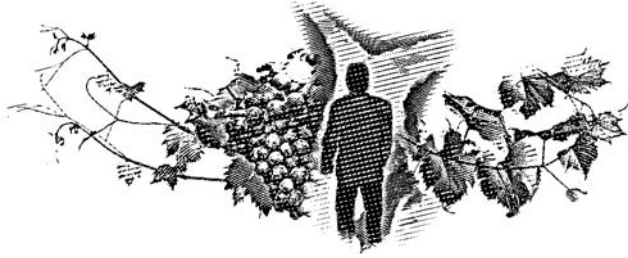


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Righteousness



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 23:25–28, Rom. 3:28, 8:4, 10:3, Gal. 3:6, 1 John 2:3–6, 5:1–3.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled’ ” (*Matthew 5:6, NKJV*).

Last week we finished our study on nine branches of the fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*). The next two weeks we will study two more: “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (*Eph. 5:9, NKJV*). In this verse, Paul repeats the reference to “goodness” while he adds righteousness and truth. This week we look at what this “righteousness” is.

We understand righteousness in two ways. First, there is the imputed righteousness of Christ, which is what Jesus has done for us, the righteousness that covers us and that is our title to heaven. Second, there is the imparted righteousness of Christ, which is what He does in us, through the Holy Spirit, to mold us into His image. Thus understood, righteousness has two inseparable components, even though it’s all really one righteousness—the righteousness of Christ, without which we would have no hope of salvation.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 13.*

The Necessity of Righteousness

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28*). “For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright” (*Ps. 11:7, NKJV*). “The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves him who follows righteousness” (*Prov. 15:9, NKJV*). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (*1 Pet. 2:24, NKJV*). “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (*Rom. 8:4, NKJV*). “ ‘But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him” (*1 John 2:29, NKJV*).

Referring to the texts quoted above, respond to the following questions:

- If we cannot be justified by the law, how then are we justified?

- Although we know that God hates sin but loves sinners, what wrong conclusions must we avoid?

- What does “that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” mean? Can we ever keep the law well enough to fulfill it? Or does Paul mean something else? If so, what?

- How should our lives be changed when we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?

- What does it mean “to do righteousness”? Can we be righteous without doing righteousness? Justify your answer.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 10:3*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Affirm that righteousness is found only in Jesus.

Feel: Desire peace with God and self.

Do: Surrender completely to God's will in Christ.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Jesus—the Only Source of Righteousness

A Righteousness that saves and sanctifies is found only in Jesus. There is no alternative. This foundational truth is expressed variously in Scripture.

1. In His parable of the vine, how does Jesus illustrate that only in Him can we be righteous?
2. How does a high view of holiness help us to understand that righteousness is unobtainable by human effort?
3. In what ways does self-righteousness victimize us?

II. Feel: Peace With God

A How does justification by faith lead to peace with God?

B What feelings arise out of turning away from self-righteousness and turning to Christ?

III. Do: Righteousness and Obedience

A The Jewish nation did not submit to the righteousness provided in Jesus but placed confidence in obedience to the law.

1. Because obedience is a product of righteousness by faith, in what ways is there a danger that it could lead to a legalistic formalism in behavior?
2. The majority of the gifts of the Spirit find their expression in our relationships with other people. What connection is there between love, peace, kindness, gentleness, and righteousness by faith?
3. How should we understand the definition of righteousness as doing right and avoiding legalism?

► **Summary:** Righteousness only in Jesus—there is no other way to Christian victory. Surrender to Christ and obedience to His will result in growth.

Do-It-Yourself Righteousness

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (*Rom. 10:3, NKJV*). What do you think Paul was writing about here? About whom was he writing, and how might these folks have tried to establish their “own righteousness”? Given human nature, why is that impossible, anyway?

