

WEARING OUR WORKS

Tonight I would like to discuss one of the most destructive ideas of modern Evangelicalism: the “*grace plus nothing*” error. Grace plus nothing means that God must do everything *for* us. If we try to take any responsibility for any part of our own salvation, we are guilty of trying to be “saved by works”. This idea has become an entire theology, yet it is built on a combination of errors, which in turn are the result of not rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

The first building block of this error is something I mentioned the other week—the “**T**” in Calvin’s TULIP theory. That “**T**” stands for Total Inability, meaning, that man is completely incapable of participating in his own redemption. Everything from beginning to end must be done for Him by God.

Another building block of this error comes from a constant *misapplication* of passages like Isaiah 64:6, where the prophet says all our “righteousness” is as filthy rags. Pastors quote this and other verses like it, and then tell us that since all of our own righteousness is worthless, we will never actually become righteous and we shouldn’t even *try* to become righteous. Instead, we should simply trust in the righteousness of Jesus, which has been applied to our account.

So the grace plus nothing idea becomes a prime axiom upon which other ideas and teachings are erected. The outcome of this can be summed up quite simply: We cannot save ourselves; God has to save us. Just as we can do nothing to save ourselves, so in like manner, after we have been saved, there is nothing we can do to keep ourselves saved—which *also* means there is nothing we can do to get ourselves unsaved. We are saved by grace alone, and we are kept saved by grace alone.

This same idea is then transferred to the rewards of the believer. We are not only saved by grace and kept by grace alone, we will also be *rewarded* by grace alone. That is why, everywhere you turn, you will find that Christians assume we will all get basically the same rewards after we die and go to heaven . The underlying theology they have been taught is that we will be rewarded for what *Jesus* did. His reward, just like His justification, has been imputed to our accounts by grace.

Whenever you tell your Christian friends that some of us will receive *better rewards* in glory than others, based upon how we have lived on this earth, they start freaking out because you have just thrown a wrench into their simplistic theology of righteousness. Since they assume all our righteousness will *always* be as filthy rags before God, they don’t believe *we* will ever be righteous. In their view, the only righteousness we will ever have is the righteousness that’s been *imputed* to us. So how could we ever be rewarded according to what *we* have done? That would destroy the whole concept of grace plus nothing.

And of course, don’t even mention the possibility of believers being *punished* for what they have done in this life—that’s downright heresy to the average American Christian! The possibility of a genuine believer receiving any kind of punishment is not even a consideration for the grace plus nothing crowd because that would completely destroy their whole theology. I mean, upon what basis could a believer possibly be punished—by grace alone? The only way you or I could be punished is if we were being held accountable for what *we* did or how *we* lived; and that whole idea is a big no-no. It’s not even a possibility.

So you have to wonder what goes through their minds when they read the following passage:

*And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise **steward**, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is **that servant**, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if **that servant** say in his heart, **My lord** delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; **The lord of that servant** will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And **that servant**, which **knew his lord's will**, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, **shall be beaten with many stripes**. But **he that knew not**, and did commit things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few stripes**. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

Luke 12:42-48

Notice that in this teaching, there are *three* different kinds of people, and each one is explicitly said to be the Lord's servants. Jesus is not comparing sheep and wolves or wheat and tares. He is not comparing those who are really His servants and those who only appear to be His servants. They were all the servants of the Lord. They all represent Christians.

Christian #1- Gives himself over to sin once he realizes the Lord will be delayed.

Christian #2 - Knows his Lords will but fails to prepare himself.

Christian #3- Doesn't realize what his Lord's will is, so he also fails to prepare himself.

Also, please notice that the failure of Christians # 2 and 3 to "prepare" themselves is defined as committing things "worthy of stripes". Yet the things they were committing—which were worthy of stripes—were obviously not as evil as the things Christian # 1 was doing.

Christian # 1 has become so evil, he is actually cut out of Christ and is appointed his part with the unbelievers. Christian #2 is not cut out of Christ. He is beaten with "many stripes" because he knew what his Lord's will was, and he *refused* to do it. Christian #3 is not cut out of Christ either. He is beaten with "few stripes" because he did *not know* what his Lord's will was.

This issue of preparing ourselves for the return of the Master is very important! That's the whole point of this parable. But the "grace plus nothing" crowd will never understand this because it will *never* fit into the theological framework they have embraced. You see, grace plus nothing *nullifies* the need to prepare. Why should we try to prepare, they say? God's grace has *already* prepared us by imputing Christ's righteousness and Christ's reward to our account. So the whole idea of the believer trying to prepare himself for the Lord's return is seen as a useless exercise in self-righteousness. Just more filthy religious works. Unfortunately, the "grace plus nothing" crowd are not only blind to what we they *receive* (regarding punishments), they are also blind to what they will *miss* (regarding rewards).

