

The Question that Will Change Your Life

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I have a question for you, a question that will help your spiritual life if you pursue it and seek to answer it. It is a question that will orient your approach to all of your circumstances. It is a question for a child that is under the authority of his parents. It's a question that's fitting for a young man, a young woman facing career choices. It's a question that's perfect for a couple in the early days of their marriage and start to realize who you really married. It's a great question for someone who has just heard the doctor say, "It's cancer." It's a question that is fitting in times of chronic discouragement. It's a question that's fitting for the passing frustrations of the day. It's a question that is fitting in prosperity and also in poverty. It is a question that is fitting for someone on her deathbed. The same question applying to all of those other situations and a thousand more beside. It is a question that would drive you to Christ for grace to transform your life. It is a question, in other words, that will change your life as you respond to it. It is a simple question that can be framed like this: how can I be righteous here? How can I be righteous here?

Now I'm going to speak primarily to you as Christians, making that assumption. We'll address non-Christians in a moment. But here's what we need to come to grips with. As Christians, we understand, we believe in the providence of God and that means that God has ordered your circumstances to the smallest detail for his glory and for your good, and so with that understanding that God has orchestrated life so that it is exactly like it is for us right now, the question becomes how can you respond to the providence of God in a godly way? How can I be righteous here?

It is really a question for those who are already Christians. For those who are not Christians, if you are not saved the thing that you must understand is that righteousness for you is a matter of coming to Christ for salvation. Titus 3:5 says that God saves us "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," and so for someone who is not a Christian, they need to understand that they cannot save themselves, that they are separated from God in unrighteousness and they need a righteous Savior to deliver them, to save them, to change their hearts and to bring them to himself, and so that is the first order of business for a non-Christian is to flee to Christ for salvation.

But it's a different manner of question for someone who is a Christian because a Christian who has received that salvation, has received new life in the new birth, for a Christian

who has been born again, you now have a duty to grow in Christ-likeness. You are commanded repeatedly in Scripture to become more and more like Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit, and so this question is simple, it's brief, but it's designed to orient your thinking toward what is ultimately the purpose of your Christian life while you're here on earth. How can I be righteous here? And we're going to spend two, maybe three weeks, looking at this but I just want to kind of introduce the thought and give you three preliminary principles for you to kind of process this and see where we are going over the next couple of weeks on our Tuesday evening study.

The first thing that I want you to see is the priority of this righteousness. The priority of this righteousness. The question how can I be righteous here is, when you understand Scripture, it is a matter of highest priority for you. It is more important than your physical health or your financial well-being; in some ways it's more important than any other human relationship that you could have. How can I be righteous here is a matter of extreme priority for every true Christian and it's not difficult to show that from the Bible.

Turn to the Gospel of Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, if you will, Matthew 5 and 6 especially. We want to see the priority of this righteousness, what kind of significance did our Lord Jesus assign to this matter. Well, it's woven throughout this sermon which introduces Matthew's account of the teaching of our Lord in his Gospel. In Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Now you may remember when we looked at the Beatitudes a few years ago, that the Beatitudes are making a statement of exclusivity. When Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied," it's an emphatic statement that he's making. It has the idea that they and they alone will be satisfied. You see, this desire for righteousness which Jesus uses an analogy to the normal bodily appetites of life, the physical appetites of life, our bodies need food, we're hungry, that's a signal that we're to seek something; thirst, same way, you understand that. Well, Jesus says that the spiritual life is like that when it comes to righteousness. The natural urge that we have for food and drink to sustain our bodily life is what is true in everyone who is truly redeemed. They and they alone will be satisfied. They and they alone will enter the kingdom of heaven and he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." He's showing that this is a matter of utmost priority and you see that as you continue on reading in the Sermon on the Mount.

