

What God Requires - Righteousness

by Zac Poonen

God requires righteousness, mercy, and humility from us, and we must be honest about our sin and seek God's help to overcome it.

Duration: 58:40

Scripture: Matthew 5:6, Romans 3:22, Romans 6:4, Romans 8:3, Philippians 3:9

Topics: "Righteousness", "Sanctification"

Description

This sermon delves into the concept of righteousness as required by God, emphasizing the journey from imputed righteousness to imparted righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit. It highlights the need for honesty, humility, and dependence on God in the battle against sin, drawing parallels to biblical stories like Peter walking on water. The message underscores the importance of seeking divine righteousness and not falling into legalism or comparison with others.

Transcript

We're going to take a Bible study on three different things titled, What Does God Require from You? And that is based on, you probably know, a verse in the Old Testament in Micah chapter 6. In Micah chapter 6, how can I stand up before God? Micah 6 verse 6. How can I show proper respect to the Most High God? Shall I bring Him an armload of offerings topped off with yearling cogs and will God be impressed with thousands of rams? You know, those are the things God asked people to bring as sacrifices, rams and cobs and with buckets and barrels of olive oil. Would God be moved if I sacrificed my firstborn child, my precious baby, to cancel my sin? But no, He has told you, O man, what is good. He's already made it plain to you what God is looking for in men and women, what God requires of us.

It's quite simple. To do justice, to love mercy and kindness and to walk humbly with your God. It's very simple.

To do righteousness, to do what is righteous all the time, to be merciful to other people and to walk humbly with your God. In ourselves, righteousness, towards others, mercy, and towards God, humility. So those are the three things that God expects of us.

And even though that is written in the Old Testament, there were little things like this written in the Old Testament which are God's requirements for all time. What does God expect from you and me today? Today we don't bring armloads of offerings and cobs and rams. We bring to God multitudes of meetings

and songs and hymns and maybe some type of activity.

Those are the sacrifices we offer today. What is God requiring from you? He wants from you and me, first of all, righteousness. So we'll consider that first of all.

Now you know there are a lot of non-Christians who like this verse. I might as well tell you that. They say, doesn't your Bible say that God wants us to be righteous and merciful and walk humbly? That's all.

It's almost as though our salvation is by works. If you do all that, then God will accept you. That's true.

But if you really try to be righteous the way God wants you to be, you'll discover it is impossible. Every man is righteous in his own eyes. And very often I have found among believers, the way we judge people is like this.

If someone lives at a much higher standard, I'm talking about financially now. If someone lives at a much higher standard than us, we say, ah, that guy is just a waster of money, living luxuriously, buying a whole lot of things he doesn't need. And if we look at someone who's living in desperate poverty, much lower than us, we say, well, if he sought the kingdom of God like me, he wouldn't be in that condition.

We may not say it, but that's what we think. Because we have this fantastic conceit, and there's no other way I can describe it, that makes us feel, I am the standard. I am the standard.

Anybody beneath me is not seeking God's kingdom first. That's why he's so poor. Anyone who has much more than me, ah, he's a lover of money.

I want to say to you, if that is how you are, and I think most, even Christians are like that, that is one of the fundamental reasons why you don't grow spiritually. I want to tell you the bad news. You are not the standard.

I want to tell you the truth. Jesus is the standard, by the way, not you or me. But ask yourself whether you have not inwardly judged people who have very much more than you.

Say, why does he need two cars, when you only have a scooter? I don't know, it doesn't interest me. He didn't take my money to buy it. Why should it bother you? What if he has 50 cars? I mean, if he took money from you, like some preachers, and buys a jet plane or something, you can ask him why.

But somebody who is not doing that, why are you bothered? And then, how can you say that that person is struggling financially because he didn't seek the kingdom of God like you? Maybe your father gave you a good education and you could get a job. Don't forget that. It's good to walk in humility.

The same way with righteousness. I was really using that as an example towards righteousness. Very often, when we talk about victory over sin and righteousness, again, you think you're the standard.

If anyone doesn't do the things you do, he's a sinner. He needs to be preached against that. But if anyone is speaking of a higher standard than you, oh, he's a legalist.

You see how you get out of it? Someone who's got a higher standard than you is a legalist. And someone who's got a lower standard than you is worldly. Why? Because you are the standard of righteousness.

Again, I want to disappoint you. You are not the standard. Jesus is the standard.

So when it says God requires from us righteousness, first of all, we need to understand to do justly. To do justly means to be absolutely righteous in everything. Jesus said your yes must be yes and your no must be no.

