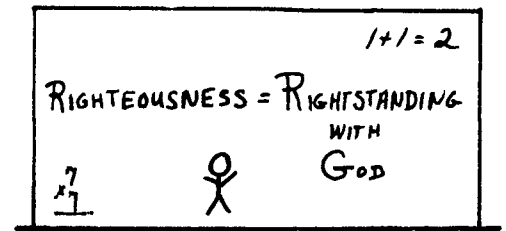


UNDERSTANDING RIGHTEOUSNESS

— by Kenneth Hagin



I Timothy 6:12

12. Fight the good fight of faith....

The faith fight is the only fight that the Christian is called upon to fight. If we're in any other kind of fight, we're in the wrong fight. We might as well stop it, get out of it right now, and get in the right fight.

If there is a fight to faith, then there have to be enemies, or hinderances to faith--elsewise there wouldn't be any fight to it. You can't very well have a fight without an enemy.

Romans 10:17

17. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

A lack of knowledge of God's Word is the greatest hinderance there is to faith--because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Very often individuals pray for faith when really it's knowledge they need, for faith is the "concomitant" of knowledge. It is that which "accompanies" knowledge. If you have knowledge of God's Word, you have faith. Really you could pray for faith forever, but you would never get it unless you got knowledge of God's Word--for faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

And so, we'll investigate one of these hinderances in connection with the lack of knowledge of God's Word which hinders our faith--the lack of understanding "righteousness".

James 5:16-18

16. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

17. Elias (Elijah) was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

This passage states the prayer of a "righteous" man availeth much. A lack of understanding "righteousness" (what it is--and what it gives) holds more people in bondage, I think

personally, than perhaps anything else. In my opinion, this is one of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible.

Romans 10:10

10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness....

Romans 5:17

17. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul makes two significant statements in these verses about righteousness.

1. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.
2. We have received of the "gift" of righteousness.

Righteousness, he said, is a gift. Too many times, we associate righteousness with good works. The Bible teaches good works and right conduct, of course, but all of our good works and all of our right conduct would never make us righteous. Man could never become righteous by his good works or because of his right conduct, because if that would do it then he wouldn't need Jesus.

But, you see, we've thought that a "righteous" person is something that maybe you "grow" into. We think, "If I could ever get to be a righteous man, my prayers would work." And we have rationalized, "If we could develop to some state of spiritual development, then we would be righteous."

Well, thank God, we can grow in the Lord and we can develop spiritually, but did you know you cannot grow in righteousness? You will never be any more righteous than you are right now. You'll not be any more righteous when you get to heaven than you are right now--this very moment.

This is one thing that hindered my faith. This very thing--a lack of understanding about righteousness--almost cost me my physical life. It almost caused me to die prematurely.

On the bed of affliction, over thirty years ago, when five doctors had given me up to die, I began to read the Bible. I knew if there was any help for me it had to be in God's Word and my spirit kept telling me that I didn't have to die. (You see, your spirit will know things that your head doesn't know, particularly if your spirit has been born of God.) My heart--something on the inside of me--told me that there was hope and help for me in God's Word. And so, I got into the Word with an open mind and I began to see some things about faith and prayer.

I got over to the 11th chapter of Mark and read there those great statements that fell from the lips of Jesus regarding faith where He said, "...whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:23-24).

My spirit leaped with joy within me! Praise God!

I was so thrilled I decided to run a reference on the scriptures pertaining to faith and prayer. This brought me to the 5th chapter of James:

James 5:14-15

14. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:
15. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; (heal him) and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

When I read about calling in the elders of the church I thought you had to do that to be healed. (You don't have to, you just can.) Tears leaped to my eyes and I began to cry, because there was no one to call in and I thought I had to do this.

But the Holy Spirit is our teacher, praise the Lord! And He called something to my attention. (When I say the Holy Spirit spoke to me, I mean it seemed as though someone spoke up from on the inside of me in my spirit.)

He said, "Did you notice that verse said, 'the prayer of faith shall save the sick'?"

I looked at it again and I said, "Well, yes, that's what it says. It does say that."

