

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

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THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

A study of God’s characteristics is so eye-opening. It causes us to be in awe of Him, strengthens our faith, and humbles us as we strive to live for His glory. “*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable*” (Psalm 145:3).

In the Bible, the expression “*the righteousness of God*” sometimes refers to the way that God makes men righteous, that is, God’s system of justifying men (Romans 1:16,17). However, in our current study, when we speak about “*the righteousness of God,*” we have reference to His personal righteous nature.

The Bible declares, “*Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful*” (Psalm 116:5). How righteous is God? “*The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works*” (Psalm 145:17).

In the New Testament, the Greek word “δικαιοσ/ dikaios” is translated into English as “just” and “righteous.” What does that Greek word mean? In reference to humans, its definition is: “in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God” [Thayer, word 1342 via e-Sword]. When applied to God, the word “δικαιοσ/dikaios” means, “. . . rendering to each his due; and that in a judicial sense, passing just judgment on others . . .” [Thayer, Ibid]. Another source: “In the NT it denotes ‘righteous,’ a state of being right, or right conduct . . . Said of God, it designates the perfect agreement between His nature and His acts (in which He is the standard for all men)” [Vine; www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/ved].

When speaking of the Lord and what is righteous, the Bible indicates that God’s *commands* are righteous (Psalm 119:172), God *loves* righteousness (Hebrews 1:9), God’s *ways* are righteous/just (Revelation 15:3), and God’s *judgments* are righteous (Revelation 16:7).

Because of God’s righteousness/justice, (1) He forgives those who comply with His terms of salvation (1 John 1:9), (2) He performs His words by keeping His promises (Nehemiah 9:7,8), (3) He upholds His people (Psalm 129:1-5), (4) He does not forget His children’s faithful activities (Hebrews 6:10), and (5) He punishes the wicked (Revelation 16:5-7). “To affirm God’s justice is to affirm that in all situations and in all details, God will do right . . . He is morally capable of expressing or taking only

those actions which are in keeping with His character. He is inwardly perfect; and therefore, His outward activity must necessarily be consistent with His perfection. He *cannot* clear the guilty. He *will* not clear the guilty [emphasis mine, rdc] . . . Justice demands that the evil shall be punished and that the righteous shall be rewarded” [Rex A. Turner, Sr., *Systematic Theology* (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Christian School of Religion, 1989), pp. 50,51].

If Jehovah makes a law and in connection with it establishes a penalty for violating it, since He is righteous/just, He must punish the lawbreakers. By God’s mercy, though, Jesus offered Himself as a substitute sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus, the perfectly righteous One “*bore our sins in His own body on the tree*” (1 Peter 2:24). In short, the Christ “*suffered once for sin, the just for the unjust . . .*” (1 Peter 3:18).

The Bible also affirms that through Jesus, God will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). If God is truthful in what He communicates in His word, and if He is righteous/just, then He will deal with man in precisely the way that He has declared in His truth.

In view of God’s righteousness and His declarations about how to be forgiven of sins, it is inappropriate to ask Him to save a person who has refused to submit to His plan of salvation. After the death of one who clearly did not obey the gospel’s conditions of salvation, some well-intending people may remark that they have prayed and asked God to be merciful to and forgive the lost person. If we trust God’s integrity, we know He will deal justly with all people. If He has said that He will save those who obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9), then to pray for Him to save the disobedient shows either (1) a *lack of faith* in God’s word or (2) a *disregard* for what He says. Because of God’s righteousness, He must do what is right/just. He must act in harmony with what He has revealed to mankind in His truth. To do otherwise would make His words meaningless and unreliable.

If the biblical conditions of pleasing God do not really “count,” then why did He give them to us? To be righteous, God must act in perfect harmony with His revealed will in every single instance. He does!

-- Roger D. Campbell

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 5-10

In the last portion of Exodus 4, we read that the Israelites accepted the message which Jehovah sent to them via Moses and Aaron and they worshiped (4:29-31). What follows in the divine record of Exodus 5-10 is the history of those two brothers going before the mighty monarch of Egypt and the first nine plagues which ensued.