Do you know that in the Ten Commandments, there was no commandment saying you shall not tell lies? It's a very serious thing to tell a lie. But God knew human nature that without the power of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for people to be free from telling lies. If you still have the habit of telling lies, you know what you need? You need to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Because in the Old Testament, they told lies. The commandment was you shall not bear false witness. Not you must not tell lies.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And that is a court word. That means don't go to court and put your hand on some holy book and say, I swear, I saw this man hurting that person or killing that person.

Don't swear to a lie. Don't ever swear and tell a lie. And Jesus took that up and said, you don't need to swear.

You must always speak the truth. Your yes must always be yes. And your no must always be no.

That's the standard of Jesus' righteousness. In the Old Testament, they couldn't live up to that standard. What was the righteousness God required from man? The righteousness of the law had 10 commandments.

Nine of them were external. The last one was inward. You know, commandments like don't take the name of the Lord in vain, I am the Lord your God, and don't make any idols, don't bow down to them, keep the Sabbath day holy, honor your father and mother, don't kill, don't commit adultery, and don't steal, and don't bear false witness.

All these things were external. And you could keep it. But when it came to the 10th commandment, you should not desire, you should not lust, you should not covet.

It's the same word in Romans 7, if you read, you shall not covet in the margin, it says lust. You shall not lust in your heart for your neighbor's wife or your neighbor's daughter. And by the way, neighbor's wife and neighbor's daughter covers every woman in the whole world.

That means you shouldn't ever lust after a woman. Either in a photograph or on the internet or when you look at someone, you shouldn't desire. You go to somebody's house and you shouldn't desire what he has.

You see somebody wearing a particular type of dress, you shouldn't desire it. You see a sister wearing a sari, you shouldn't desire that. It's not talking about grabbing it and stealing.

Stealing is another commandment earlier on. This is just desire. You want it.

You shall not covet it. You shall not eagerly desire what belongs to somebody else. It was impossible to keep that commandment in the Old Testament.

And that's why when the rich young ruler came to Jesus and he asked Jesus, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said, well, keep the commandments. He said, which ones? And Jesus did not list the first four commandments related to God because that everybody kept in Israel. He spoke about the next, out of the next six commandments, you know there were two tablets of stone.

One contained four commandments, man's relationship with God and the other six commandments, man's relationship to his neighbor. To sum up, the first tablet of stone was you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. And the second tablet was basically you shall love your neighbor as yourself, broken up into six commandments.

And out of those six commandments, Jesus took only five when he spoke to the rich young ruler. I don't have time to show it to you, but you read it in Mark chapter 10. And he said, these are the things you need to do.

Honor your father and mother, don't tell lies, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't commit adultery. And he said, I kept all of them. If Jesus had said, added the tenth one also, and you shall not desire, he could not have said, I kept all of them.

And Jesus knew he wouldn't be able to say it. And that's why he stopped at number nine. You know, if you read the scripture carefully, you'll see these things.

Why? Because Jesus knew it's no use asking somebody, have you ever desired after somebody or something that's not yours? Nobody could keep it. Does that mean that was not God's standard? Why did God put that tenth commandment there? The apostle Paul, let me show you what he talks about righteousness. Righteousness is what God requires from us to do justly.

What does it mean? God requires us to be righteous. In Philippians, in chapter three, Paul says, let me tell you about my past life, he says, verse six, the last part, as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless. Found blameless according to the righteousness in the law.

Does that mean that Paul never coveted or lusted after anybody as a young man? Hang on, we've got to read the whole of scripture. See what he says in Acts chapter 23 and verse one. Paul was looking at the Jewish council before whom he was arrested and brought on trial.

And the high priest was standing, sitting there to judge him. And he looks up to all these people, many of whom who must have known him. And he said, brethren, I want to tell you something.

Acts 23.1. All my life, I have lived with a perfectly good conscience before God, not before you fellas, before God. Until this day. That means from the time he came to an age of understanding as a little child, he lived with an absolutely good conscience before God until this day.

Anybody here who can say that? This was Paul's standard of righteousness. But what did he mean? You mean he never lusted? No, he did. But that never convicted his conscience because he was under the law.

He knew that nobody could keep that 10th commandment. But when he became a Christian, when he was born again, the conscience began to stir within him. And he says in Romans chapter seven, verse seven.

Romans seven, verse seven. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Oh, may it never be. On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law.

Because I would not have known about coveting in the margin says lusting. If the law had not said, you shall not lust. That is a 10th commandment.

You shall not lust. When Jesus said to lust with your eyes is equal to adultery. He was just quoting the 10th commandment.

