

# True Righteousness

**John 6:44** [NIV] *“No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

**Every step towards true righteousness is initiated by God the Father.**

God the Father allows the Holy Spirit to begin His work with us and eventually in us, [**John 14:17**].

**John 16:7-8** [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:”*

The Counsellor is the Holy Spirit and His first job is to convict us of our sins.

**Acts 2:36-39** [NIV] *“‘Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”*

The Holy Spirit working through Peter convicted these people of their guilt, having crucified the only One who could save them from the penalty of their sins.

**Romans 6:1-6** [NIV] *“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin,”*

**Repentance is an ongoing attitude of mind, a complete change of direction in our lives.**

**Romans 12:1-2** [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

**Once we realise the true value of the sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ, our response is to surrender our whole life to Him.**

As this decision is acted out, the Holy Spirit will begin His work in us to re-educate us towards a life of true righteousness.

**Galatians 5:22-25** [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

These “fruits” of the indwelling Holy Spirit are the very characteristics of true Godly righteousness.

These new righteous attitudes will gradually “rub off” on us as we live our daily life in the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the same way our physical parents’ attitudes “rubbed off” on us as we lived day by day with them.

The second part of the work of the Holy Spirit is then in progress in our lives, [**John 16:8**].

This seeking of true righteousness is prompted by the Holy Spirit reminding us that we will eventually face the judgement of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** [NIV] *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

We can be assured of a favourable judgement if we are continually judging ourselves, [**1 Corinthians 11:31-32; Matthew 7:1-2**].

Like many other elements of Christianity, there is a counterfeit righteousness and a true righteousness.

## **Counterfeit righteousness –**

**Romans 10:1-3** [NIV] *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”*

**The Jews tried to achieve their own righteousness, a self-righteousness.**

They did this by keeping God’s laws and many more rules that described what was right and what was wrong.

The Pharisees looked to other people as being righteous and were considered to be serving God.

**However, they did “not submit to God’s righteousness,” they fell short.**

**Luke 18:9-14** [NIV] *“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’” But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”*

**The Pharisees were confident that they were righteous, and they looked down on everyone else.**

These are two primary symptoms of counterfeit righteousness.

Self-righteous people think that they have a special relationship with God that other people do **not** have.

They generally assume that other people are not trying hard enough.

**Luke 16:14-15** [NIV] *“The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.’”*

**The Pharisees’ standard whether they realised it or not, was based on looking good to other people.**

**Matthew 23:5, 27-28** [NIV] *“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;” ... “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are*

*full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."*

**They performed their "righteous" acts to be seen by other people. They appeared to be righteous on the outside, but the inner attitude of mind was full of hypocrisy and actual law-breaking.**

**Matthew 23:23** [NIV] *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former."*

Due to their emphasis on detailed rules, they lost the bigger picture of what God really wants.

**Luke 10:25-29** [NIV] *"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?' He answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'"*

The lawyer, probably a Pharisee, agreed with what the law said, but he did not want to love other people.

Matthew's record of this event tells us that this man was rich, [Matthew 19:16-22] yet he was **not** willing to help those poor and needy people who were in the crowd listening to Jesus Christ and hearing his evasive reply and rejection of true righteousness.

Godly, true righteousness means we must have compassion and mercy on others, [Luke 10:30-37].

**Compassion and mercy are opposites of a self-righteous attitude, and important elements of true righteousness.**

## **True righteousness not gained through law –**

**Matthew 5:20** [NIV] *"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

True Godly righteousness surpasses that of simply meeting letter-of-the-law requirements.

Jesus Christ illustrated this by what He continued to preach, [Matthew 5:21-47] by saying that **obedience needs to be in our hearts and motives as well as in our actions.**

Our motives must be good and upright.

**We are not only to do what God commands, but we are also to seek to be like Him.**

It is good to want to obey God in every area of our lives, however, we can make a mistake by thinking that we can become righteous in God's eyes by obeying His law.

**Galatians 2:21** [NIV] *"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

Paul made this fact clear to the Galatian church who had been influenced by some Jews who taught a false gospel that said righteousness comes through obedience to various rules.

**Galatians 2:20** [NIV] *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

It is faith in what Jesus Christ has done for all humanity and the crucifying of our old way of selfish living, and living to serve God not ourselves.

**Galatians 2:16** [NIV] *“know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified.”*

**The Greek word for “justify” is “dikaiōō” is very similar to the Greek word for “righteous” which is “dikaios” meaning to be pronounced righteous, having a right standing with the Creator God, through faith.**

## **Our need for God’s mercy –**

**Romans 3:23** [NIV] *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

All have sinned and made it impossible for God to glorify us by giving us an eternal body, [**Romans 6:23**].

**No amount of obedience can erase our sins.**

Only through God’s mercy and the acceptance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection of His perfect sin-free life can our sins be erased from the record we will be judged by at the Second Coming of our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, [**2 Corinthians 5:10-12**].

**We must continually be in an attitude of repentance as God reveals our hidden sins, and always have faith in Christ’s sacrifice so we might be forgiven.**

Through God’s grace, as we live by faith, [**Hebrews 10:38; Habakkuk 2:4**].

**Romans 3:20** [NIV] *“Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”*

**The law is to show us what sin is, [**Romans 7:7**].**

**1 Timothy 1:8-10** [NIV] *“We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine”*

This is the proper use of the law to expose all these sinners.

**Romans 4:4-5** [NIV] *“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*

If we try to achieve righteousness by works, all we get is more debt.

But if we trust God our faith is counted as righteousness, just as Abraham’s was, [**Romans 4:3**].

**Romans 4:18-24** [NIV] *“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had*

*power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."*

Our faith in what God the Father has done for all humanity through the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ the human Son of Man, will be credited to us as righteousness.

### **So does faith and grace do away with our need to obey God's laws?**

Certainly not.

**1 John 2:29** [NIV] *"If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him."*

We are to practice righteousness, to walk in the right way of life, [Acts 10:34-35] and fear the Creator God.

**James 2:14-24** [NIV] *"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that, and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."*

Our faith in Jesus Christ motivates us to do works of love to other human beings.

**Romans 6:12-13, 17-18** [NIV] *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." ... "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."*

**We offer ourselves to God as slaves of righteousness, we express the credited righteousness in acts of love and kindness.**

**Revelation 19:7-8** [NIV] *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)"*

The wedding dress of the bride of Jesus Christ, the Christian Church, is woven righteous acts of all Christians.

**Matthew 22:34-40** [NIV] *"Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself.'" All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

**When Jesus Christ was asked for the greatest commandment, He condensed it to two attitudes of mind. Love God with all your being and your neighbour as yourself.**

This is the attitude that prevails in true Godly righteousness.

**Let us look to the Creator God for true righteousness that only comes from faith in Him.**

**Then let us in faith be responsive to Jesus Christ as He leads us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to live a life full of the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit.**

**Galatians 5:22-25** [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

Love and faithfulness along with self-control are among the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, all of which reflect the very character of the Triune God.