

Your Righteousness: Good Enough for the Kingdom?

Part 1



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All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.

I HOPE and pray you'll all carefully study and hear this VITAL 2 part teaching on how righteous we must be to be in God's kingdom. Hint: OUR best will NEVER be good enough. This teaching discusses the 2 filthy ditches too many believers fall into, the vast difference between the GIFTS of God instead of the rewards we receive by our good works – and how understanding this determines your joy of your salvation. WHAT great FREE GIFT of God rarely gets discussed? Also, HOW we become righteous enough for the Kingdom of God. Salvation and new creation is not a Do-it-yourself project.

Please print out the notes to use as you listen - to help you follow along as we go through this AND be sure to hear the audio. The audio has MUCH more than the notes, and sometimes notes will have things not in the audio, so use BOTH for the full experience.

Before I begin – I ask you to name some of the GIFTS of our Father in Heaven that you appreciate so much. We'll get back to this later. What GIFTS of God can you think of?

I believe this sermon, when you understand it, will help you experience the JOY of salvation and not always be feeling like such a failure, as we fail to measure up to the full perfection that is God in heaven. **(Opening prayer)**

Be sure you've printed out the notes to go with the audio so you can keep up. There is MORE in the audio than in the notes, and vice versa. You'll want to have and use both. If you use only the notes, you'll miss out on quite a bit as well.

Now I ask each of you: Does God see you as RIGHTEOUS or unrighteous? How important is that?

1 Corinthians 6:9a

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?”

So are you and I “righteous”? We better be, because “the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9). And without holiness, no one will see God

(Hebrews 12:14). 1 Cor. 6:9 goes on to list those who continue to practice fornication, idolatry, adultery, lying, stealing, covetous, drunkards, and on and on will not inherit the kingdom!

I asked earlier what **GIFTS OF GOD** can you enumerate or think of? Would you have said, “gift of his Son, the holy spirit, His LOVE, salvation, eternal life, the GRACE of God, the gifts of the spirit, being alive, ...” Paul said “the greatest of these – faith, hope and love – is God’s LOVE.” All of those are indeed gifts from God and so precious.

There are others, but I wonder if any of you listed the gift I’ll discuss in this sermon today?

HOW PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS DO WE HAVE TO BE – TO BE IN THE KINGDOM?

The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, so we need to be righteous. But HOW righteous must we be to inherit the kingdom of GOD? Will be OK to be “more righteous than not”? Will it be OK to be “better than most, but not perfect”? Is “better than I used to be” OK?

Let’s hear God and Yeshua’s answer.

- Yeshua says our righteousness must exceed that of the legendary Pharisees’ carefulness to be righteous (Matthew 5:20),
- Yeshua adds that in fact it has to be GOD’S very own level of perfection. He says “Seek first the Kingdom of God and HIS righteousness” (**Matthew 6:33**) and **we must become PERFECT, fully mature, “as your Father in heaven is PERFECT” (Matthew 5:48).**

We must also be holy. We can only be holy if God’s holy presence is in us or if we’re dedicated and consecrated, set apart, for God’s holy use.

- **Ephesians 1:3-4**
“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,**” **CJB says “holy and without defect...”**
Other translations say “holy and blameless...” (Holman, NIV, etc)

So there you have it. That’s not me saying this but GOD saying this through Paul: Without defect! There’s no room for being even 1% off of perfect righteousness. How on earth will that ever happen for you and me, really – no matter how hard you or I try? There’s “no fudge factor”. So, the righteous will inherit the kingdom... but will your and my righteousness be good enough?

God will never require us to be or do something that is impossible. He makes the way.

But are there any of you out there thinking right now, “Yeah, my righteousness is perfect”?

Yeshua said we must become perfect, as perfectly righteous as our Father is. How will that happen? So where do we stand? Would you be seen as perfect right now? And have you known anyone, who by the time they died, could be seen as being a perfect 100% righteous person, as perfect as our Heavenly Father is? Anyone? Of course not.

NO WONDER all too often we can feel like utter failures.