That's all. It wasn't really a new one. It was a new commandment for people who didn't stick the 10 commandments seriously.

And most people in the Jewish nation did not take commandment number 10 seriously. They kept nine commandments and they said, my conscience is clear. They kept nine commandments and said, according to the righteousness of the law, I am blameless.

Now don't be too quick to judge them. Because many of you who preach victory over sin are doing the same thing. You have a certain standard where you have eliminated certain things and say victory over sin.

What about these other things? Oh, that's not. I slip up in Paul sometime. That's exactly how the Jewish were.

They excused certain things in the life, particularly in the 10th commandment. He said, according to the righteousness in the law, blameless. But what does he say here? Because when I read this commandment, say the 10th commandment, you shall not lust.

Sin took opportunity through the commandment and produced in me lusting of every kind. Lusting after women, lusting after money, lusting after honor, lusting after position, every kind of lusting. Paul was absolutely honest.

He says, I got rid of this Jewish idea of righteousness and I began to see what God wanted from me. He says, but you see, before the law came, he says sin was dead. Verse nine, and I was alive apart from the law means I thought, hey, I'm a holy man.

Let me paraphrase it. I thought I'm a pretty holy man till I heard this commandment saying, you shall not lust. There are people who come to our church who thought themselves pretty holy till they discovered that anger was a sin enough to take you to hell.

That lusting after women was a sin enough to take you to hell. All of a sudden, it's like they begin to see that they're not as holy as they thought. I asked myself, you know, why did God put that little 10th commandment right at the bottom? You know, it's like that little tree in the Garden of Eden.

Let's see what Adam does about that. Only one tree. They have 10,000 trees.

This is one tree. Don't touch it. Let's see what Adam does.

In the same way, I felt God gave all these nine commandments and added the 10th to see. Let's see how many people are honest and will acknowledge before me. Oh, Lord, I find all types of lusting in my heart, Lord.

I know I'm not what you want me to be. And God says, those are the ones I'm looking for. I will lead them to a godly life.

There were very few. Paul was one of them. It's the same today in our midst.

Here's a church that's preaching victory over sin, victory over sin. Every church we're preaching victory over sin, victory over sin. And the Lord says, let me see what these people mean by victory over sin.

Let me see whether they take the small thing which I see in their life as sin. And many people don't. They justify it by some reason or the other.

Getting a little upset at home or doing a little unrighteousness in money matters. For example, how many believers do you think believe that if you don't pay back your debts, it's a sin? The vast majority of Christians that I know around the world don't even believe that. Even though it says in Romans 13, verse 8, owe no man anything.

Is that a commandment? The question is not whether it's a big or a small commandment. The question is, who gave the commandment? It's a great almighty God who gave that commandment. Don't owe anybody anything.

See, he didn't say don't borrow. There may be some situations where suddenly you're in a fix and you need to borrow, but pay it back. Owe no man anything.

That means if you borrow, pay it back as soon as possible. But brother, people say it's difficult to pay it back. I don't think it is.

I'll give you, you know, many years ago when I was an elder in the Bangalore church, I said if anybody in this church has borrowed more than 1,000 rupees from you and not repaid it over a reasonable amount of time, not even making an effort to repay it, please come and tell me who that is. That day, some people paid back their debts before the news came to my ears. Does it mean they couldn't pay it back? No.

The fear of Zak Poonen was more than the fear of God. Do you think such people are saved? They are a million miles from salvation. They sit in CFC breaking bread.

Many years later, I said the same thing again. Years later, again, debts were quickly repaid. Maybe I should say it again today.

And some people who need their money back will get it back tonight. The fear of man produces a holiness which is not genuine. There is only one way to be righteous, and that is the fear of God.

And Paul, because lusting particularly is in the heart, and only God knows whether you are desiring someone or something. That's the particular commandment that Paul spoke about. He says, I found I could keep all nine commandments, but when it came to the tenth, I was defeated.

And he says, O wretched man that I am, verse 24, who is ever going to set me free from this? This is a terrible body. I make so many resolutions, but I always fall, I always fall, I always fall. I cannot keep what the law demands.

And all that the law tells me to do, it cannot help me to do it. It just tells me to do that, but it doesn't help me to do it. And then we read these words.

Now you understand Romans 8 verse 3. What the law could not do. What the law could not do. What was it it could not do? It could not deliver me from my lusting.

What was it the law could do? It could make me acknowledge there was only one God. It could make me prevent me from idol worship. It could prevent me from taking God's name in vain.

It could make me keep the Sabbath. It could make me honor my father and mother. It could keep me from stealing, keep me from adultery, keep me from bearing false witness, and keep me from murder, and all that.