*And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. 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 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.*

Revelation 19:6-9

Start a conversation about the “marriage of the Lamb” at your next Christian gathering and see how many people in the room think they have to prepare for this marriage. Probably none of them will have any thought of the need to prepare themselves because they have been taught the only requirement for the wedding is the *imputed* righteousness of Jesus. However, notice that John did not say the white linen was the righteousness of *Christ*. He said the white linen was the righteousness of *saints*.

Christ’s imputed righteousness has become such a part of these believers, it has made *them* righteous in fact and in truth. They are no longer just seen as righteous (while they continue to do evil); they are no longer simply covered with the Lord’s righteousness (while they continue to do evil); they have actually become righteous. They have *stopped* doing evil. They have allowed God to change them into the image of Jesus Christ. Their righteousness is no longer filthy rags—it’s true righteousness.

John also said the Lamb’s wife “*made herself ready*”. Again, this does not compute for the grace plus nothing crowd. Trying to make ourselves ready for the coming of the Lord is worthless self effort in their eyes, since God has *already* made us ready by grace. Once again, you have to wonder what goes through the minds of these kinds of people when they read the following verses:

*Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves** from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

II. Corinthians 7:1

*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, **be diligent** that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

II. Peter 3:14

*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him **purifieth himself**, even as he is pure.*

I. John 3:2-3

The Scripture is full of promises for the child of God. In one place (*I. Cor. 2:9*) Paul said the things God has prepared for us are so magnificent we can't even imagine them. However, there's just one little catch. In order to receive all these promises, we must be spiritually clean. Having therefore these promises, said Paul, "let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit". And he wasn't the only one who said we must cleanse ourselves. Peter and John said basically the same thing. Peter said we should be diligent to be found spotless and blameless by Jesus when He comes; and John said the person who has the hope of becoming like Jesus in him will purify himself. All three apostles laid the responsibility for becoming spiritually clean on *our* shoulders.

If God has already cleansed us by grace (plus nothing), then *why* did the apostles tell us to purify ourselves, cleanse ourselves, and be sure we are found clean when the Lord comes? Could it be that having the imputed righteousness of Christ is not the whole story? Could it be that God wants us to become righteous in fact and in truth? Could it be that the reason they said these things is because they wanted us to realize that our God—who is holy and righteous, and who as a result, cannot tolerate sin, condone sin, or dwell with sin—is telling us that He will never be able to dwell with us in our fallen condition? Could it be they are telling us that God's character and our character are incompatible, and that the only way to rectify this situation is for us to become holy in truth? Could it be that God didn't just send Jesus into the world to pay the price for our sin so we could be eternally forgiven and covered, but so that we could be delivered from sin completely, and in the process, become *compatible* with His character?

We need to be reminded of this from time to time because every where you turn, preachers and Christian writers are telling us just the opposite. They are telling us we're not responsible to cleanse ourselves because Jesus did that for us. They quote passages like Hebrews 10:9-10 and I. Corinthians 6:11, which state that we have already been sanctified by the blood of Christ. However, they ignore other passages which teach that *after* we are saved we still need to be sanctified. Thus, they are only telling us half the truth—and telling someone half the truth, in order to lead them to a conclusion you know very well they would never have come to had you told them the whole truth, is the same as *lying* to them. There is no difference. Paul called this kind of thing "handling the Word of God deceitfully" (*II. Cor. 4:2*).

I've gone through this before. But just let me repeat it here again, before I move on. The term sanctify has two different meanings. The first aspect of the word describes our relationship to God. It means "to be set apart". This is what happens when God calls us and we answer the call. We are set apart for His use. We are set apart as His chosen people. In this sense then, becoming a child of God *is* the same as being sanctified. This is the past tense aspect of the word. We have already been sanctified.

The second aspect of the word describes our relationship to sin. It has to do with us being cleansed, in experience, from all the things which defile us. Sanctification is like sanitization. We use bleach to sanitize things so our bodies will not become defiled by germs and get sick. Sanctification does the same thing for *the soul*. It cleanses the soul and changes us into a different kind of person. It makes us a "new creation".

*For this is the will of God, **even your sanctification**, that ye should abstain [after you have been saved] from fornication: That every one of you should know [or learn] **how to possess his vessel** in sanctification and honour;*

I. Thessalonians 4:3-4

This second aspect of sanctification cannot be imputed to us. It's something that must be pursued. It's not a legal position; it's an individual possession that is acquired over time, little by little, as a result of obedience to the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the example of Jesus.

Sanctification is not obtained through self-effort, but rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is the one who cleanses us and makes us pure. However, we must choose to yield and submit to Him as He performs this work. Since God has given man a free will, He can only cleanse us to the degree we allow Him to do so. Thus, in the last analysis, we bear the responsibility for whether or not we become sanctified. That's why the apostles said we must cleanse ourselves.

The grace plus nothing crowd not only ignores all this, they teach the exact opposite. They say Jesus did everything for us at Calvary, so all we need to do is believe and accept what was done for us. Everything we were ordained to have, all that we were destined to become, is supposed to happen automatically, after we die, by grace. According to them, God is responsible for *everything* and we are responsible to do nothing. So when we try to do what the apostles instructed us to do, when we actually seek to cleanse ourselves and prepare ourselves for the return of the Lord, we are accused of trying to save ourselves through religious effort. This is the kind of confusion most of today's churches are trapped in.

