us to do His will on earth.

Being natural and fallen, the problem is we do not know how to pray as we ought so we can learn to depend upon God's provision. Paul says we do not know how to pray as we should. When we receive the Spirit baptism Jesus pours, we learn to follow His leading because our spirit is edified and we are building ourselves up in our most holy faith by praying in the Spirit instead of our known language. As we continue praying and being led by God's Spirit to do His will instead of ours, He produces the spiritual fruit in our lives and matures us to overcome evil in this world while advancing the Kingdom of God.

- The Spirit also helps our weakness for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. Romans 8:26
- You, beloved, (keep) building yourselves up on your most holy faith praying in the Holy Spirit. Jude 20
- As many are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. Romans 8:14

Through the entire process, Yahweh remains the Source, and Christ remains our High Priest, Intercessor, and King. This eliminates self-righteousness and spiritual passivity. We cannot boast because the life and power comes from God; and we cannot remain passive because God repeatedly commands us to respond to what He supplies. God gives what He commanded us to become. His Gift does not eliminate the Goal. His Gift makes the Goal possible. You can read several topics about the Spirit baptism by Jesus on this site and how to receive it. It is the part of God’s New Testament promise and purpose to live the Spirit led life in the body of Christ.

SUMMARY

From Genesis to Revelation, righteousness begins with God's gracious provision rather than man's achievement. God receives those who believe Him, forgives and reconciles them through Christ so they can abide and be led by God’s Spirit. The Gift does not mean the Goal has already been accomplished. God's Gift provides everything necessary for His people to participate with Him as He produces His righteousness in them, leading them ultimately to the reality of salvation which is eternal immortality in His presence.

The Gift is God's provision. Righteousness is fruit produced. Spiritual maturity is our Goal.

This was prepared as a teaching resource by Living the Spirit Filled Life.com. It was compiled from biblical study, historical research, and scriptural analysis using NASB unless noted. It is not intended as a replacement for the Scriptures, but to aid in understanding. You can use this information. Just do not misrepresent how it was intended.