A “do-it-yourself” activity is one in which a person does or makes something (as in woodworking or home repair) without professional training or assistance. In its broadest sense it is an activity in which one does something oneself or on one’s own initiative. We sometimes refer to a particularly successful person as a self-made man or woman. According to the Bible, however, a “do-it-yourself” approach to true righteousness is impossible. There is nothing that we can do of ourselves, no matter how hard we try, to be righteous before God. Our righteousness is as “filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*). In fact, seeking to make ourselves righteous often leads to the opposite result.

Read Matthew 5:20 and 23:25–28. How does Jesus here pinpoint the problem that comes from those who seek to make themselves righteous?

The crucial thing for Christians to understand is how utterly dependent they are upon Christ for their righteousness. What makes them holy before God is what Christ has done for them, not what they do. The moment someone loses sight of that truth, it’s so easy for self-righteousness to rise up, along with pride and inner corruption. The scribes and Pharisees were prime examples of how that happens. So concerned with their outward deeds of piety, they lost sight of what really matters.

In what ways might you be guilty of the same sin as the scribes and Pharisees? How might this trap be more subtle than we think?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The righteousness of Jesus Christ is the only righteousness that satisfies God’s standard of holiness. Humanity is powerless to match it—or duplicate it. It is the free gift of God, made operational in the life of the believer through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

Just for Teachers: The teacher’s calling this week is to help the class understand that God has provided us the power to live righteously right here on earth. But to do so, we must accept the gift of Christ’s righteousness and surrender unreservedly to the leading of the Holy Spirit as He brings the life of Jesus into the life of the believer. The promise of God is that all who “‘hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . shall be filled’ ” (*Matt. 5:6, NKJV*)—with Jesus!

There is no greater challenge in the life of the believer than how to produce *works* that match one’s profession of faith. For many the struggle is something akin to that of Sisyphus, the Greek mythological figure whose eternal curse was to roll a huge boulder up a hill each day, only to watch it come tumbling down again. The apostle Paul captured the Sisyphean struggle of the believer when he wrote, “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (*Rom. 7:15, NKJV*).

Consider This: Discuss with your class the following question: How can the Holy Spirit’s work be measured in the life of the believer as He teaches him or her how to live righteously?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

Just for Teachers: The goal of this week’s Bible Commentary section has three parts: (1) to emphasize that Jesus alone fills our hunger and thirst for righteousness, (2) to demonstrate the dangers of misunderstanding the gift of Christ’s righteousness, and (3) to stress that a knowledge of Christ’s ministry is not enough to grow the believer in grace.

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Christ Our Righteousness *(Rom. 5:17)*

Read Romans 5:17–19 and summarize in your own words what Paul is saying here. How are we condemned, and how do we become righteous?

If the righteousness of Jesus is a gift, how do we obtain it? *Gal. 3:6, James 2:23.*

In Romans 5:19, notice the emphasis on disobedience and on obedience. One man’s disobedience, Adam’s, led to all of us becoming sinners. This is basic biblical teaching. Adam’s sin brought the downfall of the human race. We’re all, each of us, every day of our lives, living with the results. No one is immune.

The same verse, however, also talks about obedience. Whose obedience? Of course, the obedience of Christ, who alone has the righteousness needed for salvation, the righteousness given to all those who will “receive the abundance of grace.” Indeed, in that same verse Paul says that those who receive this grace get “the gift of righteousness.” Notice, it is a gift. As a gift it must be unearned and undeserved. The moment it’s earned, or deserved, it’s no longer grace (*Rom. 4:4*).

Yet, it’s not a blanket gift. The righteousness of Christ isn’t automatically bestowed on everyone (*Rom. 5:17, NASB*). Paul is clear. It comes to those who will receive it; that is, it is given to those who claim it by faith—such as Abraham, who believed God, and it was “accounted to him for righteousness” (*Gal. 3:6*).