I believe this is why so many believers who are trying to live God's way feel like spiritual failures: we realize that all too often we're just not living up to what we've been called to be: good, holy, perfectly righteous people. I've just shown you some of the many scriptures on that.

If someone could keep God's law perfectly, with zero sins, then he/she would not need a Savior, and would be seen as righteous by the law. Please read **Rom 2:12-13; Gal 2:21**. But, **Romans 3:10-13** shows us from Psalms that **NO ONE** is righteous by God's standards, no not one. Ever! Except the Son of God, of course, the Lamb of God without blemish.

And no one has even ever come close to perfect goodness and holiness since Messiah walked the earth.

Romans 2 – says if we could perfectly live without sin, and always obey God without fail, then we could be justified (be declared righteous) by the law.

Romans 2:12-14

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 **(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the DOERS of the law will be justified;”**

Paul also goes on to say how hypocritical we are – we preach don't commit adultery – but then do. So the “law” he is referring to here includes the one about adultery and stealing and so on.

Romans 3:10 goes on to say – “BUT, NO ONE has ever been righteous, no not one.”

So therefore, by we cannot be righteous (justified) by trying to keep the law because we all fail. Romans 3:20 – “Therefore it is evident that by the deeds of the law NO one is justified”.

That's not contradicting Rom 2:13. That's saying if you and I could obey perfectly, you'd have perfect righteousness – but Romans 3 adds, “but NO ONE (but Christ) has been able to do it!” So we cannot be declared righteous by keeping the law, because we can't, and we fail.

So this whole notion that we can incrementally become more and more righteous until we are finally in the very image of Christ or God—is false. We'll never arrive at perfection ourselves, and I'll add—even WITH God's spirit, because even Paul repeatedly said in Romans 7:15-20 that even he, filled with God's spirit, could NOT.

Now SOME have been called “righteous” – but only in terms of the human righteousness of keeping God's law, but no one perfectly, and not the level of God's righteousness.

Romans 3 last half, and Romans 4,5,6 teach us how God will make us righteous. More on that later.

There IS a righteousness we must have, and it's not what we might work up.

So the reason we feel like FAILURES so much, is that we are not seeing perfect obedience, perfect right attitudes, zero worry and fretting, perfect goodness in our own lives. And we have not accepted that our goodness, holiness and righteousness must ultimately be GIVEN to us by and in Christ, by FAITH in him. And I'll prove that in this sermon with scripture. Even Paul said he too often failed and did what he hated! He also called himself "less than the least of all the saints" (Eph. 3:8)

I'll get to HOW you and I will consistently be seen by God as righteous and be seen as perfect as GOD himself is, so we can be in God's kingdom. But first: don't jump to conclusions that by giving this sermon that I am preaching we have no part, or that we don't have a lot of changing we must do. I'm not doing any such thing.

But --We MUST fight sin; we must be overcomers;

Paul is clear that the unrighteous won't be in the kingdom.

Paul is clear that we're in a spiritual WAR – that too many of us are oblivious to. We don't live and act like we are engaged in a ferocious battle and the most serious war of all time.

- Paul is clear that we must **fight** sin; fight the good fight as **good soldiers** of God (**2 Timothy 2:3-4**).
- He says HE fought the good fight (**2 Timothy 4:7**) and calls other believers "fellow soldiers" (Philippians 2:25; Philemon 2). He calls on Timothy to fight the good fight.
- He speaks of **the very real armor of God (Eph 6:13-18)** that we must put on every day. Don't be going out to do this battle dressed in just your spiritual panties! But if we're rushing to get to work on time and not setting our priorities straight – and missing our morning prayer – that's exactly what we're doing; no armor's on.
- **He reminds us in Ephesians 6:12-13 that our real enemies are "the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places"**. Sometimes we think humans are our real enemy. Not true. It's Satan and his demons who are injecting thoughts and moods and evil feelings into people – and our real enemy is the one called "Adversary" (what "Satan" means).
- And that we MUST put on God's armor (v13) that we may be able to withstand the evil day and to be found standing!