I've said this several times the last year in this room, but it bears repeating: the Bible states over and over again that we are responsible to do our part. We must **attain** the first resurrection (*Phil. 3:11-12*), and **labor** to enter the rest of God (*Heb. 4:11*). We have to **obtain** the new world (*Luke 20:35*), the prize (*I. Cor. 9:24*), and salvation (*I. Thess. 5:9; II. Tim. 2:10*). We have to **lay hold of** eternal life (*I. Tim. 6:12*). We must **sow** to the Spirit in order to reap eternal life (*Gal. 6:8*). We must **win** Christ (*Phil. 3:8*), **strive** to enter the kingdom (*Luke 13:24*), and **overcome** to receive the rewards of Revelation two and three.

Moreover, we must **keep** ourselves unspotted from this evil world (*James 1:27*), **make** our calling and election sure (*II. Pet. 1:10*), and **walk worthy** of that calling (*Eph. 4:1*). We have to **cleanse** and **purify** ourselves, our hearts, and our hands (*II. Cor. 7:1; James 4:8*). We must **abstain** from fornication (*I. Thess. 4:3*), and from all appearance of evil (*I. Thess. 5:22*), from fleshly lusts (*I. Pet. 2:11*), and **lay aside** sin (*Heb. 12:1*). We also have to **flee** youthful lusts (*II. Tim. 2:22*), and idolatry (*I. Cor. 10:14*), and the love of money (*I. Tim. 6:11*).

We have to **put on** the whole armor of God (*Eph. 6:11*) so we can **resist** the Devil (*James 4:7; I. Pet. 5:8-9*), **stand against** his temptations and assaults (*Eph. 6:11*), **wrestle against** his power (*Eph. 6:12*), **war** as a good soldier of Jesus (*I. Tim. 1:18*), and **fight** the good fight of faith (*I. Tim. 6:10*). We have to **seek** both the righteousness of God and His kingdom (*Matt. 6:33*). We must **awake** to righteousness (*I. Cor. 15:34*), and **yield** to righteousness (*Rom. 6:19*). We must **draw nigh** to God (*James 4:8*), and **come out** from among those who will not draw nigh to Him (*II. Cor. 6:17*). We must **endure** hardness (*II. Tim. 2:3*), afflictions (*II. Tim. 4:5*), chastening (*Heb. 12:7*), persecution and tribulation (*II. Thess. 1:4*), grief (*I. Pet. 2:19*), and all things (*II. Tim. 2:10*). Therefore, we should **be** sober (*I. Thess. 5:6*), vigilant (*I. Pet. 5:8*) and holy (*Eph. 1:4*).

All these things are things we must do. They do not constitute an invisible legal position, and they are not things we can simply believe or confess. Moreover, God cannot and will not do them for us! We have to do them if we want to partake of the promises laid out in the Scripture. We have to do them if we want to make ourselves ready for the marriage of the Lamb!

It is true, we cannot do them in our own wisdom or strength. We can only do them through the power of the Holy Spirit. But we still have to do them. This is why Jesus died on the Cross. He died to *empower us* to cleanse ourselves. He sacrificed Himself so we could become a new creature. He shed His blood to bring each individual who was destined to be part of the new creation, forward, into the realization and attainment of that glorious destiny.

*And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which **made a marriage for his son**...And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which **had not on a wedding garment**: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot take him away cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but **few are chosen**.*

Matthew 22:1-2 & 11-14

God's people have been greatly misled with regards to the marriage of the Lamb. When the wedding finally takes place, many Christians will not be ready. They will be resting in the imputed righteousness of Christ, which has never really been worked into their lives, so that they themselves have become righteous. Thus, they will have no *actual* righteousness (ie: white linen; wedding garment). What man would want to marry a woman who didn't even care enough about their wedding to *obtain* a wedding dress or who was not interested enough in the marriage to *get ready* for the ceremony?

This is why the grace plus nothing error is so destructive. We must be prepared. Indeed, we must prepare ourselves! We must be cleansed and purified and bear Messiah's image. We must possess a wedding garment of *actual* righteousness or we will not be able to partake of the wedding! The vast majority of Christians have been brainwashed to believe they are *already* prepared for the wedding by grace. They have been told again and again that they have *already* been given a wedding garment by grace.

Although most of today's Christians are confident they understand the issue of righteousness, they really don't. As a matter of fact, I believe this is probably the least understood concept in the entire Christian faith. The confusion over righteousness doesn't become apparent as long as you stay within the confines of the New Testament because in the New Testament you can clearly see the difference between the "new man" (or the nature of Christ), which we receive when we are born again, and the "old man" (the fallen Adamic nature) which we were all born with.