Do you really understand what it means to be saved by faith? How well do you grasp the idea that it’s only the righteousness of Jesus, credited to you by faith, that allows you to stand righteous and justified before God? What can you do to better grasp this wonderful provision, the foundation of the gospel?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**I. He's All We Need** (*Review Matthew 5:6 and John 6:32–35 with your class.*)

Jesus knew the audience that had gathered before Him to hear what later would be called the Sermon on the Mount. These everyday people knew the perils of living in a place with very little annual rainfall. They understood the dangers of getting lost in the semiarid desert of the ancient Near East. With little vegetation and a scarce water supply, knowing where to find sustenance was never taken lightly. Yet, Jesus spoke of a deeper hunger and thirst, a paucity of the soul that never could be filled by anything earthly.

Several months later in another discourse, Jesus unfolded what He only had hinted at in the Sermon on the Mount. In John 6, Jesus revisited the hunger for righteousness motif, but this time He offered a way to fix the problem. He offered Himself as the Bread of Life. Jesus seems to say, “All you need is in Me.”


Consider This: To those hungering and thirsting for righteousness—both that which is imparted and that which is imputed—Jesus doesn't offer a list of dos and don'ts. He offers Himself. Why is this? Why didn't Jesus simply give humanity a code of conduct to follow, such as the law, and wish them good luck?

II. Lethal Ignorance (*Review Romans 10:3 with your class.*)

Ignorance may be bliss when considering some subjects, but it is not true of the work of Jesus. Ignorance is never more lethal than when humans fail to understand the meaning of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection—in short, the good news of salvation.

Monday's lesson study makes the point that many believers try to construct a do-it-yourself righteousness to somehow make themselves acceptable to God. This waste of time and effort stems from misunderstanding what Christ accomplished for us through His earthly ministry. The good news is that Christ has obtained salvation completely and fully for all humanity! We simply need to accept it for ourselves.

In Romans 10:3, Paul is referring to the ignorance of the Jews, who should have known that they were powerless to construct a righteousness of their own. They had a “zeal of God” (*vs. 2*), but it was not according to knowledge, so they established, or set up, a righteousness of their own, a righteousness driven by their own works.

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Righteousness and Obedience *(1 John 2:29)*

Though we are covered by the righteousness of Christ, that righteousness must be revealed in our lives. Righteousness isn't just a legal declaration. It also becomes a reality in the life of the person who has it.

How carefully we should heed John's words: "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (*1 John 3:7*).

What might we be deceived about in regard to what it means to be righteous?

Righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit that is connected to obedience. To some people, obedience is inconsistent with salvation by faith. On occasion one might hear, "Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, won't you accept Him as the Lord of your life?" The implication seems to be that our obedience to the will of God and our salvation are separate issues. That's a radical misinterpretation of what salvation is. John wrote that living a righteous life is a verifiable indicator of those who have salvation.

Read 1 John 2:3–6. What's John's point there?

When the subject of obedience is raised, it is not unusual for someone to point out that we are not saved by works. While there can be no doubt that Lucifer's obedience to the will of God did not put him into heaven, we must bear in mind that it was his disobedience that caused him to be expelled. The same can be said for Adam and Eve. Their obedience did not put them into the Garden of Eden, but their disobedience to the will of God resulted in their being put out of the garden.

"Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

How well do you manifest the fruit of righteousness in your life? What practices might you need to give up that are hindering the fruit of righteousness in your life? (Be careful not to try to rationalize them away!)

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Why did some of the people of Paul’s day fail to understand and accept the righteousness of Christ? In what ways do we repeat the same mistakes? What is the antidote to avoiding them?

III. Be Transformed (Review Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 12:1, 2 with your class.)

Is there a more difficult truth in Scripture for believers to accept than the one found in Isaiah 64:6? Humans do a few things well, but meeting God’s standard of righteousness is not one of them. But there’s good news, so we need not despair. What is it? Jesus didn’t just save us from the ultimate penalty of sin by dying the second death for us; He also saved us from a life of sinful living. He is able to produce good works—righteousness—in us.