This life is a big fight against sin. So know that I know and teach that! I will say more about that in Part 2 of this sermon.

So don't at ANY time feel that I'm saying our spiritual task is easy, or that we don't have to strive hard to abide in Christ and have God abiding in us. But that PART of the equation is not my focus today; but just understand I teach and practice that we must obey God, must live by his commandments, but love one another - -which is the commandments' result. And if we don't, and if we stay in a life of sin – we won't even **be** in the kingdom of God.

WE can't do this spiritual fight like we're merely shadow boxing, like someone merely beating the air (**1 Cor. 9:26**). In fact, we need to understand that we have a tremendous battle going on against spirits in high places, temptations by demons trying to get us to stumble, and we need to use God's spirit to gain the victory. Peter speaks of "fleshly lusts that WAR against the soul" (**1 Peter 2:11**).

OK, got it? I'm not saying in this sermon that we don't have to fight sin. I AM asking, even with all the best performance you can muster, are you and I EVER going to attain 100% perfection, be blameless, be without defect, and be without any fault – even with God's spirit? Again, Paul said he found himself still doing things he hated! Romans 7:15-20. Are you better than Apostle Paul?

WHOSE RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST WE HAVE?

Is there therefore a better way? YES, YES, YES. While we still fight sin, we have to also realize **God has made another way possible as his gift**. It's his greatest miracle. Though the physical creation was finished long ago, God is still creating "new creations"... transforming people. He calls it "the new creation" (**2 Cor. 5:17** and more).

Remember the song "Amazing Grace"? HE takes a *wretch* like me and you, and HE covers us, HE changes us, HE transforms us to where we can go from a wretch to shining forever and ever as the stars of heaven in his glorious realm!

Thank GOD that he washes away ALL our sins. Even all of yours and all of mine! But then what? Where do we go from there? **It's not your righteousness that will ever "make it" – but a much, much higher righteousness than yours and mine.**

We MUST "see" this point. You can't just work on sin, work on yourself, and think you'll ever be good enough, because the standard set is very clear.

2 Peter 1:1

"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who have obtained like precious **FAITH with us BY THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF OUR GOD** and Savior Jesus Christ:"

Where and how do we "see" true Righteousness?

Romans 1:16-17

"For I am not ashamed of ***the gospel of Christ***, for it is the **power of God to salvation for everyone who believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. **17 For in it THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD is revealed FROM FAITH TO FAITH**; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

So I'm showing that there is God's very own righteousness that somehow is available to us -- BY FAITH. Not convinced? Keep reading the scriptures I'll share.

Hebrews 11:7

"By faith **Noah**, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and **became heir of the righteousness which is according to FAITH.**"

We have to face up to the fact that the holy righteousness that counts, like so many things – is not by what we do, but by faith in Christ. What we do is invite him to live actively, obediently, zealously inside each of us, so much, that HIS life will shine through us!

This righteousness by FAITH is all through especially Romans 4 as well – Rom 4:3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 20-24. Please study it.

This “righteousness by faith” is not righteousness you can muster up, work up, develop or produce yourself. It is by faith. And the standard of righteousness -- over and over – is the righteousness of GOD himself. God’s level of righteousness is what we’re required to somehow have! GOD’s very own righteousness is the only perfect righteousness that will be allowed in the kingdom!

I keep saying that, because we must come to see that is what scripture says.

Remember, as we read more of the scriptures, that “JUSTIFIED” means “made right before God; declared as righteous, seen as right”. (The audio has more)

Galatians 2:16

“knowing that a man is not justified [declared, seen as just, righteous] by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

Galatians 2:20-21

**“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”**

So the perfection of God’s own perfect righteousness IS NOT going to come to us by our striving to keep the law. (Comments on audio about Gal.3, etc). It can’t be done perfectly, and yet we are called to be PERFECT, as our heavenly father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

So what does God do?

We’re talking about perfection here now, God’s level of righteousness and not one scintilla less. **Paul compares the best he could do – and gives it ALL up for the best that God can do.** Let’s read it.