Look at verse 20 of chapter 5. Jesus says, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." In Matthew 6:1, he emphasizes this theme of righteousness again, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." And in verse 33 of chapter 6, he states it as plainly as he could possibly say. He says, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Now friends, he's not talking here about the imputed righteousness that we receive in the act of justification. The Sermon on the Mount is directed toward those who have already

repented and entered into the kingdom, who are living under the realm of Christ and his rule. The Sermon on the Mount is for people like that and so what Jesus is saying is he's speaking to his disciples and he is elevating to them the importance of this practical daily righteousness that he is discussing throughout the entire sermon. We're not going to look at the details of that here and examine the details of what he expresses in the Sermon on the Mount, I simply want you to see that from the words of our Lord himself, he is emphasizing this priority of righteousness. Hunger and thirsting, they and they alone will be satisfied. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you. And so this is a question about the pursuit of sanctification in the Christian life, growing in Christ-likeness, dying more and more to sin and living more and more unto righteousness, which we'll define as we go throughout this short series over the next two or three weeks. And you know, people sometimes will, I'm not talking about anybody in here even in the context of Truth Community Church because I don't hear these kinds of statements so you understand where I'm coming from in what I'm about to say, but you'll hear people generally speaking within the context of Christianity, oh, they want to hear messages that are practical, usually they're contrasting that with theology which I'm not comfortable with that comparison at all, as if theology could be anything other than immensely practical, but what we're talking about here tonight when we talk about this kind of righteousness is a matter of utmost practicality. It's a matter of practical daily life that we're talking about in the inner man and in the outer man, in your heart attitudes and in your external behavior. Everything about life comes under the umbrella of this one question: how can I be righteous here?

Now in 1 Corinthians Paul expresses it in different ways but he says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Therefore whatever you do whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." And so we find that Scripture is teaching us as believers that we are to view life through a lens that is devoted to the glory of God thinking about it vertically. Thinking about it horizontally and internally, we realize that Scripture is calling us to an approach to life that is concerned for the pursuit of righteousness in every circumstance and in everything that we do.

What can we say about this kind of godliness, this kind of righteousness? Well, in a negative sense, it's a righteousness that is seeking to avoid sin or to put off sin in every possible way. It is a positive righteousness that is a matter of heart attitudes in the words that come out of our mouths and in our conduct. You know, put off the old man, put on the new.

Look at Ephesians 4 for just a moment to kind of attach a text to what I just said, and I just love the way that Scripture speaks to us, the way that Scripture lays these things out with such stunning clarity, with such perspicuity is the theological term. In Ephesians 4:22 you see Paul saying that "in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." And so we are saved, delivered out of our sin, we're delivered from our old man and given a new nature. What we are to do with that is that we are to pursue righteousness then; we are to have a

conscious pursuit of righteousness as we respond to Scripture, as we see what God has said, and we grow in it, we understand that this is a comprehensive way of life that has implications for every moment that I live. Now for a true Christian that is not a burdensome thing to contemplate. When God puts a new nature in you, a nature that is like after his own, you love righteousness, you desire it even though you fall short, even though you stumble along the way. This righteousness is, in other words, it is attractive to us. It's what we want even as we sometimes struggle to fulfill it on a day-by-day basis.

So there's this emphasis on righteousness. I want to just dwell on this priority, this biblical priority just a little bit more to show you that I am not, the last thing that I'm doing here is making a mountain out of a biblical molehill. No, this is a mountain in the sight of God. It is a mountain in Scripture for the way that we are to think about the Christian life. Listen as I just read two or three verses here.

In Romans 14:17 it says "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The Apostle Paul writing to his disciple Timothy says, "Flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness," 1 Timothy 6:11. And as Paul elsewhere was talking about the nature of salvation he said this in Titus 2:12, he said, "the grace of God instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." God saves us in order that we might live righteously. It's not simply a matter that God saved us so that we wouldn't go to hell as punishment for our sins, although we're all very grateful that he did that, but you see, God saved you not simply to deliver you from the punishment of sin eternally, he saved you in order to deliver you from the power of sin in your life. And so growing in righteousness is an expression of one of the critical aspects of true salvation. God saved you to progressively deliver you from the power of sin in your earthly life, one day ultimately to deliver you from the very presence of sin when you are glorified in heaven.

So beloved, if we are to live out and to express the nature of our salvation, we are to understand that at the center, one of the centermost orienting features of it is that God is seeking to reproduce the righteousness in the image of Christ in our lives as we go about and that has immense implications as we will see. The thing for now is to understand that it is a priority of righteousness that we are talking about.

I want to illustrate this from a couple of different perspectives. First of all, before I forget, I have one of them in my notes, the other one I don't have in my notes so let me go outside my notes for a moment here, and I love to make this point. It is a very important point to make especially in American culture and in American Christianity. When we talk about this pursuit of righteousness, we are not talking about, we are not talking about someone who is preoccupied with the sins of society. Now look, we're all against abortion in this room, we're all against, you know, the sins of homosexuality and the way that our culture has perverted God's gift of marriage, and we can talk about the wicked political system and all of that, blah, blah, blah, blah stuff, and the reason that it's important for us to talk about it in these terms is that when Scripture is talking about living righteously, it is not commending you for your opposition to the sins of society.