In Paul’s discussion of the Jewish penchant for trying to make themselves righteous through good works, he mentions their failure to submit themselves to God (*Rom. 10:3*). They “prided themselves upon their knowledge of God and the divine law (*Rom. 2:17–20*) but in actuality they were refusing to conform to God’s will. . . . No obstacle to salvation by grace is so great as the self-righteousness of a sinner.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 595. The Jewish knowledge about God was not matched by a willingness to obey and be transformed by God.

The good works that many Christians yearn to produce from day to day can come about only as they submit to God’s leading through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the life of Christ—along with good works—into the life of the believer and makes the believer’s efforts effectual.

Consider This: Is it difficult to submit one’s entire life to God? What does it mean to surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit? What role does God’s Word play in the process of submission and surrender?

► STEP 3—Apply

Thought Questions:

- 1 What does a righteous life look like? Describe in your own words what it means to live a righteous life. If you had to explain to a nonbeliever what

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The Righteous Life

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:1–3).

How does John tie in the love of God with the love other fellow believers have and with keeping the commandments? Why would he link all these together?

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. *The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.*”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 97, 98, emphasis supplied.

And what better way to inspire a desire to be loyal to God than through contemplation of His incredible sacrifice in our behalf on the cross? There’s no power in telling people that they have to keep the law. The power comes in pointing people to Jesus and to His substitutionary death in our behalf. The power comes from letting sinners know that their sins can be forgiven through Jesus, and that they can stand perfect before God in the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

Love of God, and not the fear of hell and condemnation, should be the power that motivates our lives, and nothing will cause us to love God more than focusing on the Cross and the riches and promises that are ours through it.

Do you really love God? If so, how do you know? (Might you be deceiving yourself?) What do you do or say that reveals the reality of this love? In other words, what evidence is there that this love is real?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

it means to live a righteous life, what would your definition be? Take time to write it out.

2 Some have described the life of the Christian as one never-ending battle. Others take the opposite view: all one has to do is accept what Jesus has done for us through His birth, life, death, and resurrection, and submit moment by moment to the Holy Spirit's leading. Where do you fall on this continuum? Is your Christian walk easy, difficult, or a mixture of both?

Application Questions:

1 Living a victorious Christian life really means allowing Jesus to live out His life within us. This process requires the disciple of Christ to submit to the discipline brought into the life by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. How do spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, service, meditation, and witnessing, help us to live the life of Christ?

2 In John 15:1–8, Jesus implored His disciples to remain in Him and to abide in Him. List at least three practical ways in which believers can abide in Christ.

► STEP 4—Create

Activity for the Coming Week: Ask your students to create a quiet space during the coming week where they can spend uninterrupted time with God. They may spend this time contemplating the sacrifice of Jesus, the gift of salvation, or the rest that Jesus offers. The key to this exercise is for them to meditate on what Jesus has done and is doing in their lives.

Further Study: “It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. ‘He that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.’ ‘Hereby we do know that we know Him if we keep His commandments.’ 1 John 3:24; 2:3. This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can we avoid the trap of legalism, that of thinking that our works will save us or that of cheap grace, thinking that our works have nothing at all to do with our salvation? How do we strike the right balance here? Which ditch do you tend to lean more toward, cheap grace or legalism?
- ❷ What is the inherent danger of having our lives driven by the desire to do good works? What can this lead to, and how can we avoid it?
- ❸ Think of a person you know who seems to be “righteous.” What is this person like? How does he or she act? How does he or she treat people? What does this person talk about? What can you learn from this person?
- ❹ We tend to think of righteousness in individual terms, which is correct. But is there not a community element, as well? Can our church community be “righteous”? If so, how? What would a “righteous” church community look like? How does yours compare with the ideal that you’ve come up with?
- ❺ If salvation by faith means more than merely making a profession of faith in Christ and having our names registered on the church roll, then what does it really mean? What is “faith” in the biblical sense of the term?