Philippians 3:3-6 He talks about how good he was ...

“For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have **no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; **concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**”**

Philippians 3:7-11 especially V 9

“BUT what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **count them as rubbish (KJV: dung)**, that I may gain Christ

9 and be found in Him, NOT having my OWN righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is FROM GOD BY FAITH;

10 that I may know Him and the power of HIS resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Please read Philippians 3:9 over and over til it really sinks in. “I DON’T want the best I can do – by keeping the law the best way I can with the help of God’s spirit – but I want the best that GOD did and what God IS, by Christ, and faith in Christ, I want the righteousness of GOD, FROM GOD himself, by faith” – my paraphrase.

A big part of this—in case I forget to mention it later – is found in my recent **sermon “God’s desire to tabernacle with man”**. Please hear it. God and Christ want to come LIVE in us – and we live in God – and THAT is what truly cleans us. We focus so hard and so much on what WE do – fighting sin – that we don’t focus enough on the POWER we receive when we focus on having GOD in us.

*****Focus much, much more on our relationship with Christ and Father** – more than ever before, and God’s mind will start to fill yours more and more and sins will be farther and farther apart. We focus so much on the negative- the sins – rather than focusing on the positive, on HIM, on the One who defeated sin and its consequences.

His FILLING UP of our lives is what removes the power of sin. We resist sin; we defeat the next sin SO much better when God is living inside us actively.

Do you think your goodness and righteous deeds will be good enough?

Look at what Isaiah tells us Isaiah 64:6. And some ministers want to explain this away – but in conjunction with all these scriptures I’m reading alongside it, just read it for what it says:

Isaiah 64:5 CJB (it’s verse 6 in your regular Bibles)

“All of us are like someone unclean,

ALL OUR righteous deeds are like menstrual rags; (KJV – “filthy rags”)

we wither, all of us, like leaves; and our misdeeds blow us away like the wind.”

The original Hebrew IS “menstrual rags” – like soiled sanitary napkins. That’s how our righteous deeds stack up. You want to rely on THAT? Sure, that’s better than outright evil, but it’s not measuring up to God’s standard: perfection. Without defect. Blameless. Perfect.

So Paul says in Philippians 3:7-10 that all his good and perfect law-keeping and deeds were ... garbage, or filth, or dung – depending on the translation you use for “skubalon”. Isaiah says menstrual rags. So which do you prefer – the best we humans can do (garbage and filthy rags) – of the best God offers?

We've been reading already and we'll see more – that this righteousness of God Himself we are to have, is available ONLY “in Him”, in Christ, by faith in him, by his resurrection life alive again you and me.

When our God sees you and me, will he see OUR best efforts – or the LIFE OF Christ imparted to you and covering you like a beautiful cloak?

Now we're getting down to the nitty-gritty of how we ever can become absolutely perfect in God's eyes, and in fact, the ONLY way we will be perfect. And it's not by you getting better and better every day because you try harder tomorrow than today. That's not bad, but it's not going to ever get you to perfection. So – what's the secret?

1 Corinthians 1:29-31 read this slowly a few times.

“...that no flesh should glory in His presence. 30 But of Him you are **in Christ Jesus, who BECAME FOR US wisdom from GOD – AND righteousness** and sanctification and redemption — 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, **let him glory in the Lord.**” (vs. **glorying in how good you have become yourself**)

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For He (God) made Him who knew no sin (Christ) **to be sin for us, that WE might become the righteousness OF GOD -- in Him.**”

Romans 9:30-33

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, HAVE attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of FAITH; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? **Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.** For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.”

Romans 10:3-4

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, **and seeking to establish their OWN righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness OF GOD.**”

v. 4 shows that Christ was the very intent, the goal, end purpose of the LAW.

So is it becoming clear, that the kind of righteousness or goodness you and I have to have – the very perfection of GOD HIMSELF -- is NOT something you or I will EVER muster up? And yet, it's what we have to have.

A few more scriptures, and then we'll get into HOW to possess the very righteousness of GOD HIMSELF (and also in part 2 of this important topic).