However, things begin to get a bit confusing once you leave the New Testament and go back into the Old Testament because even though there was forgiveness and imputed righteousness in the Old Testament (*See: Psalms 31:1-2; Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:6,11,22,24*), there was no "new man" in the Old Testament. That's why Paul said in Romans 8:3: "*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son...*" The Law could not produce the perfection God was after in His people because under the first covenant, they only had one nature. They were not "born again" in the sense we know it, when they trusted in God by faith. They received forgiveness of sins, just like we do; they received justification, just like we do; and they received the imputed righteousness of Christ, just like

we do. But they did not receive a “new man”. The new man is a New Testament thing. What this means is that even though the saints of the Old Testament could have the righteousness of God ascribed to their account, they could not come forth in the *actual nature* of God. They had God’s righteousness imputed to them and covering them, but they could not actually *manifest* that righteousness. The only kind of righteousness they could manifest in the earth during that time was *human* righteousness.

Now, when you add what Isaiah said about all *our* righteousness being as filthy rags to this reality, guess what you end up with? Two plus two can only equal four. You end up with the idea that no one under the Old Testament *actually* lived righteously—they just *thought* they were living righteously. In reality, since any righteousness they accomplished would be *their own* righteousness, and since God views all of *our* righteousness as self righteousness (ie: filthy rags), they were only righteous in their legal position before God as a result of being justified. They were not righteous in truth and in deed. This kind of logical confusion makes it impossible for us to accept the testimony of the Bible regarding Old Testament saints.

*And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. And **it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.***

Deuteronomy 6:24-25

*And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. The LORD render to every man **his** righteousness and **his** faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed.*

I. Samuel 26:22-23

*And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul. . . They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me. The LORD rewarded me according to **my righteousness**: according to the cleanness of **my hands** hath he recompensed me.*

II. Samuel 22:1 & 19-21

*The **righteousness of the perfect** shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.*

Proverbs 11:5

*The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth **righteousness** shall be a sure reward.*

Proverbs 11:18

*The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? **He that walketh righteously**, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;*

Isaiah 33:14-15

*Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When **a righteous man** doth turn from **his** righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and **his righteousness** which **he hath done** shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.*

Ezekiel 3:19-20

*Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by **their righteousness**, saith the Lord GOD.*

Ezekiel 14:13-14

What think ye? Was any one in the Old Testament righteous? Did any of them they *live* righteously? I'm not talking about their *invisible* legal position, which is what "imputed" righteousness is. It's obvious they were *seen* as righteous and *covered* with righteousness through justification by faith. I'm talking about how they lived. If you think I'm just playing word games here, you're wrong. I was faced with this question many years ago while on a deliverance ministry trip. At the time, I had gone to Alaska by myself to spend a couple of months alone with the Lord. There was a deliverance ministry in that same area that I knew, and this minister invited me to go along with them up into the Yukon, to a little community of about 35 people who were living in the middle of nowhere, who had asked for some help in deliverance. This minister had also invited a sister who was visiting Alaska at the same time that I was, to join them as well.

I didn't know this sister personally, but I had heard her sing because she had made some really beautiful music tapes, and I had one of them. So I was kind of excited—in a strictly spiritual way, not a boy-girl thing—to be going on a ministry trip with her. Unfortunately, the first night we arrived at the community I

got into a confrontation with her over the issue of righteousness. At one point she quoted King David, where he said the Lord had rewarded him according to *his* righteousness, and she scornfully *mocked* him for being so arrogant and so deceived as to think he could actually *be* righteous.

I was not at the same point in my spiritual growth *then* as I am now, so I didn't handle the situation very well. I snapped at her and told her that her whole view of righteousness was distorted and gave her a bunch of Scriptures to challenge her position. But I was coming at her with the same attitude she displayed towards David, so all I did was make her my enemy. Since then I have run into this same kind of attitude, time and time again, and it's always based on the *same* misunderstanding of righteousness.

*The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For **the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.***

Psalms 11:5-7

*The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind: the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down: **the LORD loveth the righteous:***

Psalms 146:8

*They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD: but **such as are upright in their way are his delight.***

Proverbs 11:20

The Scripture says the Lord loves the righteous; and that He behold's the upright; and that the upright are His delight. Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that if God wanted us to universally apply Isaiah's statement about our righteousness being as filthy rags to all people, at all times, everywhere, there could be *no distinction* made between the righteous and the wicked in the Old Testament? If we universally apply Isaiah's statement, then the result will be that the wicked are wicked because they *manifest* unrighteousness; but the righteous are *also* wicked because the righteousness *they* manifest is actually self-righteousness—and we know that God views all self-righteousness as filthy rags, right?

Isn't this what the Scripture means when it says things like:

*The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were **any** that did understand, and **seek** God. They are **all** gone aside, they are **all together become filthy**: there is **none that doeth good, no, not one.***

Psalms 14:2-3

*God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. **Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.***

Psalms 53:2-3

*What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, **There is none righteous, no, not one:** There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; **there is none that doeth good, no, not one.***

Romans 3:9-12

When you present these kinds of questions to the average Christian, or even to the average pastor or Bible teacher, if they have any answer at all, it will be that when God says He is pleased with the righteous in the Old Testament, He's not talking about how people actually live on this earth. He's talking about their legal state of *imputed* righteousness. He loves the ones who have put their trust in Him, and have therefore been forgiven, justified, and made righteous legally. Because of imputed righteousness, all their sins—meaning, how they actually live—are forgiven and covered. God sees them as righteous, not because they actually are righteous, but because His righteousness has been credited to their accounts; and that's also *why* He loves them. He could never love them based on what they actually do, since everything they *do* is viewed by Him as filthy rags and religious self effort.

