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Pause Ponder Profit

Relative Righteousness

by Dan Shipley

When asked by a stranger whether he considered his wife attractive, a certain rancher replied, "Compared to what?" Many are inclined to measure their standing with God in much the same fashion. By some standard most justify themselves as being "good enough to get by" spiritually. Honest and discerning men will recognize this popular practice to be wrong for several reasons.

In the first place, what pleases self does not necessarily please God. It would appear unnecessary to point this out were it not for the widespread notion that personal preference ought to be respected on a par with divine revelation. Paul's preaching gave emphasis to how men "ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thess. 4:1). This principle is controverted by the subjective philosophy of moderns who put the emphasis on what pleases the individual. The fundamental question to be resolved is not whether my religion satisfies me, but whether it pleases God. With Paul, our aim must be "to be well pleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5:9).

Secondly, pleasing God involves more than just being better than someone else. Paul wrote of certain ones who commended themselves as they measured and compared themselves by themselves. He concludes them to be without understanding (2 Cor. 10:12). As the self-righteous Pharisee of Lk. 18, most can find a despised "publican" with which to compare and exonerate himself. What is the consolation in a relative righteousness that sees self as being "better" than another sinner if I am less than God wants me to be? Some seem to take delight in finding fault with Christians — as though the Christian's sins could somehow excuse his own. Someone (Abraham Lincoln, I think) has said in this connection, "Short men do not grow taller by cutting off the legs of tall men". Is anyone complimented in being "as good" as the hypocrite in the church? It is a poor system of justification that can only find credit for self by discrediting others.

A similar, but more subtle method of self-justification is the appeal to a high moral standard. It goes further than just being better than some; it prides itself in having higher moral standards than most and may even include being a loyal worker in some church group. "Surely", some would think, "this is good enough to take me to heaven!" But it's only the same misconception in different wrappings. Self is still Judge and men still the standard. We must look higher.

True righteousness means being right with God and is possible only on His terms. Through faith man subjects himself to God's will (Matt. 7:21) as set forth in the gospel. Therein is God's plan for making man righteous (Rom. 1:17). As

(Continued on page 4)



The Gospel Of Easy Salvation

by George Hutto

When Jesus said that the fields are white unto harvest (**Matt. 9:37, 38**), surely He didn't mean that all the folks would come running to become Christians like hogs coming in for a feeding frenzy. More than likely, He meant that it's open season on sinners for those who go forth with the gospel – not to shoot them down, but to “persuade them to become Christians” (**2 Cor. 5:11**). Anybody can become a Christian, but the gospel is not easy to obey – folks have to be persuaded to bear their crosses, to mortify, put to death, the old man of sin (**2 Cor. 5:10-11; Lk. 9:23**).

Nevertheless, those who peddle the gospel try to make it easy. They preach various gospels of easy salvation – “so easy even a cave man can do it.” In the apostles' day folks were “*perverting the gospel*,” in effect turning it into “*another gospel which is not another, but some would pervert the true gospel and draw away men after themselves*” (**Gal. 1:6-9**). Don't be shocked that preachers do the same today, when modern marketing techniques have become a way of life for Americans – and a shameless element of religious efforts – put forth all types of entertainment and recreation. Let us go from the very easiest of plans to the more involved ones:

Everybody Is Going To Be Saved (Universalism). Some passages of Scripture might be taken out of context and put forth to teach such a thing (**1 Tim. 4:10**), and what a comforting doctrine this would be – if only it were true. But the reader knows that the same Bible which teaches salvation from sin also teaches eternal condemnation for those who are lost. Without question, Jesus taught about the narrow way which leads to life and the broad way which leads to destruction (**Matt. 7:13, 14**). This gospel of “everybody is going to be saved” is not

a true gospel. The last day, the day of judgment, is proof that not all will be going home to be with Jesus, the majority will be assigned to eternal hell.

All The Good And Sincere People Will Be Saved. Well, we all appreciate good and sincere people, but we're talking about sin here. Good and sincere people also get sick and die. Being good and sincere is not a remedy for sickness or for sin.