5:1-4 – The 1st meeting of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh. Through those two men, Jehovah charged Egypt's king to let His people go, that is, release them from slavery. Pharaoh's response: "*Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go*" (5:2). The man had a pride problem, as the Lord later rebuked him with this question: "*How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?*" (10:3). The Bible also declares that "*Pharaoh was stubborn*" (13:15). Those who are proud and stubborn do not submit to God!

5:6-21 – Another level of the king's response to the Lord's command to release the Israelites is seen in this passage, as Pharaoh cruelly caused the children of Israel to suffer more and work even more strenuously. In turn, the Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron that matters had worsened because of those two (5:21).

6:5-8 – God assured Israel that, despite the difficulties they faced in life, He would be with them and bless them. God promised, "*I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . . I will rescue you . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you as My people, and I will be your God . . . I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham . . .*" May we learn to latch on to God's promises by faith, be strengthened by His reassuring words, and guard our tongue when we face unpleasant situations in life.

Let us now consider some different aspects of the first nine plagues which came on the land of Egypt. A plague is an affliction, calamity, epidemic disease, or pestilence.

All of the plagues in Egypt were miracles, not accidents or coincidences. The Lord Himself called the plagues "wonders" (3:20) and "signs" (10:1). God was in control of every plague. He spoke, and they took place at His command (Psalm 105:28-35). In some cases, Jehovah predicted a plague, and if He did make such a prediction, it always happened *when* and *how* He said it would (Exodus 9:5,18; 10:4).

What was the purpose of the plagues? (1) They showed the Lord's power and that He is the one true God. God proclaimed to Pharaoh that, ". . . *I will send all My plagues . . . that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth . . . that I may show my power in you . . . and that my name may be declared*

in all the earth" (9:14,16); (2) The plagues convinced the Egyptians to release the Israelites (3:19,20); (3) Via the plagues, the Lord executed judgment against the idols of the Egyptians (12:12) — the so-called gods of Egypt were powerless to prevent Him from carrying out the plagues and delivering His people.

The plagues were so disruptive and destructive to Egypt, yet in some instances, the Bible plainly says that they did not affect the Israelites (8:22,23 – flies; 9:3,4,6 – pestilence; 9:25,26 – hail and fire; 10:22,23 – darkness). What does this indicate? (1) That the Lord made a difference between His people and the Egyptians (8:22,23), (2) God protected His children, and (3) God was totally in control of the plagues.

How did the Egyptians respond to the plagues? As we noted, Pharaoh refused to humble himself (10:3). The king cried for relief, confessed his sin, indicated that he would change, then when the Lord removed a plague, he went back to his old rebellious ways (9:27,28,34; 10:16,17,20). What about the Egyptian "magicians?" They confessed that the plagues were God's finger at work (8:19). Prior to the plague of locusts, Pharaoh's servants said Egypt was destroyed and pleaded for the Israelites to be released (10:7).

Another interesting topic connected with the plagues was the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The Bible speaks of this in three different ways. First, the Bible directly states that "*the heart of Pharaoh became hard*" (9:6). In addition, the Scriptures affirm that "*the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh*" (9:12). Finally, it is written, "*But Pharaoh hardened his heart*" (8:32). Thus, both Jehovah and Pharaoh himself had a part in hardening the monarch's heart.

Why would God want to harden Pharaoh's heart? He did so in order to convince him that Jehovah is God and to cause him to release His people (3:19-21). We note that throughout the whole process of God communicating with Pharaoh and sending the plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh had a free will to do as he pleased. At any time he could have humbled himself and obeyed God. He refused to do so (10:3). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not to cause him to be lost eternally, but to persuade him to heed God's instructions. Again, at any time he could have chosen to submit to the Lord's will. He chose not to.