The only problem with this explanation is that it can't be supported by what is actually stated in the Scripture. When ever the writer of Proverbs, or the Psalmist, or any of the prophets, compare the righteous with the wicked, look closely at *what* they are comparing. They are not comparing what the righteous and the wicked *believe*. They are not comparing the invisible legal positions of the righteous and the wicked. They always compare what the righteous and the wicked do. The righteous *do* righteousness and the wicked *do* wickedness.

So we are back to the same question: Does God “love” the self-righteousness? Does He “behold” the (self-righteous of the) “upright”? Are the self-righteous (ie: the upright) a “delight” to Him? If the righteous *living* of a person is seen by God as filthy rags, and if all the righteous *deeds* of a person is viewed by Him as *self* righteousness, then it doesn't really matter what they do or how they live does it? The only thing that matters is that they have the *imputed* righteousness of God.

As always, the answer to the *seeming* perplexities and contradictions of Scripture is to have the Holy Spirit “rightly divide the Word of truth” for us. The answer is to get the whole council of the Bible on any given subject—and this is especially true when it comes to the issue of righteousness. The *worst* thing a person can do, when faced with a complex issue like righteousness, is take one side of the issue, establish that side as a theological prime axiom, and then proceed to build an entire theology on it. First of all, we need to take a good look at the whole passage in Isaiah, where he says all our righteousness are as filthy rags, for Isaiah's statement is always presented to us out of context.

Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence.

*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what **he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.***

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.

*But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O LORD, neither **remember iniquity for ever**: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?*

Isaiah 64:1-12

When you read this whole passage, it becomes obvious that Isaiah was talking about the *national* sins of Israel, which had persisted century after century, and which finally brought the wrath of God upon them. Their holy city was a desolation, the Temple had been burned with fire, and all their pleasant things had been laid waste. What Isaiah was saying was that while the people of Israel lived in a constant state of sin, rebellion, and idolatry, they *maintained their own righteousness*. They still saw themselves as God's people and as being faithful to Him. In *that* condition of complete self deception, all their religious works and service to God were indeed seen by Him as filthy rags. But notice what Isaiah says just before his statement about all our righteousness being as filthy rags,:

*For from of old they have not heard nor perceived by ear, neither has the eye seen a God besides Thee, who acts in behalf of **the one who waits for Him. Thou dost meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, who remembers Thee in Thy ways...***

NAS Isaiah 64:4-5a

Isaiah speaks of those who wait for God, and those who rejoice in doing righteousness, and those who remember God. Now think for a moment. Why would Isaiah talk about those who *wait* on God, who *remember* God, and who *do righteousness* if nobody could ever do these things, and if nobody ever actually did them? Why would Isaiah say God acts on the behalf of those who wait for Him, and that He rejoices in those who do righteousness and who remember Him, and then turn around and say *but* nobody has ever really remembered Him, or waited on Him, or worked righteousness, because all of these things are viewed by God as filthy rags? Isn't the one statement a direct contradiction of the other?

In this passage of Isaiah, the prophet is talking about hypocrisy. It's the righteousness of *the hypocrite* that is viewed by God as filthy rags. It's the *outward show* of righteousness by a people who were continually rebelling and sinning against God on the inside, that He rejected as filthy rags. Isaiah was not saying it's impossible for men to actually *be* righteous or *live* righteously—and any preacher who claims that's what he was saying needs to be thrown out of the pulpit because they are a *novice* at handling the Word of God. They have no business teaching anyone, anything!

So the first kind of “righteousness” that is seen by God as filthy rags is the righteousness of the *hypocrite*. God hates an outward show of piety when it is being used to cover and hide inward iniquity.

There is a second kind of righteousness that God hates as well. This kind of righteousness is described by the apostle John, when he said: “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1. John 1:8). God expects all people—whether they lived before the Law of Moses, during the Law of Moses, or after the Law of Moses—to acknowledge in their hearts that: “*...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). He demands that we all acknowledge that we are sinners by nature, and that left to ourselves, we would never seek God. If left to ourselves, we would never think about God or wait for Him or search for Him because the Adamic nature every one of us is born with is depraved and *hostile* towards God.

Finally, there is a third kind of righteousness that God hates—it's the kind people do in order to *earn* salvation. This is the kind of righteousness the apostle Paul railed against throughout his epistles. He called this kind of righteousness “works”, or “works of the law”. The Jews in particular, had been overtaken by a religious deception that caused them to think that if they kept the Law of Moses, this would earn them God's salvation. If they kept the Law, they deserved to be saved. This is why, when describing the religious zealotry of his fellow Jews who would not submit to the Cross, Paul said: “*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*” (Rom. 10:3).