Even some of the prophets knew this and spoke of this:

Jeremiah 33:16 and Jer 23:6

“In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely.

And this is the name by which she will be called:

YHVH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Isaiah spoke of it – *that “IN YHVH I have righteousness and strength”* Isaiah 45:24. David spoke of God’s righteousness (Ps 119:40) and asked for God’s righteousness to revive him (KJV “quicken”).

In Christ, we come alive spiritually (Eph 2:5; 1 Cor. 15:45). That’s a huge key.

SO HOW do we attain this Righteousness of GOD himself?

Unless you already know this DEEPLY, it’s hard to believe. We’ve read many verses already that it is by FAITH and **that Christ becomes the righteousness of God and the wisdom of God FOR us (1 Cor. 1:29-30) and yet so many of you just won’t believe that! But it gets even better.** These are not my words I’m showing you, but God’s words straight from the Bible.

I asked about God’s GIFTS earlier, as we got started. Notice the word “GIFT” and how often it’s used in these verses in Romans 5.

Romans 5:12-19

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned –13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

15 But the FREE GIFT is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God **and the GIFT** by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.

16 And the GIFT is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the FREE GIFT which came from many offenses resulted in justification.

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the GIFT of RIGHTEOUSNESS will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act **THE FREE GIFT came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

I asked earlier about the gifts of GOD. Have you ever heard any sermons about the specific “Gift of RIGHTEOUSNESS”? And how are you at accepting gifts? We all better accept this one, for sure, because our own righteousness won’t measure up.

NOW ... I hope you will accept God's precious GIFT of his very own righteousness. The word "GIFT" is used at least 6x in v 15-19! And "FREE Gift" is used 3x so we're clear that it is not a reward for our works! Read and re-read Romans 5:17-19 many times, slowly.

SO HOW does this happen? AND WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

WE ALL KNOW ABOUT YESHUA ON THE CROSS. WE ALL KNOW HE DIED FOR US, PAID FOR OUR SINS. And we all accept THAT. But then what?

Soon after we repent and are baptized, and have all our sins washed away -- we find we still sin. We fail. Over and over. We still sin. Apostle Paul even said, "The good I want to do, I don't do. That which I HATE, I still do" – **Romans 7:15, 19**. EVEN with the Holy Spirit – we still fail in this life, and of course we get depressed and figure we'll never "make it" into God's kingdom. But you're ignoring the GIFT.

I know people who believe with God's spirit we can duplicate Christ's life and attain perfect righteousness someday, eventually. We are to follow him, yes, but WE will never be perfect in this life on our own efforts, even with the Spirit.

Let's see what Paul said. **(The AUDIO has much more than these notes)**

Romans 7:14-25

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I HATE, that I do.

I hope we're all at the point where we at least hate sin now, and even while we're sinning, when we catch ourselves, we hate it, and hate what we're doing.

16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. **17** But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. **18** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; **for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.**

19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 O wretched man that I am! WHO will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

Receiving and having perfectly divine righteousness requires each of us to be DELIVERED, AS Paul just said in verses 24-25. And Yeshua – Jesus – is our Deliverer. But he doesn't just wipe out our past sins and then going forward we're on our own. Remember Paul had the fullness of the Holy Spirit – and says he still kept doing things he hated from time to time. You're no better than Paul! He was set apart from his mother's womb Gal. 1:15.

So there's something else.

We have to realize God wants to GIFT US – his very own righteousness. You'll never attain it on your own. It's a GIFT. A gift we just don't speak about enough.

How does He gift it?

- **We have to proclaim with our mouth and believe in our hearts Yeshua the Messiah (Romans 10:9-10) and that God raised him from the dead. We DO have to recognize the valuable gift and receive it.**
- **We have to be willing to cut away the fleshly nature. If our right hand offends, get rid of it (Matthew 5:30). Take drastic measure to STOP the way of sin. We must give up a life of ongoing sin. Period. More on that later. I'm talking about "living in sin" as a way of life vs. stumbling in sin from human weakness, which we all (including Paul) sometimes do.**

UNLEAVENED BREAD COMPARISON.