And that voice within said, "You can pray that prayer as well as anyone can."

I began to see it! I began to believe it!

But you see, when I read further about the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availing (working) much," the devil (because he knew I didn't know what righteousness is nor what it gives) took advantage of my lack of understanding that to defeat me.

He said to me, (and when I say Satan said to me, it was just like a voice speaking in my mind) "Well, yes, you could pray that prayer of faith alright, if you were righteous. But you see it says right here, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' If you were righteous you could do that. You could pray the prayer of faith and receive your healing."

Notice, he didn't contradict what was said to me, nor did he say, "You can't pray the prayer of faith," because I believed I could. But he went another way and, of course, when he said what he did he reminded me of all of my own mistakes and faults and failures. He brought a mental picture of them right up before me.

He knew I didn't know what righteousness is and he knew I didn't know what it gives. I thought that righteousness was some kind of a spiritual state that you might eventually attain through spiritual growth. But I knew I just wasn't there.

You see, the devil asked me, "Are you righteous?" Not knowing what it is, I said, "No, I'm not." As I looked at myself from the natural standpoint, I wasn't what I at that time considered righteous--I was far from it.

So, you see, by accepting what the devil said, I just simply permitted him (because of the lack of understanding righteousness) to rob me of the blessings God intended I should have right then.

I reasoned to myself like this, "Well, if I just don't die. If I can just live long enough to grow enough to develop enough spiritually to ever get to be righteous." I said to myself, "If I ever get to be righteous, I'll sure be a 'whiz' when it comes to praying." But I laid it aside because I was just sure I wasn't righteous.

This all happened over a period of months, not just a few days or a few hours. One day as I was reading, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions," I thought, "I believe I'll just go back and check up on that dude. If he's giving him as an example of praying and getting results, I can follow his example and get results. He's given him as an example of a righteous man."

So I went back and began to read up on him. And the more I read about him, the more he reminded me of myself. Then I remembered that that's what James said. James said, "He's a man, (Elias or Elijah) subject to like passions as we are." James was comparing Elijah with himself and the Christians he was writing to. He said,

"He's just a man like us, subject to like passions as we are."

The devil had said to me, "Now you're not righteous and you couldn't get your prayers answered. You know you got mad and knocked the tray off the bed. That's no way for a righteous man to act is it?"

Well now here was Elijah subject to like passions as we are. He had his great moments. He'd prayed and shut up the heavens for three years and six months, he'd had the contest with the prophets of Baal and had prayed the fire down, then he'd prayed the rain down-- praise God! The Spirit of God came on him then and he outran the king's chariot fourteen miles across the plains of Jezreel. He had his high moments.

But, when he got to Jezreel, somebody told him, "Jezebel said that she's going to have your head off by this time tomorrow." He'd had all the 450 prophets of Baal slain; their heads cut off. And so Jezebel was going to have his head.

He started running again. Now the first time he ran those fourteen miles across the plains of Jezreel the hand of the Lord was on him. But this time he started running there wasn't any hand of the Lord on him. It was just Elijah running, and he ran until he gave out. He climbed up under a juniper tree and said, "Lord, just let me die."

He really didn't want to die. If he did why didn't he just stay where he was? He'd have been dead by that time. They would have already had his head off by then. If he had really wanted to die he could have just stayed where he was. Why run and give out and then die? No, he didn't really want to die any more than you did when you said, "I might as well be dead." Or than I did. You see, he was a man subject to like passions as we are.

The more I read about him the more he reminded me of myself--sort of double talk sometimes--mistaken ideas--you could see his shortcomings, mistakes. And I said, "He's not my idea of a righteous man." (But that's where we get into trouble--substituting our ideas for God's Word.) "How in the world could God call him righteous?" I wondered.

Elijah went on to say, "Now, Lord, you might as well let me die. I'm the only one left anyhow. Everybody else is backslidden but me."

(You know, you run into those kind of folks today. "Nobody but me has anything--just me and my little bunch." I'm so glad that's not the truth, aren't you? But in spite of all their mistaken ideas they can still be righteous in the sight of

God. Hallelujah! And they get answers to prayer.)