When Paul said the Jews were trying to “establish their own righteousness”, he was not saying it's impossible for anybody to live righteously; so anyone who attempts to do so is trying to establish their own righteousness. That's the conclusion most of today's preachers have drawn. That's why they tell us we shouldn't even try to be righteous ourselves. They completely *misrepresent* what Paul is saying. All he was saying was that the Jews were trying to obtain forgiveness and justification by obedience to the Law, rather than by faith. They had long forgotten the real purpose of the Law—which was given to them for the purpose of sanctification, not justification—and the result was that for centuries they had been trying to be justified by the Law. This is why Paul said repeatedly that man cannot be justified by the Law (See: Rom. 3:20 & 28; & 4:2-3; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 5:5).

This is why it's important to understand the difference between the old and the new man, and the different levels of righteousness each one is capable of producing. Sanctification *equals* righteousness—that's what it is. The degree of sanctification people walk in reveals how righteous they are. Both the Old and New Covenants were designed to *produce sanctification* (ie: righteousness behavior). The difference between the two covenants lies in the level of righteousness each was designed to bring forth.

The Old Covenant only dealt with what the New Testament calls our "old man" (See: Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). That is, it only dealt with our original nature. As I said, until Jesus made atonement for sin and rose from the dead, there was no such thing as a new man. Before the establishment of the New Covenant there was only *one* man—the old man. Until then, mankind was stuck with his original, fallen nature and God had no choice but to work *within the framework* of that first nature. The Law of Moses was designed to produce a level of righteousness which the old man *could* bring forth. It was not the actual character of God. Rather, it was only a human representation of that character.

The different levels of sanctification produced by the two covenants has to do with our *experience*, not our *position* in Christ. It has to do with what we can manifest in the earth. Old Testament saints received the same justification, forgiveness and imputed righteousness that we do. However, they could not demonstrate the righteousness that was imputed to them. They could only manifest *human* righteousness because the fallen Adamic nature will never be able to bring forth the *actual* character and nature of God. So when God said to Israel: "...*be holy, for I am holy*" (Lev.19:2), He was not demanding that they be as *holy* as He Himself is—that wasn't even possible. Rather, He was telling them to walk in the level of righteousness He had designed for them, that which was explained by the Law, which the fallen Adamic nature was able to obey and bring forth.

God's ultimate goal is for His people to possess, experience, and manifest His actual character and nature to the nations of this earth. He does not want us to go through eternity only having the *imputed* righteousness of Jesus. As wonderful as this is, we must realize that whatever is imputed to us is not really ours by experience. It's only ours legally. It's a legal position, not a reality that we automatically manifest. God wants us to be able to manifest what we have by divine legal right. Under the Old Covenant this was not possible. That's why a "new" and "better" covenant had to be established. Through the "new man", the New Covenant is designed to bring forth in us the very character of Almighty God.

Here is where contemporary Evangelical theology falls flat on its face. We have been taught that it was not possible for the Jews to keep the Law of Moses. It was not possible for them to bring forth the righteousness the Torah was *designed* to produce. The basic assumption is that if the Jews had actually succeeded in keeping the Law, that obedience would have justified them and made Jesus' sacrifice unnecessary. Since the Bible plainly states that it is *not* possible to be justified by works, preachers just assume it was, likewise, not possible to keep the Law. They wax eloquent on the futility of trying to *earn* God's salvation by keeping the Law, and the Law is cast in a negative light, being associated closely with legalism, self-righteousness, and in general, man's attempt to save himself rather than submit to the Cross.

But you see, the Law of Moses was never intended to be a vehicle of justification! It was intended to be the means of sanctification—two totally different operations. Yes, it's true, many (not all) Jews *confused* the two operations and ended up trying to be justified by obedience to Moses. But this was never God's intention. God asked them to obey the Law so they would be *sanctified*. He asked them to obey the Law

so they would walk in righteousness. In order to be a “light” to the nations, which was their call and destiny, they had to walk in righteousness. Righteous behavior *is* the light. Therefore, it was not wrong for them to strive to obey the Torah. Obeying the Torah was *absolutely necessary* if they were to ever fulfill their divine calling as God’s people. It was only wrong to assume that such obedience could *justify* them. Do we all understand the difference between justification and sanctification?

Those who are under the influence of modern Evangelicalism never seem to question the illogical and unreasonable conclusions their theology demands. If God gave the Law of Moses to Israel as a means of justification—knowing in advance that no person would ever actually be able to obey it—then why did He punish Israel for not obeying it? Did He punish them because they failed to save themselves by their own works? The whole idea that the Law was a vehicle of justification—or even a *theoretical* vehicle of justification—is absurd. Yet this is exactly what Christians have been taught for centuries.