But it couldn't keep me from lusting. What the law could not do. It could not enable Paul to keep the tenth commandment.

And if after the gospel came, which is supposed to be good news, still Paul has to say, boy, even the gospel couldn't do it. Then we have to say the gospel is also a failure like the law. And the second covenant has also got to be considered a failure and God has to make a third covenant.

I want to tell you, the second new covenant is not a failure. If it is a failure in your life, it's because you haven't understood it. Or you're still living under the old covenant.

Sin shall not have dominion over you because you're not under the old covenant but under the new covenant. You're not under law but under grace. So that's one of the surest ways to know whether you're a legalist.

Many of you call other people legalists. If you're defeated by sin, you're a legalist too. Did you know that? I could read Romans 6.14 like this.

Sin will rule over you if you're under law. That's a perfectly legitimate interpretation of Romans 6.14. Sin will rule over you if you're under law. You will not be able to overcome sin as long as you're under law.

Because there's something the law cannot do. The law cannot help you to overcome lusting. And it all depends on your standard and what you call lusting.

I remember hearing a story of a man who attended some church somewhere in the United States and he heard the pastor preach saying, I never quarrel with my wife. And this man was really impressed. He said, that's great.

I wish I could live like that. And after the service, he was traveling back with the pastor in his car. And he saw the pastor and his wife having a big argument in front.

And he said, oh, well, his definition of quarrel is different from mine. That's all. And very often when we talk about victory over sin, it's just that our definition of that particular sin is about ten miles below God's definition.

We say, I got victory over sin. It's just a play with words. What do you mean by that? Who are you fooling? You're not fooling the devil.

He sits back and laughs at you. You're not fooling God. But you are fooling yourself.

Or you're probably not even fooling yourself. You're fooling other people. The thing that delivered Paul was his honesty.

He recognized that God wanted him not to lust in his heart. And he found despite his best efforts, he was doing it. And he found that struggle, struggle, good resolutions, nothing could accomplish it.

Any number of meetings couldn't accomplish it. But he was honest. Oh, wretched man that I am.

Who shall set me free? And then he says, what the law could not do, God did. How did he do it? Let's read verse 2. The law of the spirit. Now he's contrasting this with the law mentioned in Romans 7. We mustn't read these chapters in isolation.

It is one continuous letter. There were no chapters when Paul wrote Romans. There's a law which is the law of Moses that brought sin in my life and death, spiritual death.

But there's another law. That's called the law of the Holy Spirit. So we have two laws here.

The law of Moses that only brought me more into sin and death because I couldn't keep it. And the law didn't help me. It just told me don't do this, do this, do this.

And then there's another law called the law of the spirit. There's a contrast between the law of Moses and the law of the spirit. Moses' law had 10 commandments and 603 other commandments.

The law of the spirit, how many commandments does that have? Really, no commandments. Because it says here, the law of the spirit, and I want to read this verse like this. For the law of the spirit, verse 2, by which I mean the life of Jesus Christ, that set me free from this other law, which I could never be set free from.

There's a law in my members, he says in the last part of Romans 7, no matter how hard I try, no matter how much I determine to be righteous, to do justly, I know God requires of me to do justly, but I just can't make it because there's a law in my members that's always dragging me down. But there is another law which I discovered. It's not a law of commandments.

It's not thou shalt and thou shalt not. It is open your whole being to the life of Jesus Christ. That's the law of the spirit, that when the Holy Spirit fills a person, he's filling him with the life of Jesus Christ.

And that life has such a tremendous power, it lifts me up from the law of sin and death. That which looks impossible, it does. One of the greatest examples of the law of sin and death is the law of gravity.

It works uniformly on all people all over the world, in every generation, and the law of sin and death is exactly like that. And all the children of Adam, no matter how hard they try, they cannot lift themselves up off the ground. If they jump, they'll come down.

They can determine, they can do what they like, they can determine and they come down. But today we see massive machines called aircraft, which weigh many hundreds of tons, going up against the law of gravity. It's almost as though the law of gravity is pulling it down, but it can't.

It just goes up. There are thousands and thousands every day of such huge heavy metal machines flying through the air. How did they overcome the law of gravity? There is another law called the law of aerodynamics.

It's a very simple law. That's how they shape an aircraft's wing. It's a law which man discovered.

It was a law which Adam could have discovered if he wanted to, which lifts. The shape of a wing is made in such a way that the pressure becomes less on top and it lifts the plane. It lifts tons.

And the law of aerodynamics has set that plane free from the law of gravity. It's with birds. It's the same thing.