How did the Lord God harden Pharaoh's heart? God gave the ruler commands that his stubborn nature would not accept. God pushed, so to speak, and Pharaoh obstinately pushed back. Furthermore, the plagues that God sent infuriated Pharaoh, causing his anger and rebellious spirit to remain intact.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Overcoming Apathy

Jesus' letter to the church of Laodicea, found in Revelation 3:14-22, draws our attention to the problem of an apathetic spirit. Jesus' admonition to them was: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (3:19).

The strength of Jesus' statement, "I will vomit you out of My mouth" (3:16), may shock us, considering that there is no mention of the sins that are numbered against the other congregations to whom Jesus writes in Revelation 2 and 3. What we see is a congregation that is not committed to serving God. It seems that they have simply taken a seat with His name on the door. It bears noting that in the letters to each of the other congregations, Jesus mentions something good about them, but not to this one. When a congregation or an individual Christian has lapsed into an apathetic state, what good can come from them?

It is one thing to recognize the problem of apathy, but quite another to change it. The Bible is clear that we have a role to fill in overcoming apathy. In laying out a portrait of faithfulness, Paul wrote, "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). The understanding is that zeal can be cultivated. When we discover apathy in any part of life, it takes decision and diligence to bring about change.

Sometimes apathy may be the result of repetitive sin. When Christians stray from the path of faithfulness into sin, it can stifle our motivation in many ways. If we have become burdened in sin, we are going to have to face our wrongs and repent (1 John 1:5-2:6).

It could be that the source of apathy is a lack of spiritual discipline. We may need to start small – daily Bible reading, scheduled prayer times each day – we must start somewhere in this fight. Paul instructed Timothy to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11,12).

Perhaps we fill our minds with too many trivial things. If too much time is devoted to social media, television, or hobbies, we face a danger of saturation — being filled with things that, ultimately, do not matter. We must be filled with the things that matter most (Romans 12:1,2).

Self-evaluation is part of our Christian diligence. If we suffer from apathy, we must be willing to seek change and growth. We must revive the desire to serve the Lord with faithfulness and productivity.

-- Dave Leonard

What does it mean to be "born again?"

As recorded in John 3:1-21, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to speak to Jesus. Jesus quickly turned the conversation with this declaration, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Nicodemus expressed confusion at Jesus' statement, to which Jesus replied, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Since Jesus said very clearly that entrance into the heavenly kingdom is conditional upon being born again, this question is of extreme importance. What, then, does it mean to be "born again?"

During Jesus' time on earth, the Jews placed heavy emphasis on their fleshly relationship to and descent from Abraham. Many Jews felt that their kinship with Abraham somehow guaranteed their salvation, regardless of how they lived their lives. This prompted John the Baptizer to say to some of the Jews who came to see him baptizing, "Do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones" (Matthew 3:9).

In His remarks on being born again, Jesus was foreshadowing to Nicodemus the impending change from the Law of Moses to the new law Jesus would establish. Under Jesus' new law, covenant relationship would not be based on physical birth (as with the Law of Moses), but rather, on a rebirth (in other words, being "born again").

In short, the concept of being "born again" refers to the baptism of penitent believers into Christ, where sins are washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16) and one becomes a child of God (a Christian) and a new creation. A few parallel texts further confirm this:

- Paul establishes clearly in Galatians 3:26-29 that God's children are those who have been "baptized into Christ," further stating that those who have done so are "Abraham's seed."

- Peter speaks of Christians as those who have been "born again . . . through the word of God" (1 Peter 1:22,23). In other words, Christians are begotten through the teaching of God's word (and this involves water, Ephesians 5:25,26).

- Paul says one who is "in Christ" is "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3 plainly teach that to be "in Christ" means to be "baptized into" Christ.

If we want to be saved, we **must** be "born again." Jesus said so. Let us hear and obey the Master.

