

## WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR US TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD?

Romans 3:23 says ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*** The implied question is: "How then can we be right with God? How can any one be right with God?" The answer, of course, is that we need to be righteous. The only way that you and I can be right with God is by being righteous, living in perfect conformity to God's will, doing and thinking and behaving as God does, and acknowledging His presence in everything we say, think and do.

God said, ***"You must be holy for I am holy."*** And the Psalmist said ***"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour"*** (Psalm 24:3-5). A righteous person according to Psalm 15 is someone ***"whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man; who despises a vile man but honours those who fear the Lord; who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent."*** That is the kind of man or woman, boy or girl we need to be in order to be right with God.

But you are probably thinking, "That's not the kind of person I am, is it?" Yet nobody is. That's what Paul says in Romans 3, ***"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."***

We have a problem! In order for us to be right with God we need to be righteous, but none of us is righteous. In fact we can't be. Our minds, wills, hearts, spirits, emotions, intellect - every part of us - has been so affected by sin that we can not be righteous, no matter how hard we try. The Bible says even our best works are but filthy rags in the sight of God. And see, that's important to know! Yes, we are not righteous in ourselves.

So the first step to being right with God is to know and believe that by yourself, you can never be right with God, because you are not righteous. You are a sinner. The second step is to go to Jesus. In Christ, I am right with God and heir to life everlasting. In Christ, I am right with God; not in myself, not on the basis of my own righteousness, but on the basis of His. The good news of the gospel is this: "Without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ. It's as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner; as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ who was obedient for me." Hallelujah! That's what makes us free! Jesus makes us right with God. Jesus and His righteousness alone and nobody and nothing else. That is the liberating truth of the gospel. What God demands, He Himself provides!

Note, God still demands righteousness. He hasn't changed. God does not change. And God will not lower His standards. The righteousness which the law shows us is still the standard which God demands. The trouble is that nobody can do it. But God sent Jesus, His eternal Son to fulfil all righteousness for us. And Jesus did it. Nothing more needs to be done. Nothing less will do. Nothing else is necessary.

See, you need to ask this question: "Am I right with God?" If you don't ask it, you'll never find Jesus. Because the only way that you and I can ever be right with God is through Jesus. Jesus, the one who alone is righteous, has made us right with God. All we need to do is to receive Him with a believing heart. And you know what? The moment that you and I turn to Jesus in faith and receive Him into our hearts as our Lord and Saviour, that's the moment God declares us right with Him. That's the moment God declares us justified, just as if we had never sinned.

Are you right with God today? Maybe you haven't felt right with Him for a long time. Maybe there are things in your life and heart that prevent you from experiencing it. Maybe you aren't living the way God wants you to live and you know it. Maybe you haven't reconciled your differences with that one person who hurt you a long time ago. Maybe there is dishonesty in your heart, maybe you are living a lie, allowing people to see what you want them to see, but being someone else when they aren't looking. Maybe you don't really believe it at all, but you pretend you do because you don't want to disappoint those around you. Maybe you've convinced yourself into believing that some day you will change - that you will get there eventually on your own. Think again! With an attitude like that you'll never change and you'll never get there. God has to change you. Jesus has to bring you there.

When things aren't right between people, they need to deal with it right away. If you wait too long it becomes more difficult, almost impossible to fix. When things aren't right between us and God we need to deal with it right away too. Don't put it off. Don't let it fester and grow into hardness of heart. Talk to someone about it - one of the pastors or an elder or a friend. Confess your weaknesses to the Lord, repent of them and turn to Christ in faith, and let Him make you right with God.

There is no other way to be right with God than through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no other Saviour. Don't try to do it on your own. It won't work. Give your heart to Christ and let Him change it. It doesn't matter what you've done. He is able to wash all your sins away. *"Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ who was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift of God with a believing heart."*

Nevertheless! What a great word! It is the 'nevertheless' of grace, God's great surprise. No matter what terrible sin we may have committed, you and I are declared righteous by the Almighty - clean and innocent the moment we place our faith and hope in Jesus. It was once said: *"Faith triumphs over our failures as long as we know the 'nevertheless' of justification by faith in Christ. Every one who humbles himself and cries 'God, have mercy on me a sinner' will go home justified."* "This is the 'nevertheless' of the gospel." Remember it. Repeat it to yourself over and over again. Shout it when Satan attacks you. Nevertheless, I am declared righteous; I am justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ. Because I believe in Him! As soon as we start believing that, that's when we start to change. God does not love us because we change first. God loves us first and then He changes us. Only then are we right with God. Hallelujah!