A bird without a wing cannot fly. You know that. It needs wings to fly.

There's a law that gets into motion when it flaps its wings and it goes up. It defies the law of gravity. And these are all little illustrations.

Those who wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings like eagles, it says in scripture. And those Old Testament prophets never knew what it really meant. Today we understand.

Those who wait on the Lord, who depend on the Lord, will find themselves getting spiritual wings that lift them up above the law of sin and death and make them righteous. So what does this life on Christ Jesus do? What is it the law could not do which the life of Jesus Christ could do? Please read verse 4. Now, the requirement of the law can be fulfilled inside us. The most important word in that is the two-letter word in, not outside us.

That was the first nine commandments. What is the requirement of the law? The requirement of the law is you shall not lust. Can't do it.

But this life in Christ Jesus, like the law of aerodynamics, it makes me, lifts me up. And now that requirement of the law, the 10th commandment, which said you shall not covet, is fulfilled inside me, not automatically, because if it were automatic, I would be like a robot. You know, God doesn't make me into a robot when I accept Christ that I automatically don't lust and automatically obey God.

No. I have to choose. That's why Jesus said you must choose to deny yourself and take up the cross every day, but I will give you the power of the spirit.

You know, the law of aerodynamics is controlled by a pilot. He's the one who decides when the plane is going to take off. It's not completely out of his control that suddenly it takes off.

No. He controls it. He controls when it should take off.

It controls how high it can fly, etc. There's a control there, but it's not his power. No pilot can lift a plane.

It's a pilot using the law of aerodynamics, but which is under his control. And the Holy Spirit's power is offered to us to lift us up, to make this righteous requirement of the law fulfilled inside us, but we have to make a choice that I will not walk according to what the flesh tells me, but according, verse 4, to what the spirit tells me. And it all depends on where I set my mind.

That's the important thing. You know, the mind is one of the most important things in the Christian life. The Holy Spirit wants to control your mind and the world wants to control your mind.

Today in Christendom, people say worldliness is if you dress in a particular way, that's worldly. Or if you wear jewelry, that's worldly. Or if men have long hair, that's worldly.

Or if women have short hair, that's worldly. I wish it were so easy to make people holy. It isn't.

Holiness and worldliness are both in the mind, initially. From the mind, it manifests itself in the way we dress, the way we speak, the way we do things, the way we spend our money, the way we do a thousand and one things every day. It's worldly or holy according to how we think.

Be renewed in your mind and don't be conformed to the world in your mind, but be renewed so that you can be transformed in your mind into the likeness of Christ. Romans 12, verse 2. So, it says here in verse 5, those whose mind is according to the flesh, they keep on thinking about the things of the flesh. But those whose mind is yielded to the Spirit, they'll be thinking about the things of the Spirit.

Because if a mind is set on the things of the flesh, it's going to be spiritual death. But if a mind says, I'm going to be set on the things of the Holy Spirit, it's going to be life and peace. And the mind set on the flesh is an enemy of God because it doesn't subject itself to the law of God.

And it's not even able to do it. That's why he gives us the Holy Spirit. So, what is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit? He begins to change my mind.

He makes me begin to think like God thinks about certain things which are sinful. He makes me begin to be righteous in all my dealings, in my inner life, and also with other people, that we have to be fair and just towards other people. You know, that's one of the things that James was very concerned about.

There are two extremes, as I said, in the Christian life. We've often spoken about the two cliffs that people fall over. One is that salvation is only by faith and works don't matter.

And the other is salvation is by works. And faith is not just such an important thing. And throughout 2,000 years, Christians have tended to fall over one of these cliffs or the other.

Faith without works or works without faith. But it is the works of faith that James emphasizes. You know, James probably looked around in his time, in 60 AD, and saw a lot of Christians who claimed to be righteous.

I've accepted Christ. I'm clothed with the righteousness of Christ. But nobody could see that righteousness.

You know, there are a lot of Christians like that today. It is true that justification means I'm clothed with the righteousness of Christ. I mean, I mustn't devalue that.

It's very important to know that initially, when we come to Christ, the day we are born again, we are justified. You may not know it, but it is true. The blood of Christ not only cleanses us, Romans 5, 9, it says it justifies us.

Justifies means we are declared righteous before God. It's very important to know that. I never get tired of repeating that because a lot of new believers come into our church and you need to hear it.

This is the thing that will assure you that God accepts you when you come to Christ. See, when you come to Christ, the only thing God wants from you is honesty. An honest admission of your sin and an honest desire to turn from whatever you know to be sin in your life.

