

LESSON 11

*March 6–12

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.

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 folk 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?

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 be 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?

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!)

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 provided.

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 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?

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:

- 1 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?
- 2 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?
- 3 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?
- 4 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?
- 5 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?

A Child's Song

by MAYE PORTER

Asap peeked into the hospital ward in her hometown of Kavieng, Papua New Guinea. The doctor wasn't there, so she slipped inside. She knew that the doctor didn't want her to be around sick people, but Asap was on a mission. The patients looked so sad, and she wished she could do something to cheer them up.

Sing! A voice seemed to whisper. So Asap walked from bed to bed singing songs she had learned in Sabbath School.

One old man, Salatiel, smiled as Asap approached his bed. "What church do you attend, Girlie," he asked teasingly.

"The Adventist church," she answered.

"What day do you attend church?" he asked.

"On Sabbath, the seventh day," she said innocently.

Her simple answer surprised him. He gave her his Bible and said, "Show me a verse that says that Saturday is the Sabbath."

Five-year-old Asap couldn't read, but she opened the Bible and pointed to a verse. "Here," she said to the man. "Read this."

Salatiel read the verse Asap had pointed to. He blinked and read it again. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord" (*Exod. 20:10*).

"Go get your father," he told Asap. "Hurry!"

Asap scampered from the hospital and soon returned with her father. "I want you to see this miracle," Salatiel said, pointing to the verse Asap had shown him. "Surely the Sabbath is the Lord's day of worship!" he said.

Asap's father studied the Bible with Salatiel, and by the time the old man was well enough to return to his village, he had accepted many new Bible truths. "How am I going to explain this to my pastor and others in my village?" Salatiel asked. Asap's pastor offered to go with him to help him.

Many people listened as Salatiel and the pastor explained the Sabbath and other Bible truths, and soon several asked to be baptized. The pastor invited Asap and her family to attend the baptism, and when it was Salatiel's turn to be baptized in the sea, little Asap took his hand and led him to the water. Today a new group of believers worship in a little bamboo church in their village—all because a little girl obeyed when the Holy Spirit whispered, "Sing!"

Someone needs your help to find the Savior today. And every day your mission offerings help to share your faith with people you may never meet.

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