Sometimes it’s taught implicitly, sometimes it’s taught explicitly, but everywhere it is taught that under the first covenant there were *two* ways of salvation, at least theoretically. One way was by “keeping the Law”—which supposedly no one could ever do. The other way was by faith. Saying it was possible to be justified by keeping the Law, or even that it was theoretically possible, is worse than absurd because it *imputes unrighteousness* to God. It casts Him in the role of an unjust tyrant who played a cruel, Sadistic joke on His own people.

God gave Israel the Law and commanded them to obey it. He said *if* they obeyed it He would bless them, but *if* they disobeyed it He would curse them—all the while knowing that no one could possibly obey it. Since it was really impossible to obey the Law in the first place, no one did. The result was, God punished them severely. So God punished them for failing to obey something that was *impossible* for them to obey to begin with! What a twisted image of God's justice such ideas portray

I’m amazed at how many foundational doctrines of the Protestant Church ascribe injustice and wickedness to the Lord. People go like deaf and dumb sheep to churches every Sunday and listen to men accuse God of every kind of injustice imaginable, yet they never perceive what’s being said! Truly amazing.

It was possible to obey the Law. The Bible says people did obey it (*Ps. 119:55*). In addition, the whole sacrificial system was designed to provide forgiveness when a person did transgress the commandment (*Lev. 16:21-30*). This means that even if a person did break a particular commandment, as long as he repented in his heart and brought the appropriate sacrificial offering, he was *still* keeping the Law because he was keeping the *sacrificial* portion of the Law. He was doing what God had commanded.

Well, if it was possible to keep the Law, then why couldn't that obedience justify the person? Because in order to stand justified before God Almighty, a person has to possess *the same kind* of holy and righteous nature He possesses. He has to be *as holy* as God. Obedience to the Law, even perfect obedience, could not change man's basic problem, which is that he possesses only one nature—a nature that is contaminated by sin, a nature that is fallen. No matter how well it behaves, no matter what it does, it will never, by its own religious efforts, be *as holy* as God. God never intended to justify His people through their obedience to Moses. He used their obedience to *sanctify* them. When He said be ye holy, He meant be ye sanctified. The way to be ye sanctified was to obey ye the Law.

Under the Old Covenant, the saints were justified by faith and sanctified by obedience to God. That is, they were sanctified by obedience to the Law and the guidance of His priests and prophets. The Law and the Prophets explained and defined what sin was, not in order to condemn everyone to Hell, but to show the people how to *live righteously*.

Under the New Covenant, the saints are also justified by faith and sanctified by obedience to God. That is, they are sanctified by obedience to Him personally, through the Holy Spirit that has been given to them. This is why the Holy Spirit is sent into our lives. He replaces the Torah that was written on stone tablets. He becomes our Living Torah. He becomes our Law. His task is to show us what God says is sin and unclean. He does this so we, like the Hebrews, will know how to live righteously.

Most of us do not realize the critical role the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. His task is to *purify* the Church. He is more than a comforter, more than a good feeling. He is sent by the Father to lead us (*Rom. 8:14*) and teach us (*John 14:26*) and guide us into all truth (*John 16:13*). Not just doctrinal truth but transforming truth. His purpose is to change us and transform us into the image of Jesus through *the process* of sanctification (*II. Thess. 2:13; I. Pet. 1:2*). Sanctification is accomplished as we allow the Spirit to convict us of the sins we currently practice (*John 1:9*), so that He can then deliver us from that sin. This takes serious obedience on our part, for the Spirit never forces His will on anyone. As we obey the Spirit, He cleanses us and frees us from the bondage of sin, not only legally, but in experience as well.

Under the Old Covenant, the people of God could be delivered from the *penalty* of sin but they could not be delivered from the *power* of sin. The reason they could not be delivered from the power of sin is because the power of sin resides in the Adamic nature. That's why, even though justification, forgiveness and imputed righteousness were available under the Old Covenant, God still had to institute *better* covenant. Under this better covenant, a new experience, called the "born-again" experience, becomes available to us and we receive power over the sin nature.

God is doing much the same thing with New Testament believers as He did with Old Testament believers, but on a much deeper level. He has sanctified us, in the sense of calling us and setting us apart as His people and giving us His Spirit, His Word and the example of His Son. He has done all this so we, like the ancient Hebrews, will *sanctify ourselves* (ie: live righteously) and fulfill our call as a light to the nations. The only difference between us and them is that our "light" (righteousness) can be the very character and nature of God through the "new man". The light of the Hebrew people was limited to a dim (human) representation of God's actual character. One was the shadow of the reality; the other is the reality.

Righteousness is critical because it and it alone produces light. Light is not what we say. Light is not our invisible legal position. *Light is what we do*. God is not content that we spend our lives talking about light. He wants to make us light. As we become light, we will discover that people who would never listen to what we say about God, many times will be affected by *how we live* in spite of themselves.

