

Abounding More and More in Righteousness

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This study has been personally uplifting, faith-building, as well as challenging. My sincere appreciation to the faithful brethren who host this excellent annual series for the honor and joy of proclaiming these precious truths.

Our study will contain two major divisions. We will first approach the study under the points of (1) Examining the terms, (2) We must attain righteousness, (3) We must maintain righteousness, and (4) We must abound in righteousness. In the second division of our study, we will allow the Scriptures to address the righteousness of (1) God, (2) God to man, (3) Man's righteousness, (4) Fall from righteousness, and then summarize with (5) In what way is this important to me?

FIRST DIVISION OF OUR STUDY

Examining the Terms

Abound

The definition in the *New World Dictionary* is, "overflow, plentiful, exist in large numbers, be filled, be wealthy." The word is found often in Holy Scripture, and by noticing the context in which it is used, we are provided with a needed picture of our responsibility. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:58, exhorts:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast,
unmoveable, always abounding in the work of

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the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. [All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted and bold text has been used within some Scripture quotations for emphasis.]

Simon Peter itemized a list of virtues which the Christian must possess and in which they are to “*abound.*”

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8)

Peter continues by saying that if you lack these qualities you are barren. The choices are **abound** or be **barren**.

Paul encouraged the brethren at Thessalonica to abound (1 Thess. 3:12; 4:1); said to the brethren at Philippi that he knew how to abound and pled with them to abound (Phil. 4:12, 17-18). He also admonished the Corinthian church to abound (2 Cor. 8:7).

Righteousness

The definition in the *New World Dictionary* is, “acting in a just, upright manner, morally right and justifiable, doing what is right.” The Greek word *dikaios* is defined as, “justly, agreeably to right;...2. properly, as is right; 3. uprightly, agreeably to the law of rectitude” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon 151).

A search through the Scriptures reflects the word “righteousness” found 297 times and “righteous” 225 times in the King James Version. Long ago it was spelled

“rightwiseness.”

As we progress in our study, we will further define and detail this beautiful word of Holy Writ.

We Must ATTAIN Righteousness

Christ drew the line, placed the mark for which we should endeavor. In the magnificent Sermon on the Mount, the Lord said:

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect...For 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. 5:48, 20)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matt. 6:33)

The scribes and Pharisees were religious (prayed regularly, worshiped, gave liberally, enthusiastically evangelized). But they were hypocritical, impenitent and loved to be seen and heard of men (Matt. 23; Luke 7; Matt. 6). Our righteousness **must exceed** the righteousness of these ancient ones.

In order to **attain** a righteous condition, let us examine a few Biblical examples of those who were righteous. We are able to see what they did that resulted in their being called righteous. **(1) Noah** (Gen. 6-8; Heb. 11:4-12) believed God and did ALL that God commanded and “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7). He lived in a wicked, evil world and yet he was righteous. It is simply stated: Noah walked with God. **(2) Enoch** (Gen. 5; Heb. 11:5) was also described with this beautiful overview: he walked with God. In fact the Bible says, “And Enoch walked with God after he begat

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Methuselah three hundred years...all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years...Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:22-24). **(3) Abel** (Heb. 11:4) was righteous. He obeyed God's instruction regarding that which was to be offered to God, while his brother Cain did not (Gen. 4:2-8).

The apostle Paul instructed Titus regarding the acceptable life:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. (Tit. 2:11-12)

In view of the fact that we have been redeemed by the Lamb of God (1 Pet. 1:18-19), reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10), cleansed and washed by the Savior's blood (1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 1:5), it is an imperative, we **must** abstain from sinful things and live a godly, holy, righteous life! This high standard of conduct required of faithful followers is grounded in God's grace. The grace of God brought salvation through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is by the grace of God that we are taught how to live in this evil and crooked world. The passage above emphasizes our denying those things that have the mark of condemnation and living in the way of holiness that denotes and receives the approval of God. We live a righteous life with ourselves, others and God.

From the moment we hear the gospel of Christ, believe with our hearts, repent from our sins, confess His matchless name and are immersed in water for the remission of our sins – we have begun the journey toward glory. We have turned from ungodliness to godliness. We no longer serve sin, nor let sin reign in our bodies (Rom. 6:12). Yet, we must continue this developmental process.

The instructions continue throughout out life by the grace of God.