That's not the point. Forgive me for saying it like this in this environment but it's not even enough to be a creationist and just really concerned about the biblical doctrine of creation and to oppose all forms of evolution. It's good to do that. I'm a creationist. I'm opposed to evolution. I believe in a young earth, but that's not what we're talking about here. To simply hate the sins of society says nothing about whether you are pursuing righteousness personally. When Jesus addresses righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, he's talking about your personal sin, your anger problem, your problem with pornography, your problem with bad relationships within your home environment. He's talking about your life and the fact that you hate the sins of society doesn't say anything about your attitude toward your own personal sins. You see, this pursuit of righteousness is a matter of you saying, "I want to be righteous even if no one goes with me. And, yeah, sure, society is bad but you know what? I've got sins of my own that I need to repent of and to deal with and to mortify in my life."

So we should not, not one of us in this room or none of you watching over the live stream or in subsequent media, none of us should think that we're doing this simply because we're conservative politically and that we hate the sins of society. That is not what we're talking about here today and I cannot emphasize that enough. We are talking about who you are on the inside; how you view God; whether you are thankful and trusting toward him or not; whether you love his word or not; whether you're repenting of your own sins or not. That's what we're talking about and it is just so vital to make that distinction and to not try to seek shelter in the discussion by saying, "Well, you know, you don't know how much I'm opposed to abortion and homosexuality." That's great but that's not what we're talking about here. If you're not thinking about this in connection with your own struggles with sin and your own need to pursue your own personal righteousness, we are completely missing the point because that's not what it's about, and so I think I've made that clear.

Let me give you a second contrast that will help you see what I mean on a more practical personal level that's a little bit less confrontational than what I just engaged in just now, and you understand, don't you, the reason that we speak directly, bluntly about these things, we say these things in a spirit of love and we say it for your up-building and edification, beloved. It's not in hostility that we say these things at all. That's the furthest thing from my mind. It's just very important for each one of you to understand what Scripture is calling you to and unless I help you see the distinctions, I'm not really doing my job and one day I would have to give a bad account before my own Lord for that. I don't want to do that so we speak.

Let's talk about a different kind of contrast, though, here that illustrates it in a different way. It's possible to be a person like this. I once knew a woman, she's not around here, she's not from here, but I once knew a woman who was great at God-talk, what I would call God-talk. She would talk like this, "You know, God just really led me to choose this exact carpet for my home. Isn't it lovely? I just love how the Lord guided me to this." And God helped her get a good price for her appliances, and God helped her find a good parking spot when she went to the store to get it all, and just on and on like that. You've

probably known people, you probably know people who talk in those kinds of terms. It's common for charismatics to be, you know, to talk in these kinds of ways.

When I first met that woman, I could not begin to put my finger on what was wrong with it. I knew that something was wrong here. I knew that something was out of kilter but I couldn't quite get it. I couldn't quite just put my finger on why that all made me uncomfortable. But now I can. Now I can. Her discussion of God and her relationship with God was all centered about her own earthly, selfish priorities and the things that were preoccupying her with the external aspects of her daily life. That's what she was talking about. She spoke about God as though God existed to fulfill her objectives in life, to smooth out the path for her so that rather than walking on a rocky path, she was walking on rose petals all the way into heaven. I exaggerate a bit to simply make the point of what I want to contrast it with.

You can contrast that with a different Christian woman I know, also not from here. This was a Christian woman whose spouse had sinned and without going into the, you know, the morbid details of it, let's just say that Christians have gone to divorce court over lesser matters than what this woman was faced with in her marriage. Her response illustrates in a positive way what we're driving at in this conversation about how can I be righteous here. Here was her response almost verbatim in what she said at the time. She said, "My husband has sinned. I do not want to sin in my response to him, therefore I am going to keep my vows, I am going to be faithful to my husband, I am going to live in submission to my husband and I am going to trust God to work this out."