Satan knows better than we do just how important walking in righteousness is to fulfilling our destiny. He also knows that *obedience* to the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is our Living Torah, is the key factor in coming forth in God's righteousness. It's that obedience that produces the light we are to be before the nations. No obedience—no righteousness. No righteousness—no light. If we do not *become* light, we are as worthless as salt that has lost its savor. Therefore, it has been Satan's plan from the very beginning to

convince us that obedience and actual righteousness are not important. He convinced Adam and Eve of it; he convinced Old Testament Israel of it; and he has convinced the New Testament Church of it as well. So any time you hear someone talk negatively about righteousness, watch out! Unless they are referring to one of the three kinds of righteousness that God hates, Satan is speaking through them.

Every false concept and teaching Satan has contrived is geared to produce one thing—disobedience. He isn't seeking to get us to deny the Christian faith, or reject the Savior. Rather, he seeks to instill in us a false sense of security by telling us that while it is good to obey God, and even profitable, it is not absolutely necessary to obey Him, for he knows that without radical obedience to Christ, you and I will have no "light" to shine before the nations. We can TALK about God and about religion all day and it won't affect any one. Talk is cheap; and religious *hypocrites* are as common as house flies. What God is after is light. What He wants to see is actual righteous living because righteous living is the LIGHT.

Unfortunately, most of today's Christians have bought into Satan's "grace plus nothing" lie. They put no importance on living a righteous life; and they don't even think about preparing themselves to meet the Lord. They are going to wake up one day and realize, too late, that they were fooled. They are going to realize that they made the same tragic mistake Israel did. After being called, chosen and set apart by God; after being brought into a covenant relationship with Him; they refused to *sanctify themselves*. They will realize that they allowed themselves to be deceived by Satan's ministers because they were too lazy to study to show themselves approved, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Instead, they chose to go to a building each week and drink whatever cool aid is being offered. They will see that they came under the influence of another spirit, which caused them to accept another gospel, which in turn, caused them to forfeit their calling and destiny as the "chosen people"—just as many Hebrews have done.

When the Bible says God's people in the Old Testament were "righteous", you better believe God means what He said. They *were* righteous; and they are going to be rewarded according to their righteousness, just like you and I will be rewarded according to *our* righteousness (or our lack thereof).

Abraham believed God and trusted Him by faith. That faith justified him. It also produced a lifestyle of righteous living, and that righteous living caused God to call Abraham His "friend" (*II. Chron. 20:2; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23*).

King David believed God and trusted Him by faith. That faith justified him. It also produced a lifestyle of righteous living, and that righteous living caused God to call David "a man after His own heart" (*I. Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22*).

Job believed God and trusted Him by faith. That faith justified him. It also produced a lifestyle of righteous living, and that righteous living caused God to say of Job: "...there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (*Job 2:3*).

Abraham was not God's friend; David was not a man after God's heart; and Job was not perfect and upright, because they had received the imputed righteousness of Christ. God said these things about them because of how they lived. These men were not sinless and they knew it. They never claimed to be sinless. They did, at times, claim to be living righteously and obeying God's commandments because they were, by and large, doing just that. But this claim to righteous living in no way equals a denial of all sin. That's just

the idiotic assumption Evangelical leaders read into those statements. Thus, when they teach on righteousness, the idea that continually comes across the pulpits is that nobody—either in the Old Testament or in the New Testament—can ever really say *they* are righteous, or that they *live* righteously, or that they *do* righteousness because we are all sinners.

This is such a perversion of what the Scripture actually teaches. My friends, if we are living righteously, if we are allowing the Holy Spirit to change us into His image every day, if we are walking in righteousness and obeying righteousness, then we *are* righteous! We don't have to be sinless before we can be righteous! Let me repeat that: **We don't have to be sinless before we can be righteous!** If we did, the apostle John would have never been able to say: "*Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous*" (1. John 3:7). Please notice that John didn't say, he that has received the imputed righteousness of Jesus by faith is righteous. He said he who **DOETH** righteousness **IS** righteous.

At first glance, it may not seem like such a big deal, this perverted view of righteousness that is so common today; but it is. If we think nobody can actually be righteous, our whole view of Scripture will be perverted, as well as our understanding of redemption. For instance, let's look at that passage on the marriage of the Lamb again. Remember that John said the fine linen is the righteousness of saints? Well, the Greek there is actually plural. It says, "*righteousnesses*". So it's talking about more than even the character and nature of God which has been worked in us. It's actually referring to the righteous *acts* or righteous *deeds* of the saints. In other words, when Jesus returns, each of us is going to "wear our works". We are going to be clothed with the deeds we have done in this life!

In this light, the importance of what we do and how we live in this life takes on much greater weight, doesn't it? Take a few minutes and think about the ramifications of being clothed for all eternity with *how you have lived* and *what you have done*; as opposed to being clothed for all eternity with what you have believed, or with what Jesus has done!

If this is true, what kind of "garment" do you suppose most "Christians" will be given on Judgment Day? Not a very pleasant picture, is it? Maybe *now* you can understand *why* Jesus said there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth on that day.

Next week, Lord willing, I am going to show how this perverted "grace plus nothing" error has twisted and perverted everyone's understanding of the book of Job. Job was God's champion; but everyone says he was self-righteous.