You may know only 1% of the millions of sins in your life, but if you're willing to turn from that 1%, which you know, that shows your attitude is right and that's what God looks at. What is your attitude towards sin? Not do you have light on all the 10,000 sins in your life. You'll get condemned if you think like that.

What is your attitude towards sin? I want to turn from it. I'm sorry for the way I've lived. I want you, Lord, to forgive me, cleanse me.

The Bible says if we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. And to walk in the light means very simple. Don't hide in the darkness.

He who was honest comes into the light, it says in John 3. If I'm honest, I come to the light and say, yeah, I've got a few spots on my shirt. I don't want to hide it. I want the Lord to cleanse it away.

I got a few things wrong in my life, like the thief on the cross said. I deserve this. I'm a criminal.

I don't deserve a few years in jail. I deserve to be crucified. And Jesus said, really? You come to paradise then with me today.

Paradise is made for such people who don't blame anybody else, but say, I deserve that. I'm 100% to blame. I don't blame my mother for bringing me up wrongly.

I don't blame my friends for leading me astray. I don't blame that gang of robbers who put the blame on me. No, I deserve this.

I deserve to be crucified. I'm a terrible sinner. Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.

Such people get saved very quickly. They can enter paradise. But Adam, who when God asked him, what about you? Did you eat that? You know, you've heard him say that many times.

He blames his wife. She's the one who gave me this fruit. And Lord, you're the one who gave me this wife.

And postscript, P.S., I ate the fruit also. Such people are kicked out of paradise. Do you see the contrast between Adam and the thief on the cross? One refused to straightaway acknowledge it's my fault, blamed his wife, blamed God, and got kicked out.

And the other one just said, no, I deserve it 100%. The Lord said, come in. Paradise is made for honest people.

Paradise is not made for perfect people. When you go to heaven and you meet the thief who was hanging on the cross, do you believe you'll meet him there? Oh, yes. I'm looking forward to meet him.

He'll be one of the most excited people in heaven. He'll be the one running around heaven saying, you know, I did nothing. Not one good thing.

I didn't even make restitution to the fellows I hurt and I'm here in heaven. Maybe you guys got grace, but not as much as me. I did nothing.

It was sheer grace. 100% God's gift. How did you get here? Just honesty.

The only thing I could do was open my mouth and say I'm a sinner. I don't blame anybody else but myself. That's all you need.

That's all you need to be saved. But it's so difficult for a proud man to be honest. Haven't you husbands and wives discovered that in your home? How you blame each other, even though you know part of the blame is for yourself.

Oh, how you blame your mother-in-law for problems that you'd never blame your mother for. Right? I don't mean you holy people. I'm talking about all the unholy people elsewhere.

Right? We blame people for things which deep down in our heart we know. If my mother did that, I would excuse her. But this does not happen to be my mother.

It happens to be my mother-in-law. And I want to get back at her somehow. See, we are dishonest.

We are a thoroughly dishonest people. We got it from Adam. We need to come to the feet of the thief on the cross and say, brother, please teach me some honesty.

Please teach me to take the blame. That's the first step towards righteousness. And we get justified.

That means, you know, if your sins are all forgiven, you still can't stand before God. Some people think if my sins are all forgiven, I can stand before God. No, sir, you can't.

Because there's so much of a bad nature in you. How can you stand before God with a bad nature, even if all the past sins you committed were forgiven? We have two problems. One is all the sins we committed.

Okay, that's taken care of by the blood of Christ. But what about the sinful nature? This thing called the flesh, which we still have. Can I stand before God with that filthy thing? That's why we need a second thing.

We need something more than forgiveness. We need a second thing, which the New Testament calls justification. Being declared righteous.

Not become righteous, that'll take time. Declared righteous. It's like something put to my account.

It's like, can a baby be a millionaire? What do you think? You need time to think on that? A baby can be a millionaire if his father just opens an account in the baby's name and puts one million rupees in his name, he's a millionaire. That is justification. Where God puts the righteousness of Christ in my account, even though I didn't do anything.

He clothes me with the righteousness of Christ so that when I stand before him, my sinful nature is covered. That's the meaning of that story where all the beggars came for the wedding and took the wedding garment and sat down. But one fellow who thought his dress was good enough, maybe he came in a suit and a tie, he said, I don't need that garment.

He got kicked out because his suit and tie were not good enough. The meaning of that parable is the one who thinks he's righteous is the one who is more in danger of being kicked out than the one who recognized my righteousness is filthy rags. I'm like a beggar.

I am glad to get Christ's righteousness in me. And one of the marks of a person who has taken Christ's righteousness and been justified is this. He will not despise another sinner who was worse than him.

