



CHAPTER III

Righteousness by Faith

1. Before we can enter the kingdom of heaven, what must our righteousness exceed?

“I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 5:20.

2. What kind of righteousness did they have?

“They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness.” Rom. 10:3.

NOTE.—The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was self-righteousness. They depended upon their good works for justification. But we cannot enter heaven on the merit of our own righteousness.

3. Can we be justified by the deeds of the law?

“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Rom. 3:20.

4. Why not?

“All have sinned.” Rom. 3:23.

NOTE.—All having sinned, and the wages of sin being death, it is clear that all are under sentence of death. It would not help us, even if we kept the law perfectly the remainder of our lives, after we had committed one sin. We would have to die for that one transgression. And as we have all sinned, therefore we cannot hope to be justified by our good works. If we had never sinned, then we would be justified on the merit of our own righteousness; but, alas! having already sinned, and being under the sentence of death, if we are now to come before the judgment bar of God clad in our own righteousness, we are without hope.

5. How is righteousness represented in the Scripture?

It is represented as a garment of covering. Man’s righteousness is represented as a garment of filthy rags. See Isa. 64:6; Zech. 3:1-4. God’s righteousness is represented as fine linen, clean and white. Rev. 19:8; 3:18. Our righteousness is just as far below the standard which God requires as filthy rags are inferior to fine linen, clean and white.

6. In what light does Heaven view the self-righteous man?

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Rev. 3:17.

NOTE.—Could men but see themselves in the light of heaven, they would, as Job of old, abhor themselves, and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:6.

7. What counsel does Christ give to man in his miserable, wretched, and naked condition?

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." Rev. 3:18.

8. In what are the saints clad?

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." Rev. 7:9. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor 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." Rev. 19:7, 8.

NOTE.—Christ is the Lamb of God. He will receive his kingdom and be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords at the hand of his Father, at the close of his mediatorial work in heaven, just before he starts for this earth to raise from the dead his sleeping saints, and to translate those who are living, and take them to the mansions prepared for them. After returning to heaven with all the glorified saints, they celebrate the marriage supper. None will be permitted to enjoy this glorious feast except those who have on the wedding garment of "fine linen, clean and white." This is expressly declared to be "the righteousness of saints." But as their own righteousnesses are as filthy rags, it is very evident that they have been provided with this garment of spotless righteousness by him who invited them to the marriage supper, and just so it is. While all are invited, yet Christ counsels us to buy of him the white raiment, the wedding garment, that we may be clothed. Those who reject this spotless cover-

ing of righteousness, presuming to enter the feast in their own rags of righteousness, will be cast out. This is forcibly and beautifully shown in the parable of the marriage of the king's son, put forth by Christ. See Matt. 22:1-13.

Thus we see we cannot come into God's presence in our own righteousness. This must be completely discarded, and we must accept at the hand of Christ a spotless robe of righteousness which has been provided for all who accept the gospel invitation.

Christ's Obedient Life Imputed to the Sinner

9. By whose obedience are we made righteous?

"By the obedience of one [Christ] shall many be made righteous." Rom. 5:19.

10. What has God made his Son to be in our behalf?

"He [God] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin." 2 Cor. 5:21.

11. Why was this done?

"That we [who are sinners] might be made the righteousness of God in him."—*Ibid.*

NOTE.—Christ knew no sin: his life was spotless. Yet upon him was placed our guilt, and he who did no sin died in our behalf, a condemned criminal. Christ took our place before the law as a condemned criminal, and we are given his place before the law as justified saints. By our disobedience he is made a sinner; by his obedience we are made righteous.

12. Upon what condition can we be made righteous by the obedience of Christ?

“Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.” Rom. 3:21, 22.

NOTE.—The law and the prophets stand as two witnesses testifying that the righteousness which was manifested in Christ’s life was the righteousness of God. This righteousness is imputed only to those who believe. While it is unto all, yet it is upon, or serves as a robe of spotless covering for, only those who believe. The law and the prophets bear testimony that Christ’s life is just, because he did no sin; and when his obedient life is imputed to us, we are given the same standing before God that he had; we are counted just, and “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom. 5:1. We then stand before God just as if we had never committed sin. Thus by the obedience of Christ we are made righteous.