Do you see the difference? You put these two side-by-side and all of a sudden the first aspect of that contrast looks awfully superficial and unattractive by comparison, doesn't it, because the selfishness at the core of it is exposed. The second woman had nothing about this that played to her selfish, fleshly, carnal priorities if she had given in to those. What was dominating her mindset and it was her immediate reaction to the situation, was in so many words she's saying, "I have to be righteous here. The fact that my spouse has sinned does not give me liberty to sin. The fact that my spouse has acted in an ungodly way is no license for me to do the same or to retaliate or to do anything else. I'm responsible to God for my response to my husband. Scripture has laid these things out and that's what I want out of my life and that's what I commit myself to." Totally different perspective on what it means to be a Christian by that contrast.

It's challenging to think about, isn't it? You know, even if we're not as crass as saying, you know, "God led me to just the right carpet." You know, we all tend to pray with selfish priorities, for example, and just, you know, kind of get wrapped up in, you know, that unholy trinity of me, myself and I. You know, we're all subject to that. Part of the way that the Spirit changes us and liberates us from that is to bring these things to our mind through biblical instruction, and so we had one woman who wanted God to fulfill her objectives, we had another woman who simply wanted to live righteously in the sight of her Savior.

I have a question for you, beloved: what kind of Christian do you want to be in light of that contrast? What do you want God to produce in your life? The outward effects of suburban prosperity? I'm not against suburban prosperity, we're talking about something else, we're talking about what you want, what's important to you. Or do you see your purpose in life as to say, "You know what? This book tells me what a righteous life looks like and I want to submit to it. I want Christ to reproduce His character in me by the work of the Holy Spirit. I want to be like my Savior. I love Him. I'm indebted to Him. I owe everything to Him. The greatest aspiration of my life would be to somehow approximate and reproduce His characteristics in my moral being." All of those things are ways of saying how can I be righteous here.

And it's important for us to understand, beloved, I'm speaking as pastorally to you as I can within my limited ability, it's important for us to understand that these heart shaping desires and the way that they live themselves out is faithfulness in little things. You know, Jesus said, "He who is faithful in a little will be faithful in much." I've said this not too long ago on a Tuesday, I think on a Tuesday evening, maybe it said it in that interview that Spencer and I did a while back, but it's great to dream big dreams about what you're gonna do for God in your life and what you want to do, but do you know what? That's all kind of meaningless and can be a self-deluding influence on you if righteousness doesn't matter to you on a moment by moment basis if righteousness isn't important to you in the private area of your home life, let's say, you know, in the way that you interact with your spouse or with your children or with your parents. You know, Scripture speaks to those areas of relationship in great depth. The person who is sincerely asking – here's my point, I'm not teaching on family relationships here, I'm teaching on something completely different so don't lose track of what I'm saying here – the person who is sincerely asking the question how can I be righteous here, embraces that question in the realms of life where nobody notices. Once the door is closed to the outside world, what kind of person are you inside the four walls of your home, for example. What kind of person are you with your spouse, with your children, with your parents, so on and so forth, what kind of person are you at work. Those are the areas, beloved where this question how can I be righteous here finds its outworking.

I'd ask you to turn to 1 John 3 just to see this again and I'm gonna make a very strong point here, not that I haven't somehow done that already but 1 John 3:7. 1 John 3:7, go past Hebrews and James and Peter and you'll find your way to 1 John 3. The funny thing is, my friends, is that this very question, it is at this very point that we are so vulnerable to self-deception and in which I don't mind telling you, for some of you I worry over you as I pray for you on this very very point. 1 John 3:7, he says, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you." Okay, that gets my attention. Deception is always a danger in a world that is under the influence of Satan and there's all kinds of unseen spiritual forces pointing us toward deception, we can deceive ourselves, and so when Scripture says make sure no one deceives you, that gets my attention. That jumps off the page to me because it's warning us at the point where we're especially vulnerable and it says, "Little children," I love that affectionate term of address that is so characteristic of the writings of the Apostle John in this letter. He says, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." Here's the

logic to reverse engineer it: Jesus Christ is righteous, when he saves someone, he plants a principle of righteousness in their character that inevitably works itself out in their daily lives. The one who practices righteousness is righteous. In other words, he's been rightly aligned to God through salvation and the reflection of that is a reflection of Christ the righteous Savior who saves us, puts his righteous Holy Spirit within us, and that Spirit takes over our lives and starts to exert his influence in a way that produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, the nine aspects of the one fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5.