If you find that you despise some other person in the church whose past life was horrible and you think because you were brought up in a good God-fearing family, you are not so bad as him. That is a pretty clear indication that you don't have a clue about what justification means. You don't have a clue.

Maybe you know forgiveness but you don't know justification and that's part of the reason why your Christian life is so miserable and it will continue to be miserable. That's why it's important to know justification. That when that beggar who came to the party, I'm going back to Matthew 22, he's just got a thin little underwear that's also torn.

I'm a little better beggar. I've got a little more than underwear. I've got a little torn vest as well.

And I look at him and I say, hey, I'm better than you. You just got a dirty underwear. I've also got a dirty vest.

Don't forget that. I'm a little better than you. What happens when both of us get this white garment? Who looks better now? We're the same.

Have you seen that? Do you know that there are so many Christians I have met, I believe one of the reasons they never get victory over certain sins even after many, many years. If you have a problem with your anger or your lust or some other sin and you don't seem to get victory over it, consider this may be the reason that perhaps you despise somebody whose life was worse than yours and you think God accepted you because you were a little holier than him. You haven't understood justification.

That was the problem with that man who was kicked out of the banquet. So righteousness begins with that. That's the first step.

God requires righteousness of me. But that righteousness is first something I don't have. So he gifts it to me.

Clothes me with the righteousness of Christ. I look exactly like, even though I may be the filthiest sinner in the world, Paul said he was the chief of sinners, I look exactly like the other guy who was brought up in a very God-fearing home. How many of you believe that Mary Magdalene, who was perhaps a prostitute who certainly had seven demons cast out of her, finally became one of the holiest women in the early church? As holy as Mary, the mother of Jesus.

If people believe that, if people believe that the prayers of holy people could be answered in heaven if they pray to Mary, how many people pray to Mary Magdalene? People wouldn't think of praying to Mary Magdalene. Oh Mary Magdalene, God's not going to listen to her prayer. Well God's not going to listen to the prayer of Mary either, the mother of Mary either.

But if you believe that, I say you should also be able to believe that God listens to the prayer of Mary Magdalene. Of course the truth is he doesn't listen to any of them because they're dead and gone. First of all they don't have any tongue by the way in heaven, I hope you know that.

Anyway, my point is this, that if we understand justification, this is the way you can test whether you understand justification, you will not despise another born-again believer for his past life. Then, once that is done, then I find I need another level of righteousness. First is the righteousness imputed, imputed means put to my account.

Then I need the righteousness imparted, given to me from within. The first is called justification, the second is called sanctification. And that is where this righteousness which is put to my account gradually becomes mine.

Little by little by little I become righteous, holier and holier and holier as time goes on. That's a process that takes a whole lifetime where little by little we can picture the human body with its lusts like the land of Canaan. I like to picture my body like the land of Canaan.

It's somewhat shaped like the land of Canaan too. And here is Jesus, Joshua, Jesus is the new Joshua coming into this land and slaying the giants. I and Joshua, Jesus are going to kill these giants.

And little by little by little the land of Canaan gets taken over by God. It belongs to God, the whole body belongs to God, but it gets taken over little by little by little, not all of a sudden. See that's the difference between the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

The Egyptian army was destroyed in one moment. The entire army wiped out under the sea. One second, gone.

But the Canaanites little by little by little by little by little over many many years. And it depended on the Israelites cooperating with God. God was willing to cooperate with the Israelites.

He was willing to stop the sun. He was willing to pull down the walls of Jericho. But the Israelites had to say, sun stop, or shout, make the walls.

They had to do something. God worked with them. That's how the Canaanites were defeated.

But when it came to the Egyptians, the Israelites did nothing. God buried the whole lot of them in a moment. They didn't have to fight.

And that's the difference between the old man and the flesh. The old man is the Egyptians and the flesh is the Canaanites. It's very simple.

The Bible is a very simple book. If you don't go to Bible college or don't try to read complicated things into simple scripture, the old man is what God kills, buried under the Red Sea. And the Red Sea we read in 1 Corinthians 10 is a picture of baptism.

It says they were baptized in the Red Sea, 1 Corinthians 10 verse 4. And that's what we testify to in baptism in Romans 6, 4. Not that the flesh is killed, no. The old man is buried. The Egyptians are buried, not the Canaanites.

Don't forget that. So we testify that this desire to sin, the mind that wanted to sin and sin and sin, it's gone. But the lusts in the flesh are there.

And that's where, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we fight against those lusts and we become holy or sanctified. God requires that righteousness. Why does God allow us to fight the battle against the lusts in our flesh? I was talking to the teenagers and young people in the camp we had there.