But, says one, do not our good works help to justify us? Listen: “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” Eph. 2:8, 9. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Rom. 3:24-28.

Thus we see that the law of faith excludes our own works entirely as a means of justification. We must come to see

ourselves just as we are,—poor, miserable, blind, and naked,—and be willing to receive at the hand of Christ a robe of spotless righteousness, made after God’s own order. This will exclude all boasting on our behalf, and will entitle Christ to all the glory; for God hath made Christ to be unto us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” 1 Cor. 1:30, 31. Not one soul that enters the kingdom of heaven will ever boast of having done one thing to merit salvation. Christ will receive all the glory. The life of Christ is in itself complete. We can add nothing to it, and those who accept him are made “complete in him.” Col. 2:10.

Justification Maintained by Faith

13. By faith we are made just, given a perfect standing before God, and have peace with him. How are we to maintain this perfect standing?

“The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:17. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.” Col. 2:6.

NOTE.—We receive Christ by faith, and are made complete in him. We are counted as though we had never committed one single sin. This perfect standing is maintained in the same manner in which it is received—by faith.

Right here is a vital point; here is where many make a fatal mistake. They profess justification by faith at conversion. This gives them peace with God. Then they attempt to maintain their just standing before God by doing good works. The result is that they soon begin to see defects in their lives; a sense of condemnation takes hold of them, they become discouraged, and many give up in despair. Others

struggle on, as the saying is, part of the time in the valley, and part of the time on the mountain. They are governed entirely by their feelings, and their feelings in turn are governed by their experience: and without fail, such persons will soon begin to compare themselves among themselves by saying, "Well, I guess if this or that person gets there, I will get there." But, dear reader, this is not the path of the just; for the just shall live by faith. The complete standing which we receive in Christ Jesus in answer to our faith at conversion, is maintained throughout our lives by faith, so that every moment of our lives we are given a standing before God which is "holy, unblamable, and unreprouvable in his sight." Col. 1:22.

But says one, Do we not commit sin after we are converted? Yes, every one; at the best, our lives are frequently found to be imperfect; and for this very reason it becomes necessary to impute to us the righteousness of Christ every moment of our lives. But this righteousness is imputed only to those who believe; hence the importance of "holding fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." The imperfections and mistakes of our lives are not imputed to us; we stand before God as perfect. Not because we are perfect, but because we are robed in Christ's righteousness, and are accepted in the Beloved. O, what a blessed state to be in! David describes it in the following language: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered [with Christ's righteousness]. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Rom. 4:7, 8. What a merciful protection to the child of God to have a spotless character imputed to him every moment of his life, while here in the weakness of sinful flesh.

But you inquire, Do we not have to maintain good works? Most assuredly! Our delight will be to know and do God's will. "Faith without works is dead." Saving faith always works. It works by love, and purifies the heart. Gal. 5:6;

Acts 15:9. Good works are the evidence of faith. They are not the means of our justification, but rather the fruit. While it is true that we stand just before God by works, yet it is not by our own works. Christ lived the life which we ought to have lived. This obedient life is imputed to us. Thus by his obedience we are made righteous. And not only are we justified and kept just by faith alone, without our own works, but the good works which follow justification are produced by Christ living in us by his representative, the Holy Spirit; for of ourselves we can do nothing. Thus in the matter of our salvation, Christ is all and in all, and we are made complete in him.

Dear reader, have you accepted Christ as your complete Saviour? Have you received at his hand that spotless robe of righteousness which he has so graciously provided for your covering, and are you now making your boasts in the Lord? or are you among the multitude who are, with a degree of satisfaction, watching your neighbors' faults, and saying, "Well, if my neighbor gets to heaven, I am sure I will, for I am as good as he is"? Come, don't be deceived in this matter. Take a good look in the mirror of heaven, and see yourself as God sees you, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Hear the counsel of the Faithful Witness imploring you to receive at his hand the garments of righteousness, which will admit you to the marriage supper of the Lamb. O, receive them, put them on by faith, and then you can say, with all confidence, "If Christ is there, I shall be there; for I am in him," and you can say with the prophet of old, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Isa. 61:10.