"Yes," Elijah said, "I'm the only one left, everybody's backslidden but me. Everybody's bowed their knee to Baal except me."

God had to correct him on that and said, "No, no, I have seven thousand reserved unto myself who have not bowed their knees to Baal."

How could God call Elijah righteous? How could James inspired by the Holy Spirit give this man as an example of a righteous man praying? I just wondered about that and I began to check into it.

I found out that the 32nd Psalm says:

Psalm 32:1-2

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity....

I found out that in the case of the Old Testament saints God had set up a system whereby the blood of innocent animals could be shed which would cover their sins and He did not impute iniquity unto them. He imputed righteousness unto them. That is, He "counted" them as being righteous.

Then, when I got over to the New Testament, I began to see that the Bible says we have a better covenant established on better promises. (See Hebrews 8:6) We have thought and said, "Our sins are covered." But really our sins aren't covered. The New Testament says we are cleansed from sin. Cleansed--Hallelujah--by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ!

II Corinthians 5:17

17. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

II Corinthians 5:21

21. For he hath made him (i.e., God has made Him, Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Did you notice the phrases "in Christ" and "in Him" in each of these verses? In Christ we become a new creature (vs. 17). In Him we have become the righteousness of God (vs. 21). Hallelujah!

You, when you were born again into Christ, became a new man, a new creature, in Christ Jesus! You know as well as I know that God never made an "unrighteous" new creature. That would be an insult to the work of God.

Romans 10:10, quoted earlier in this lesson, says, "...with the heart man believeth unto righteousness..." How does a man get there? He believes unto righteousness! Hallelujah!

Romans 5:17 tells us that we have received of abundance of grace and of the "gift" of righteousness. Glory! Righteousness is a gift!

And when you were born again, you became a new man in Christ Jesus and were made the righteousness of God in Him! Hallelujah!

I was teaching along this same line several years ago in Scranton, Pennsylvania in one of the Full Gospel churches there. The pastor had made mention of the fact that the Superintendent of the Sunday School was really the most spiritual man that he had ever pastored.

This man worked the evening shift so he attended the day services where he sat on the front seat every morning taking notes. I knew from what the pastor had said that everyone considered this man to be the most dedicated, spiritual Christian in the whole church.

One morning (I wanted to illustrate that most folks don't know what righteousness is) I suddenly stopped and said to him, "Are you righteous?"

He said, "I'm trying to be."

"Now I'm not trying to be vulgar," I said to him, "but are you a man or a woman?"

"I'm a man," he said.

"How did you get that way?" I asked.

He answered, "I was born that way."

I said, "That's the way you get righteous!"

That's the way you get to be righteous. You're born that way. Praise God! Peter you remember said, "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that you may grow thereby." That little newborn babe is just as righteous in the sight of God as the older saints who have been living for God for 50 or 60 years and are full of good works and right conduct. And that newborn babe can get his or her prayer heard just as quickly as the older saint--because righteousness means right standing with God!

That's what it means--right standing with God! And, you see, we have the right standing with God not because of what we did but because of what Jesus did!

It's a gift! Receive the gift! We have received the gift of righteousness in Christ Jesus. And you see that newborn babe in Christ has just as good a standing with God as the old saint who has been living for God for many years. And you can see this, that you'll not have any better standing, any more right standing, with God when you get to heaven then you have right now. Hallelujah!

Now you know that's difficult for folks to accept. Yet, if they'll just believe what the Bible says, the scriptures that we've laid out here you've got to believe it. We get fouled up with "religious teachings" sometimes instead

of actual scriptural New Testament teachings.

Let's read again II Corinthians 5:21. "For he hath made him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin...."

Now I believe that part of that verse is true, don't you?

I've tested people and said, "How many of you believe that's true, that part of that verse?" Everybody lifted their hand.

Then I would read the last part of the same verse, "...that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ." And I would say to them, "Therefore, we are, I am and you are, we are the righteousness of God in Christ. How many of you believe that's true?"