So he says "make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous." Verse 8 by contrast, the one who doesn't, "the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning." You see, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin," he's talking in lifestyle patterns here, no one who is born of God does that "because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." You see, if you've been born of God, if God has put his Spirit in you, the omnipotent power that he has starts to work itself out in your daily life so much so that John can say this in verse 10, he says, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious," two categories here, there's Christ the head of his people, the devil the head of his, and we reflect the character of our Master. "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious." Obvious. This is apparent. This isn't difficult. "Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." So, wow, step back from that and, you know, we look down at our shoes and we realize that our feet just got stepped on by the word of God and by the Spirit of God as he works in our lives.

Now you see the point here, you know, elsewhere Scripture says, you know, we all stumble in many ways, James says that, and what we're saying here is not a denial of the fact that we battle with sin in our daily Christian lives. We're not talking about that either. What we're talking about here is that somewhere in the heart of a true Christian there is this overwhelming desire that longs for the righteousness of God to be expressed in his life, that loves the righteous Christ who saved him and sees within his heart a desire for righteousness to be expressed in his own life. One of the results of that is that a true Christian does not come to be comfortable in sin. He's not content to live a sinful life as his pattern, as her pattern, because it's just contrary to nature. It's like a cat trying to be a bird. Well, kitty, kitty, kitty, you can't be a bird because it's not your nature. By nature you're a cat. Christian, Christian, Christian, you can't live in unbroken sin. It's contrary to your nature and if you're living in unbroken sin and you're just unrepentant about it, let's go back to a prior principle and maybe you shouldn't be calling yourself a Christian if you're living a life, a double life and you embrace sin in your life and, you know, you're resistant to all calls about it. There is no grounds for security of salvation for anybody that is living like that. That's not Don talking, that's Scripture.

Look at verse 10 again, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God." And so the question that will change your life, how can I be righteous here, one of the things that it does is it

exposes your true self. Now if you're under great conviction in the preaching of God's word here tonight, do you know what? The door of repentance is open to you. Christ calls. You know, sometimes his people stumble into prolonged sin. Well, you say you're a Christian, then manifest the truth of that by repentance tonight, right this moment an open confession of your sin to God and to whoever you're sinning against, but don't carry on a charade of saying, "I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian," when you're clutching onto hidden sin in your heart and you're not even willing to repent of it. Those two things, that's oil and vinegar. That doesn't mix. That's not reality. That's the very realm of self-delusion that John is warning us against. Don't be deceived. If you don't care about righteousness, my friend, you're not a Christian. It is that simple and that important.

So that's the priority of this righteousness. Let's move on to a second consideration about it, about this matter of practical righteousness and let's deal, number 2, with the problem with this righteousness. Here I want to shift my focus a bit. You know, I've spoken pretty directly to anyone that would be living a double life in here, for example, and now I want to speak tenderly and encouragingly to those of you who are earnest in your pursuit of righteousness but you find yourself falling short, and I want to help you think through this a little bit with you and give you some perspective on it because let's be honest, without denying anything that I've said to this point, you know, in one degree or another we all struggle with expressing the reality of Christ's presence in us. As I said from James earlier, we all stumble in many ways so how are we to think about that, how does that fit into the matters that we're talking about here? What is the problem with this righteousness?

Well, the problem with the question, how can I be righteous here, is surprising, I think. You know, you just think about it in natural terms and it wouldn't come up, you wouldn't guess this, but the problem with this righteousness is you. It's you and it's me. We contribute the problem that makes the pursuit of this righteousness difficult, and let me just kind of flesh this out for you just a moment, fleshing it out, no pun intended there. Sometimes the problem with the question, how can I be righteous here, sometimes it's a problem of ignorance. Sometimes you just don't know what righteousness requires you to do. You're in the midst of a conflict or a difficult situation, there's a lot of pressure coming upon you, and you say, "I just don't know. You know, I lack wisdom here." Scripture anticipates that, James 1:5, if we lack wisdom. Well, sometimes you just don't know what righteousness requires and there's an element of a lack of understanding and ignorance that we have in a particular situation that makes it so that, how can I be righteous here, is not easily answered.