I was telling them that many years ago I was wondering why did God allow sexual desire to arise, particularly in a boy when he's 12 years old and he can't get married for sometimes another 16 years. And I was thinking, boy, if God had only allowed this sexual desire to start in a boy when he's around 26 and

until the age of 26 he's like a two-year-old playing innocently with the other boys and girls around him. Wouldn't that have been great? No special desire, no special struggle with lust or any such thing.

Because a guy can't get married until he's 26 or so. But God in his great wisdom allowed this desire to begin when you're 12 and 13, probably younger nowadays, I think. I'm talking about the old days when the world was a little simpler.

And struggle, struggle, struggle. And I felt the answer was this, that God wanted us to fight a battle. A battle, a battle, a battle, a battle.

And overcome! And imagine you can be an overcomer. And if you have a desire that is strong in one area, you can be a greater overcomer than somebody else. You know it's true, some men have got very weak sexual desire.

But they can't become as great an overcomer in that area as you who've got a strong sexual desire. Yeah, it's true. God wants us to be overcomers.

And you'll never overcome if you have an easy way through life. That's how righteousness comes. Righteousness comes through battle.

God wants us to do what is right. First of all, inwardly. Always what is right, inwardly.

And it's not by laws and rules. You know very often we find, I find this is one of the big problems we have in CFC. There are some wonderful brothers who could have been great leaders in the church.

But they are such legalists. They are so hard on other people. It's almost as though they can never be gentle.

If you tell them to be gentle, they are hard. There's a song which we sing sometimes in CFC. And our lives would all be sunshine in the sweetness of our Lord.

And we would bring sunshine into other people's lives as well. This is the man who wrote, My God, how wonderful thou art, thy majesty how bright, how beautiful thy mercy seat in depths of burning light. This is the man who wrote, I worship thee, sweet will of God, in all thy ways adore, and every day I live I seem to love thee more and more.

You know who he was? Frederick Faber, lived in the 19th century, born as an Anglican, and felt that the Protestant church was too worldly and joined the Roman Catholic church. He became a priest in the Catholic church. Are there people who would say, I'd rather be a Roman Catholic monk than be a part of CFC? Because CFC people are so worldly.

Monks don't see the filthy movies that some CFC people see. This man left a Protestant church because he said there's too much worldliness here. I'm not saying that his doctrine was right, but if our righteousness does not exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, and the scribes, and the Protestants, and the CSI, and the Pentecostal, I wonder whether we will enter the kingdom of heaven.

And that's what should bring us to our knees in a desperate cry for the power of the Holy Spirit. God requires righteousness. And if you can recognize, Lord, I cannot produce righteousness any more than I can turn water into wine.

Please help me. Give me the power of the Holy Spirit. This human righteousness will be water, water, water.

But if you do a miracle, it can be divine. You require righteousness and you will produce it in me. I want it, Lord.

What does God require of you? Attending numerous conferences and multitudes of meetings and doing a lot of activity? No. He requires righteousness. Let's think about that.

Meditate on it and acknowledge our inability to fly and say, Lord, I want to depend upon you. I want the power of the Holy Spirit to bring within me this new law called life of Jesus Christ that lifts me up. You know, in conclusion, that's the message of Peter walking on the water.

Tell me, which is the greater miracle, Jesus walking on the water or Peter walking on the water? Any day. Jesus walking on the water, hey, that's not a great miracle. I mean, we can accept that.

But Peter, a fellow like me, walking on the water. What was Jesus demonstrating in walking on the water? I can overcome the law of gravity. I can overcome the law of sin and death.

I never sink. And there is a Peter here and a Mary Magdalene there who says, Lord, if you can do it because you came in my flesh, so can I. Bid me to come. And the Lord says, come, come out of that boat of unbelief and trust me.

And Peter puts out his first step and miracle of miracles. He begins to walk. And he's overcoming gravity, too, until he turns his eyes away from Jesus.

On to somebody else. Uh-huh. I'm a little better than you.

You sink. Or somebody else. That guy's better than me.

I've got to be more spiritual than him. Sink. This is how we sink.

Or you look at some enemy. That giant is stronger than my God. You sink.

The secret is looking unto Jesus to be righteous. Trust him. He can do it for you.

What he's done for others, he'll do for you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you will apply the truths we have heard to our life.

So that it doesn't remain theory and nice images and nice sermons. But something that really produces in us a tremendous hunger and thirst for righteousness. Because you said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

They will be filled. And I pray it will be so for those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness here. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/what-god-requires-righteousness/>

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