Our fleshly lives are like leavened bread as we come to the Days of Unleavened Bread. We can't take the leaven out of the bread once it's leavened. All bread has to be discarded, thrown out – and start over with the new unleavened Bread from heaven (Yeshua).

Some of you are trying to be righteous by picking the leaven out of your leavened bread (by analogy), trying to pick sin out of your life, rather than realizing we need to die to self, to the flesh and let the resurrection life of Christ come to life again in you. (Col 3:3, etc). Now of course we fight and resist sin – but focus on the gift, the new life, more than focusing on sin.

Neither can we ever attain the level of God's own righteousness while in the flesh, even with God's spirit. We're COVERED by Christ however. Even Paul said he still kept doing "that which I hate, I do" (Romans 7). You're not better than Paul.

I'll say more on this in part 2 of this teaching, but when we actually become without fault, and are seen as incorruptible, perfect, is at the resurrection – when we shall see God the Father "for we shall BE like him" at that time (read 1 John 3:2).

**ONE BIG Reason you may be struggling so much with this:
You're mixing up SALVATION AND REWARDS.**

Christ is coming back and will reward us – but the rewards are given to those who have accepted his gift of salvation and righteousness.

- **Salvation and eternal life are God's GIFTS (Eph 2:8-10; Rom 6:23). We can't earn them. If you can earn a gift, it's no longer a gift, but a wage, a reward. We've all earned death ("the wages of sin is death"), but we don't and we can't earn salvation and eternal life. As Romans 6:23 says "the wages of sin is death but the GIFT of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Salvation is not a payment for our work. It's a free gift.**

THE SCRIPTURES clearly teach we are saved by Grace, through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast (**Eph 2:8-9**), but that we definitely are REWARDED by our works, and created FOR good works (verse 10). TWO different things.

Ephesians 2:8-10

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the GIFT of God, 9 NOT OF WORKS, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

- **REWARDS – is about what we’ll BE and what we’ll DO in the kingdom of God. We are rewarded for our Works. But our reward is not salvation. That’s a free gift.** It’s about how many cities we’ll be given – 1, 5, 10, and so on – parable of the pounds and talents, for example. (**Rev 22:12; 2 John 8; Heb 11:26; 1 Cor. 3:8, 14; Matt 10:41-42; Matthew 16:27; Matthew 6:1-6, etc. etc.**) Those are a few of the verses about Christ coming back with rewards, and seek a full reward, and we’re rewarded by our works.

DON’T CONFUSE the two. We work hard for a high reward. We BELIEVE “hard” – for salvation and righteousness. These are 2 different things. We’re talking about salvation, righteousness and justification now... free GIFTS of God. Get it?

Reward is not salvation.

- **Reward is because of what WE do.** That has to do with position in the kingdom, what we’ll be doing in the kingdom. But it’s not salvation, eternal life or even righteousness.
- **Salvation and eternal life - is because of what GOD does.** It’s about what God is offering and **because of what CHRIST did** – and we accept God’s free gift of salvation AND His righteousness GIFTED to us.

“...BUT THE GIFT of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

What we’ve EARNED is death, the wages of sin. But what we’re GIFTED with, when we believe (Romans 10:8-10) is eternal life (Rom 6:23).

And in this sermon we’re talking about the seldom discussed free Gift of God – the GIFT of his righteousness.

We are not to look at all who have accepted their Savior the way they used to be, or think of their past sins, -- but think of each one as a NEW CREATION. In Christ.

So in part 2 we’ll dive more deeply into HOW we become as righteous as God is – especially after the resurrection, though we can be seen as having God’s righteousness even now, in this life. **Be sure to hear part 2.**

To be ready for Part 2 of this sermon, read slowly end of Rom 3, Rom 4, 5, 6,7, 8 and Philippians 3:9, 1 Cor. 1:29-30, 2 Cor. 5:21. (More on audio) CLOSING PRAYER.