



Light from the Word

Called to the Righteousness of Christ, Not Our Self-Righteousness

As we begin this next segment of topics under the heading of Nurturing the Believer, we want to return to first principles of a life lived in sanctification toward God. Just as the February article emphasized the critical aspect of God's call to repentance and its fundamental importance in Presenting the Gospel, God's Word calls the believer to be His disciples, bearing much fruit as we keep His commandments and abide in His love.

John the Baptist began his teaching by calling all to repentance in advance of the imminent coming of the Messiah Jesus. Many came confessing their sins and were baptized by John in the wilderness. *"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins"* (Mark 1:4-5).

In his ministry, John was clear that he was only the forerunner, and that his role was to point people to the Master. He took his cues from Isaiah by being *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"* (Matt. 3:3-4, Isaiah 40:3). Although he often drew great crowds, and could have easily become caught by the lure of human popularity, he recognized and honored Jesus, saying, *there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose"* (John 1:26-27). And when time came for his earthly ministry to come to a close, he willingly yielded to God's plan, acknowledging, *"He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all"* (John 3:30-31).

While we draw a positive example from John's humility, his interactions with the Pharisees also provide a contrasting reminder of the dangers of self-righteousness. When they followed the crowds to the Jordan River to hear John, he called out their insincerity with a stern, *"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* (Matt. 3:7).

What was it about the Pharisees that led to John's warning? Evidently they were over-relying upon Abraham (their spiritual heritage) and neglecting to bring forth the fruit of a life given wholly to God's service. Romans 10:1-4 further clarifies this warning. As he called them to repentance, John had a special exhortation, *"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father... (for) every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire"* (Matt. 3:8-10).

Jesus greatly expanded on John's condemnation of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees later in His ministry (Matt. 23). While He acknowledged their spiritual place (Moses' seat, v. 2) and that their teachings were to be observed, sadly, He had to warn against mimicking their actions. This stands in stark contrast to the model Jesus taught of the disciple following the master. And the pattern of the master is a servant, walking in faith, humility, and love. After noting that, *"whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,"* (Matt. 23:12), He went on to issue several "woes" of condemnation (v. 13-39) to give emphasis to the warning of these dangerous spiritual examples. He exposed their spiritual blindness and self-righteous living, calling them hypocrites.

How then must the believer walk if he is to avoid these pitfalls of self-righteousness? God speaks through Isaiah that He will look *"to him that is*

— Please turn to pg. 62

Continued Articles

Called to the Righteousness of Christ...

— Continued from pg. 3

poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:2).

This contriteness of heart leads to an honest appraisal of one’s brokenness before God. It springs from a respect and honor of His holiness and recognizes that we are only made righteous through faith in the crucified and resurrected Lord who shed His blood for our justification and our sanctification. It understands that the Christian is to reject sin—indeed that we must abhor the exceeding sinfulness of sin—and if a believer sins, he acknowledges it and applies the Scriptural remedy. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:9-10, 2:1-2).*

David’s example of this is summarized in the beautiful Psalm 51. He makes no excuse for his sin, confessing it readily and taking responsibility for it before God (v. 3). He most of all regrets his sin as an affront to God (v. 4) and mourns the resulting loss of relationship with Him; desiring for it to be restored (v. 12). He throws himself at the mercy of the righteous God, trusting in His loving kindness and forgiving spirit (v. 1).

God’s call to holiness is rooted in the nature of God. We are taught, *“as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).* Indeed, we are called to bear fruit that will be observed by others, as Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).* There is a stark contrast between an ostentatious display of self-righteousness and

the humble fruit-bearing through which God is glorified.

As followers of Christ and true disciples, to truly *“grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18),* we must become more like the Master. We do this by *“looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).* Day by day we put on the mind of Christ, who *“made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).*

Following the authentic and genuine example of Christ we will *“be found in him, not having (our) own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” (Phil. 3:9).*