Brother Tom McLemore correctly pens a list of things that our righteousness must include:

More than being religious, though that is a part.
More than an outward but an outward and inward righteousness. Consistency in profession and practice. A stand for the right whether seen of men and rewarded or not. Trusting in God rather than self. Living strictly by the Bible, not opinions or traditions. Study and practice of what is studied. Hunger and thirst after it. Seek it first.

Righteousness does not mean sinlessness. It is impossible for any human being to be perfect (without sin). The joy of salvation, the good news of Christ, is that we are able to be "blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14; 1 Thess. 5:23). God does expect our ALL, denying ourselves, taking up the cross daily and following Him (Luke 9:23). If we love our father or mother, son or daughter more than Him, we cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:26). Our Father requires that we seek Him first (Matt. 6:33). He will not accept second place. It is possible to be righteous, acceptable to God. We can **know** we are walking with God, righteous in His sight, based upon the encouraging truths found in Scripture.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God...The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. (Rom. 8:14, 16)

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments...But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (1 John 2:3, 5)

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The inspired writer John tells us we can know we have eternal life as a result of our righteousness (1 John 5:13, 18-19).

We Must MAINTAIN Righteousness

From the exact time we are cleansed of our sins, the Lord adds us to the church (Acts 2:47). We have a new standard by which to live. We serve a new Master. We have a new family. We are pressing toward a new goal.

Our affections and desires are no longer earthly and carnal. Our life and love is now set on things above (Col. 3:1-8). We are now repulsed by worldly and evil things. We are expected (required) to maintain and develop further in righteousness.

If we reflect again for a moment on Titus 2:11-12, we will see the divine guideline for the Christian's standard of life, how his life is to be characterized. Three powerful adverbs capture this state: "*soberly, righteously, godly.*"

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live **soberly, righteously, and godly**, in this present world. (Tit. 2:11-12)

Paul exhorted that we press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling (Phil. 3:12-14); to go on toward perfection (Heb. 6:1); not grow weary in well-doing (Gal. 6:9); put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand (Eph. 6:10-18) and "live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). Note the **action** required. Being a faithful child of God, a genuine Christian servant, requires great effort and fortitude.

God's faithful servants realize we are in a war, a fight for our lives. Satan is the wise, crafty, cunning, lying

adversary (1 Pet. 5:8; James 4:7; John 8:44). He has ministering servants that deceitfully appear as righteous (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

To reach heaven we must **maintain** an acceptable relationship with God. Having been washed by the blood of Christ is essential, but it will not, does not once and for all make us holy and righteous. John speaks of "walking in the light" (1 John 1:7ff).

Notice a couple of responsibilities Christians have: maintain good works (Tit. 3:14) and abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58), since we are created unto good works (Eph. 2:10).

We Must ABOUND In Righteousness

Thus far we have reflected upon the necessity of **attaining** and **maintaining** righteousness. Let us take this to the next level. God expects us to abound in righteousness. For a moment, notice a few passages of exhortation that show us in what and how we are to abound:

Therefore, as ye **abound** in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye **abound** in this grace also. (2 Cor. 8:7)

And this I pray, that your love may **abound** yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment. (Phil. 1:9)

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may **abound** in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Rom. 15:13)

And the Lord make you to increase and **abound** in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you. (1 Thess. 3:12)

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and

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exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would **abound** more and more. (1 Thess. 4:1)

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and **abound**, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8)

The attitude of many in the world today is “do whatever is necessary, the least possible, to get by.” Tragically this attitude has splashed over into the spiritual lives of many. “What must I do? Do I have to do that? Maybe I can be acceptable without doing that, too.” Such an attitude is NOT Biblical.

God’s people must possess the attitude of great servants in the long ago: **(1) Isaiah**, “Here am I, Lord, send me” (Isa. 6:8); **(2) Noah**, “Thus did Noah according to all that God said do” (Gen. 6:22); **(3) Nehemiah**, “So built we the wall...for the people had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6); **(4) Macedonians**, “first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5); **(5) Poor widow**, “casting in thither two mites” (Luke 21:2); **(6) Paul** (Acts 9, 22, 26) who gave up all for the cause of Christ, yet knew he had gained everything.

SECOND DIVISION OF OUR STUDY

The inspired, inerrant, infallible Scriptures are the best commentary of the testimony of the Lord. For an impressive overview, let God speak to us (Heb. 1:1-2)

through His Son Jesus Christ, by His Word.