The biggest majority of the time, you couldn't get half of them to lift a hand on the last part. And yet, if one half of that verse is true, the other half is true too. God made a provision for us that belongs to us--and we need to realize it is ours!

Let's read together now from the book of Romans.

Romans 3:21-26

21. But now the righteousness of God (remember that II Cor. 5:21 said we are made the righteousness of God in Him) without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: (Glory Hallelujah! That sets something dancing on the inside of me. Glory!) for there is no difference;

23. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (sure we have)

24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Another translation reads on the 26th verse (because the same Greek word is used which can be translated "just" or "righteous"): "...that he might be righteous, and the righteousness of him which believeth in Jesus."

Romans 5:17-18

17. For if by one man's offence (He's talking about Adam's sin in the beginning.) death reigned by one; (Because of Adam's offence or sin, spiritual death--he's not talking about physical death--Satan, through spiritual death reigned,) much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.

18. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one (That's Jesus and His righteousness.) the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. (Or, the Greek word is the same, unto righteousness of life.)

19. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Hallelujah!)

20. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now going back to the 17th verse, we have received of abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness. Righteousness, then, is a gift. Righteousness is right standing with God. That's what it is!

What does it give? In the 17th verse we read, "...they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life..." Shall reign--shall reign in life--this life--this life right here!

One of our great troubles is that we want to delegate everything to the future and not have much right now. Did you ever think about the songs we sing? You know like "When We All Get To Heaven." Well, thank God, we're going to get there and that's going to be wonderful but we don't have to wait till we get there for a lot of things. Praise God, we can have them now. And, thank God, we will reign with Christ out yonder. But we don't have to wait till then to start reigning. The Amplified translation says, "reign as kings." Where are we going to reign as kings? He said right here, "Shall reign in life." In life--in life--in this life! How? By Jesus Christ!

Paul used this illustration because in the day in which he lived, they had kings. We don't have many kings today, if so, they don't have much authority or power. But in those days, many nations had kings and the king would reign over his particular domain. His word was the final authority. Whatever he says goes. He's reigning. Well, the Word says that we shall reign in life, by Christ Jesus.

Now why can we do that? Because we have been made the righteousness of God in Christ. Jesus who is righteous became our righteousness. Our standing with God is secure. Therefore, we can stand in the presence of God as though we had never done wrong. We can stand in the presence of God as though we had never sinned. We can stand in the presence of God without a sense of condemnation or a spiritual inferiority complex.

No wonder in the book of Hebrews it says, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." We can come boldly to the throne of God! It's all because of Jesus, isn't it?

Then too, in this life, we run up against Satan everywhere on every side. In II Corinthians 4:4 Paul says that Satan is the god of this world. But you see, we can stand in the presence of Satan, right before him, without fear. He can't condemn us. Hallelujah! When you know the truth, you can stand in the presence of Satan with authority that gives you dominion over the devil and demons and disease because you know that you stand in Jesus. Hallelujah! Satan knows that.

In my own particular case, when I began to see this, I knew that Satan had defeated me because of my lack of knowledge and I began to say, "I am the righteousness of God in Christ. I am that righteous man that James was talking about where he said the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Earlier I had said, "If I ever get to be righteous, I'll be a whiz at praying." So I wrote in my Bible way back there on the bed of affliction beside this verse, "I am a whiz in prayer."

And you are too, really. If you just knew it and would take advantage of it. Sometimes people think things are just going to work automatically. But something can actually be yours spiritually, just like it can in the natural, and if you don't know it, it won't profit you anything. It is knowledge acted upon that brings results.

Wouldn't it be foolish for us to come into a dark room and grope around in the dark, finally find a chair and sit down and say, "I wonder why the lights don't come on?" Sometimes people are just as stupid when it comes to spiritual things. They say, "Well, now if that's so why don't I have it. If that belongs to me why don't I have it?"

You see, it is when somebody acts on what they know that the lights come on. It's when somebody finds out where the switch is and turns them on. And when you find out what God's Word says and act on what you know, that's when you get results!