Cornelius is a case in point whose prayers went up as a memorial before God. He was devout, and did good deeds; a man who was good and sincere and prayed to God every day. If ever there was a good and sincere man, Cornelius was the epitome of such (**Acts 10:1, 2**). However, Cornelius was lost without the true gospel preached by Peter. In fact, he was told to send to Joppa and fetch Peter who would tell him “*words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved*” (**Acts 11:14**). Those who wonder at God's punishment of good and sincere people have not taken into account the seriousness of God's disdain for sin and the cost of its remedy (**Rom. 5:8-11**).

Everyone Who Believes Will Be Saved. Here is an easy and comforting doctrine, but one that is untrue. There are passages which show the need for believing, and, of course, one must believe before he would obey any other of the commandments of the gospel. The little epistle of James deals with this issue. He says that the devils believe and tremble, but surely they will not be saved by simply believing! “*Faith without works is dead*” (**Jas. 2:19, 20**). He says that those who hear the word but do not keep it will be lost (**Jas. 1:22-25**). He further states that those who know to do good and do not do it are sinning (**Jas. 4:17**). So, the gospel of “believe only” is easy and comforting but it is a false gospel.

(Continued on page 3)

Those Who Say “The Sinner’s Prayer”

Will Be Saved. There are many sincere and good people who preach this gospel, but there is no instance of any sinner being saved by this method in the gospel records of the Bible. They make dedicated efforts to teach people, urge them to believe and compel them to say the prayer which confesses Christ, as their personal Savior, confesses their sins, and asks Christ to come into their lives. But, look, my friend, in the Bible to see if you can find such a conversion process and you will not find it.

Now, here’s what we’ve said: 1) Not everyone is going to be saved; 2) The gospel requires more than simply being good and sincere; 3) Simply believing is not enough to satisfy the true gospel; 4) and saying the Sinner’s Prayer isn’t really taught by the gospel of Christ.

So what does the true gospel require of sinners that they might be saved from their sins? One other thing which the gospel makes clear is baptism. “...*Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*” (Acts 2:38). Again, “*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16).

One more time: “*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 3:21).

And folks, repentance is a big component of the gospel message as well. It means to stop serving sin and to start serving God (Lk. 24:47; Acts 17:30; 2:38). Baptism does no good for folks who don’t first believe, who don’t confess, or who doesn’t repent and remain faithful after baptism. And all of these requirements are demanding and ongoing.

Becoming a Christian and living the Christian life are not easy, but the alternatives of eternal condemnation and alienation from God move us to rally at the good news of eternal salvation – and the gospel plan for getting us there by God’s grace. Jesus bore His cross for us, and there is a cross for each of His disciples (Mk. 8:34) Good news? Yes! If it was good enough for Jesus, then the cross is good enough for us, too.

One last note: for those who don’t believe in God, there really isn’t any gospel or good news at all. Good news that there is no God to face in the judgment? Hardly. Life here is quite short, you know. If you’re looking for evidence, simply look around at the world, the stars, and through a microscope. If you’re looking for the revelation or personal message from God, Jesus Christ will answer all your questions (2 Pet. 1:3). His Gospel is not a gospel of easy salvation, but it is the true gospel.

When A Christian Faced Death

About 125 A.D., a Greek by the name of Aristides was writing his friends about a new religion, Christianity. He was trying to explain to them the reason for its tremendous success. A sentence from one of his letters reads: “If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.” (Source unknown)

(Continued from page 1)

man expresses his faith in repentance and baptism (Mk. 16:17; Acts 2:38), he is pardoned by God's grace and thus becomes a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17,18). Remaining righteous means doing righteousness (1 Jn. 3:7) to the best of our abilities and seeking God's forgiveness wherein we fall short. Entrusting my soul to what I think may be right is wrong. Doing what God says can never be wrong.

“What Is Your Life?”

by James W. Adams

“There appears to exist a greater desire to live long than to live well! Measure by man's desires, and he cannot live long enough. Measure by his good deeds, and he has not lived long enough. Measure by his evil deeds, and he has lived too long.” (Zimmerman)

Measured by these three standards, what has your life been — long enough, too long, or not long enough? Your life and mine are largely what we make them. James says, from the standpoint of time as compared to eternity, that our lives are but a “vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” (Jas. 4:14) The true measure of life, however, is not “how long,” but “how well.”

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