Other times, you know, if we're honest with one another, we would acknowledge that there are times when we simply don't want to be righteous. You know, you're selfish in some circumstances, and when a conflict comes up, you don't want to yield or defer to the other person in love. "No, no, I'm right here. I'm not gonna give in. That person's the one who needs to apologize, not me." And you know, and you start thinking along those terms and all of a sudden the question of righteousness has become secondary to the fact that, "I want my way here! I've got to win here! I have to win this argument. I can't give in."

And without detailing those things anymore, what we find is this, is we come to this sad recognition, sad in only one way, I guess, but your inadequacies of understanding the battle against you, your sinful desires battle against you, and that makes the pursuit of righteousness something that is not, you know, it's not necessarily easy. Most of the time it's not. You know, we have to mortify our sinful desires and we have to, you know, the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, Galatians 5. Well, I find it helpful and encouraging to remember that the Apostle Paul at the height of his spiritual maturity honestly said in Romans 7:19, he said, "I find that the good that I want, I do not do but I practice the very evil that I do not want."

In fact, let's turn to that passage for a moment, Romans 7. Romans 7. Paul describes this conflict. He says in verse 15, Romans 7:15, he says, "what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate." He says, "But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I'm agreeing with the Law, confessing that the Law is good." He says, "If I don't want to do it, there's something in my conscience that's testifying to the rightness of the law of God, and yet here I am, I'm not doing it." So he says, "no longer," verse 17, "no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me." Verse 18, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want." Paul's describing the conflict within that you as true Christians can identify with, right? You know, there's this tug, there's this conflict within and sometimes we stumble, maybe we should say often we stumble and we find that you and I don't simply do not have the strength in our own resources for the task. We lack understanding. We lack spiritual strength, spiritual desires sometimes. What this question, how can I be righteous here, does something for us. It exposes that to our consciousness as we ask the question over time; there is this fundamental principle in me that desires righteousness but from day to day, sometimes that principle isn't always controlling me. Sometimes I don't care. Sometimes I don't want it. Sometimes I'm angry and I want to stay angry. So we realize that there is a lack of spiritual ability in ourselves to carry this out.

Now very important point for you as a believer here and for you young people as you're listening, I appreciate that so much, to understand this principle: to realize your inadequacies does not mean that you give up and you just give in to your fleshly carnal life. It doesn't mean that at all. It means that you need help. It means that you need provision from outside of yourself in order to live this out in the way that would be pleasing to God, and as we continue in Scripture, we find our third point here for this evening, we find the provision for this righteousness. The provision for this righteousness and we find this and I've got three subpoints here, they all start with the letter "S" and we're gonna go very quickly and save the next couple of weeks to expand this out a little further.

Here is a wonderful reality. God hasn't simply saved you from the penalty of sin, as I said earlier, God has also graciously supplied what you need to grow in righteousness. He has graciously supplied your need to grow in righteousness and we can see that in three

distinct areas that all feed off of one another. First of all, he has provided for your righteousness in the Scriptures. In the Scriptures. In the 66 and no more books of the Bible. The Scriptures point the way to godliness and righteousness.

Turn to 2 Timothy 3, a passage we go to many times for many reasons. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. This is amazing to see. God places, Christ has placed a priority on this righteousness in all of these many many passages that we have seen, right? He's made this a priority but he hasn't left you to your own resources to pursue it and to live it out. 2 Timothy 3:15-17, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in," what? "Righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The Scriptures give us the wisdom that we need in order to live righteously. The principles of Scripture guide us toward what is righteous in the circumstances of our lives. The Scriptures give us what we need for righteousness. They give us the wisdom that we need in order to grow in righteousness and notice that at the end of verse 17, they equip us for every good work. There is no circumstance in your life that Scripture doesn't inform and give you direction on so that you might be able to respond in a righteous way. Period. End of sentence. End of paragraph.

Now secondly, the provision for this righteousness goes beyond the Scriptures, it's also found in the provision of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, the Holy Spirit provides inner power for godliness and there's just a lot of places that we could go to look at this. Let's turn first to 1 Peter 1 where he says in the second verse, he says you are chosen, end of verse 1, you "are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure." The Spirit of God is given to us, the indwelling Spirit is given to us in order to supply us with supernatural power to obey Christ as we go through life.

You see that in the book of Philippians in the text that we're going to be looking at on Sunday, Lord willing, Philippians 2:13 and 12 says, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God in the person of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling Holy Spirit is working in you to stimulate righteous desires; to conform and soften your will to obedience to the Scriptures and to obedience to Christ in this kind of righteousness. God is doing a work in you as a born again Christian, God is doing a work in you so that there is a work that is in accordance with the power that raised Christ from the dead to conform you to his image in your daily life.