Now take your place in Christ Jesus--Hallelujah--and know this. When you know this you won't have to be running around to get somebody else to do your praying for you. You'll know this, that He will hear you just as quickly as He will hear the other fellow. He will hear you pray because you have just as good a standing with God as the other fellow has.

Sometimes people think, "God will hear him because he's a preacher; or minister; or pastor; or an evangelist. God will hear him but He wouldn't hear me." No, that evangelist, or that

pastor, or that minister, doesn't have any better standing with God than you have. He just has a duty that you don't have; a responsibility that you don't have. That responsibility and that duty which he has doesn't make him any more righteous or less righteous; or give him any better standing with God; or cause God to hear him pray and answer his prayer any quicker than He'll hear your prayers.

You see, God doesn't love one member of His body, the body of Christ, more than He loves another member. No matter if they are pastors or evangelists. We've got all kinds of wrong ideas about it. You know, "If I could just get So-and-So to pray it would work because he's a real man of God." No, he may have learned how to take advantage of what belongs to him a little bit better than you have, but he's not any more righteous than you are. And God won't hear him pray any quicker than He'll hear you pray.

I'm thoroughly convinced in my own spirit that there is going to arise in these last days, bands of believers, groups of them, here and there, who are going to learn how to take their place in Christ and who they are and what they are. And you talk about prayer warriors, and you talk about the prayer life, and you talk about getting results--they are going to get them. I believe that. I'm thoroughly convinced of that myself. They won't have to be dependent on somebody else to do their praying for them and to get answers for them.

God will hear you! It's difficult for us a lot of times because in our churches we've been trained certain ways and we leave it up to the pastor to do all the praying. But when you gain an understanding of what righteousness is and what it means, then you will be able to step out of the narrow place of theology in which you have lived unto the boundless fullness of God! Hallelujah!

Now some folks say, "I can see from this scripture that we've received remission from sins that are past, and have received the gift of righteousness, and that we are made a righteous new creature, but now what about those sins and wrong doings since I've become a Christian?"

After I'd learned these facts from the Bible that's how Satan defeated me a little while longer. He said, "Oh, yes, yes, that's right." (He wouldn't dispute it because the Word is true, and he knew I had found it out.) "Yes, that's right, you were made a new creature in Christ and God didn't make an unrighteous new creature--but now it is since you have been saved that you've gotten angry and lost your temper and knocked the tray off the bed and so on. It's since then."

So he had me hung up for a little bit longer because I felt so badly because I'd missed it since I had become a Christian. Have you missed it since you've become a Christian? Have you, since you've been saved, born again, become a child of God, never failed, never sinned, never missed it?

Well, I began to look at the Word again and I found that verse in First John.

I John 1:9

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

John wasn't writing to sinners here, he was writing to Christians because he said, "My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:1-2).

When a man sins, he is under condemnation and he loses his sense of righteousness. But, when he confesses, "I have sinned, I have failed God, forgive me Lord, in Jesus name," the Lord does two things. If He just forgave him his sin it wouldn't help him much because he would still be under condemnation. But, according to I John 1:9, He (1) forgives us of our sins, and (2) cleanses us.

What does He cleanse us from? All unrighteousness. All unrighteousness! Part of our unrighteousness? No, all of it.

Unrighteousness is just simply the word righteousness with the prefix "un". Un-righteousness, non-righteous. If I am cleansed from unrighteousness or non-righteousness, or not righteousness, then I am righteousness again! Hallelujah!

So I came back to the devil with that and put him on the run and he's been running ever since. Up till I found that out everytime the devil met me he'd put me on the run. And if I saw the devil anywhere you know, man I'd cross the street in the middle of the block to keep from meeting him. I'd go down the back alley just so I wouldn't run into him. (I'm speaking figuratively, you understand.) If he popped his head up or cropped up anywhere, brother I was ready to turn and run. But, after I found out who I am in Christ Jesus, praise God, I just almost invited the boy to come by my house. Amen! If I could see him, I'd just go ahead right on meeting him and he's the one who turned and ran--because he found out I knew what the Word said!