God's Righteousness

"The Lord is righteous" (2 Chron. 12:6). "Righteous art thou, O Lord" (Psa. 119:137). He is the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8) and shall judge His "people with righteousness" (Psa. 72:2; 96:13). "Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be" (Rev. 16:5). Jehovah is the "God of my righteousness" (Psa. 4:1), who "lovest righteousness, and hateth wickedness" (Psa. 45:7). All His "commandments are righteousness" (Psa. 119:172). God's "righteousness is an everlasting righteousness" (Psa. 119:142).

God to Man

God loves "righteousness" (Psa. 11:7); "the Lord loveth the righteous" (Prov. 2:7); "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness" (Psa. 11:7); He knows "the way of the righteous" (Psa. 1:6); His eyes "are upon the righteous" (Psa. 34:15) and will not withdraw "his eyes from the righteous" (Job 36:7). 1 Peter 3:12 reveals:

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous,
and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the
face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

The Psalmist declared that he had not seen "the righteous forsaken" (Psa. 37:25). God will uphold the righteous (Psa. 37:17); "shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa. 55:22); "will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish" (Prov. 10:3); but will be delivered out of trouble (Prov. 11:8).

God "heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:29) and rewardeth "according to my righteousness" (2 Sam. 22:21). Almighty God has assured us, "I am with thee" and "I will uphold thee" (Isa. 41:10).

Man's Righteousness

God told **Noah** that He had "seen" his righteous behavior (Gen. 7:1). **Elisabeth** and **Zacharias** were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). **Abel** was righteous (Heb. 11:4).

"He that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). The "desire of the righteous is only good" (Prov. 11:23); "the thoughts of the righteous are right" (Prov. 12:5). He will "follow after righteousness" (Isa. 51:1).

In a humbled state of righteousness, we are to be glad and rejoice (Psa. 32:11; 33:1; Prov. 28:12), sing and rejoice (Prov. 29:6), even though "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psa. 34:19). The righteous will trust in God (Psa. 64:10) and "give thanks" unto His name (Psa. 140:13). "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7). When the Psalmist asked God who shall dwell in His hills, he says, "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart" (Psa. 15:2).

Notice some characteristics of the righteous: "studieth to answer" (Prov. 15:28); "hateth lying" (Prov. 13:5); "giveth" (Prov. 21:26); "considereth the cause of the poor" (Prov. 29:7); does not make himself over wise (Ecc. 7:16); is led in the "paths of righteousness" (Psa. 23:3); "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6); "speaketh truth" (Prov. 12:17); "ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law" (Isa. 51:7); "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33); "shine forth as the sun" (Matt. 13:43).

The one who "followeth after righteousness and

mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour" (Prov. 21:21); he is the one who puts on "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Righteousness delivereth from death (Prov. 10:2; 11:6). The righteous one has "hope in his death" (Prov. 14:32).

Man Can Fall from a Righteous State

Galatians 5:4 says that brethren fell from grace. Again and again, in both the Old and New Testament, we learn that one can be righteous, but leave that state and become (in the sight of God) unrighteous. "When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity...he shall die" (Ezek. 3:20; cf. 18:20-26). "When I shall say to the righteous...if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered" (Ezek. 33:13, 18).

The spirit or determination to remain faithful for Christians today should be as that which Job possessed:

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it
go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I
live. (Job 27:6)

Sadly, many today are guilty as those almost two thousand years ago,

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)

It is not righteousness as man defines nor determines, but that which is specified by the Creator of the universe, "the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3:9). We follow the inspired Word, which provides "instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

In What Way Is This Matter Important to YOU?

In 1 Peter 4:17-18 we find a frightening fact:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the **righteous** scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Christianity must be a full-time, 100% committed, devoted-to-death righteous life. God's people will live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world; take up the cross daily, and follow Him; seeking Him and His righteousness first.

Our attitude and actions will be that of an obedient servant. Whatsoever He has said, we will do (in our daily life, home life, worship or sacrifice).

We cannot love mother or father, son or daughter more than Christ in order to be His disciple. We will NOT love the world, nor the things of the world. We will, like the apostle Paul, know the terror of the Lord and thus we will seek to persuade men.

When we have met these challenging instructions; when we possess the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5) with a mind of obedience, sacrifice, devotion to the Father and love; then we will ABOUND in RIGHTEOUSNESS!

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