That's provision. That's great power and we realize that God has not left us to our own natural abilities, he's given the Scriptures to transform our minds, he's given the Spirit to transform our hearts and they work in connection with each other to do that. And so God has provided for this righteousness in the Scriptures and by the Spirit and there's one other aspect that I want you to see if you'll go back to Matthew and we'll close here, Matthew 6 once again. Those of you that are in our Fundamentals of the Faith class,

we're coming back to the same ground that we talked about on just this past Sunday. Love the providence of these things overlapping like they do. But God has also provided for our righteousness by giving us supplication. Supplication, by which I mean that we are to pray in this way. We express our dependence on Christ in prayer in this matter of growing in the realm of righteousness.

Matthew 6:9, Jesus commands us to pray this way. Verse 9 he says, "Pray, then, in this way," here's what I want you to pray about as the pattern of the topics that would occupy your attention before the throne of God. And when you find this, you won't find the superficialities of carpet prices and appliances in it, you'll find the matters of spiritual import directing the course of your prayers. Oh, I should preach a whole sermon on that but I'm not going to.

He says, "Pray, then, in this way," and there's this God-oriented perspective at the start, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done." Expressing submission to the will of God. "God, Your will is righteous. I submit to that. In the midst of the providence that You have orchestrated into my life, I submit to it. I accept it, Lord. Your will be done." But he goes on, "Give us this day our daily bread," as you provide for us in our physical needs. But look at the spiritual dimension here in verses 12 and 13, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," and here's what I really wanted to get to for tonight, "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "God, I want to be righteousness here. God, I'm vulnerable here. There is an invisible spiritual realm that tempts me. The world tempts me. My own inner desires tempt me away from the righteousness that I desire, God, and so I'm asking You because I'm not strong enough to resist it on my own. God, how am I strong enough to resist my flesh, the world and the devil? They're all supernaturally stronger than I am in my own volition, and so, God, I humbly come to You and I ask You to exercise Your power and to direct and orient my life so that I would not enter into the realm of temptation, but rather that You would deliver me from evil, deliver me from the evil that is within, the evil that I cannot see, the evil in the world around me that I see and that tempts me to sin. God, I am depending upon You and I'm asking You to help me in my struggle for this righteousness that I desire to express."

So you see the priority of this righteousness, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness; we see the problem with this righteousness, there's a lot of spiritual forces working against us in order to keep us from that goal; but we see that God has given us a supernatural bounty of provision that is more than sufficient for the task in the Scriptures, in the indwelling Holy Spirit, and in supplication to him, asking for him to do that which he has said that he would do. If we ask for a fish, he won't give us a snake. If we ask for bread, he won't give us a rock. When we ask him to help us in the pursuit of righteousness, in light of everything that we've seen in his word tonight, what's God gonna do? He's going to help us live out that righteousness that we desire. And one simple question points us to the priority, the problem and the provision: how can I be righteous here? And the question, my friend, is, or I guess my response to that question here tonight is: yes, yeah, how can you be righteous where God has put you tonight?

Let's pray together.

Dear Lord, surely these words have been helpful to some and convicting to others. I pray that You would have mercy on those that are convicted, to assure them of Your willingness to forgive them of all of their sins if they come in humble repentant faith to Christ but, Father, they need to come and they need to repent but, Father, how will they repent if Your Spirit doesn't come alongside and help them? And so we ask on behalf of those, Father, that Your Spirit would work out a work of repentance in those that, as they walked into this room, were hard and indifferent and resistant to Your will.

Father, for those that are here as humble sincere Christians, stumbling sometimes along the way and yet, Father, having that abiding desire for righteousness, I pray that You would water that desire and cause it to grow and flourish as the spring flowers respond to the rains that You send from heaven. Father, send the rain, as it were, of Your word, the rain of Your Spirit upon their hearts, that that desire for righteousness would grow to result in Your glory and the expression of, Father, what You've put in their hearts to be and to do, a Christian living righteously in the present age. Help us all to that end, Father. Help us individually. Help us corporately. Help us as our church to be like this. And Father, we ask, Father, not for our sake preeminently but for Thy sake, for the sake of Your glory so whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, it might all be done to the glory of God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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