-- Chad Dollahite

THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

In Matthew 13, seven parables of the Master are recorded. What rich reading! In our English Bible, “The Parable of the Hidden Treasure” comprises one single verse, Matthew 13:44. There we read: “*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*”

I love this story! Its message is easy to recall and leaves a lasting impression on those who read it. In some fashion, the kingdom of heaven is like the situation Jesus described in this parable. In the Scriptures, “*the kingdom of heaven*” is the same as “*the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:23,24).

In ancient times, it was common for people to bury any treasure which they possessed. There were no banks, no vaults, and no safety deposit boxes. It would have been unsafe to carry along a treasure everywhere a person went or to leave it lying around in one’s home. Thus, it was a wise practice to bury a treasure in a place where only the owner would know its location. Hidden treasures are mentioned in Job 3:21 and Proverbs 2:4.

Jesus does not supply a lot of details in this parable, such as: What happened to the original owner of the treasure? Under what circumstances did the man in the story find the treasure? What about the morality of this man who found a treasure that was not his and then carried out a plan to secure it for himself? The story is brief, and Jesus does not dwell on any of those matters.

What Jesus spotlights is the man’s attitude toward the treasure which he found. Note the actions which this fellow took. He found a treasure in a field. He realized that it was valuable. In life, not every treasure or valuable object is recognized as such by the finder or one who views it. However, this guy knew a treasure when he saw it. Next, he made a decision: he wanted to make the treasure his own. So, he hid it. He was filled with joy. Why? It thrilled him to know that he could buy the field and make the treasure his own. He went and sold all that he had, and finally he went and bought *that* field — he was not of the opinion that all fields are the same!

So what is the main thrust of the parable? The kingdom, which is God’s church, is like a treasure. That is, it is of *enormous value*. Remember: the man in the parable was willing to give up *all that he had* in order to obtain the treasure which he found. What can we say about the value of the Lord’s kingdom?

▪ The kingdom’s value is not determined by man’s concepts of it. Human thinking often differs from the Lord God’s (Isaiah 55:8,9). Non-religious people see

no value in the Christ’s kingdom, neither do those who are advocates of false religions. Sadly, even some members of the church fail to appreciate the kingdom’s value, as indicated by their failure to put the kingdom first in their lives (Matthew 6:33).

▪ The kingdom is of great value in the Lord’s sight. It was part of His eternal plan before the creation of the material universe (Ephesians 3:3-11). Through His prophets of the Old Testament era, Jehovah foretold the coming of His kingdom, which would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). And, for that wonderful treasure/kingdom/church which He loved, Jesus poured out His blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25).

▪ The value of the kingdom is not changed by the passing of time. Some new things are of more value than older ones; in other instances, the opposite is true. But, in the case of the kingdom of God, its value today is exactly what it was when it came into the world nearly 2,000 years ago on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The kingdom’s worth does not change, and glory is given to God in the church forever and ever (Ephesians 3:21).

▪ The kingdom is of much more value than any earthly, material treasure. Earthly goods give us temporary happiness, temporary satisfaction, and are a temporary blessing. In contrast, in the Christ’s kingdom we can have eternal salvation and permanent blessings (Hebrews 5:9). Jesus wants us to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1,2) and lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth (Matthew 6:19-21).

▪ Because of the immeasurable value of the kingdom and the blessings we have in it, each disciple of Jesus ought to be willing to sacrifice for Him. Again, in this parable our Lord wants us to see the man’s attitude toward the treasure. He sold all that he had *for one purpose*. What would others think or say? It did not matter: the treasure’s value was undeniable. That is how each of us ought to view God’s kingdom. Being a loyal citizen in His kingdom may cost us some things . . . things like time, money, friendships, family, a job, or even our life. We sing, “All to Jesus I surrender.” Are we *living* those words in real life?

When a person finds the kingdom/hears the truth, he/she then must make a decision. The man in this parable finds a treasure. For him, the question then becomes, “What am I going to do with it?” Since *you* have found the truth, what are *you* going to do with it?

-- Roger D. Campbell

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