

(16)

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH - PART I

Romans 3:21-23

After the Armistice was signed at the end of the First World War, France was more or less overwhelmed by many thousands of American soldiers whose primary purpose in life became getting home to America as soon as possible.

Military discipline was greatly relaxed from the tension of the actual wartime, and the men were taking advantage of as much leave as they could in order to enjoy the sights of Europe. In a certain village about a hundred miles from Paris, there was a unit of American soldiers, consisting of a lieutenant and about forty men, whose duty was to guard an ammunition dump.

Thousands of cases of shells were stored in a field and guards patrolled the perimeter to protect the explosives. There was little to do outside of the brief periods of guard duty, and the men amused themselves as best they could and waited for the day when they would receive orders to embark for home.

There came a time when the lieutenant received permission to go on leave for two weeks, and he left the group in charge of the sergeant. A few days later, there came a motorcycle messenger from General Pershing's headquarters bringing an order that greatly excited the soldiers.

The order stated that 2,700 men were to be chosen to march in the peace parades of London, Paris, Brussels, and Rome. When the corporal and sergeant read the order, they looked at each other and said, "Boy, that would be something! Traveling all over Europe at the government's expense!"

But as they read on, they discovered that there were two conditions imposed as standards for selection. The first was no problem for it merely stated that every candidate had to have a clean record - no man would be chosen who had ever been court-martialed. But the second condition left them in a quandry. The order stated that every man applying had to be at least one meter and eighty-six centimeters tall.

The corporal looked at the sergeant and the sergeant looked at the corporal. "How much is one meter and eighty-six centimeters?" one of them asked. Neither one of them knew the answer. Then the corporal said the most natural thing under the circumstances, "At any rate, Sarge, I'm taller than you are!"

When mess time came and the news spread through the unit, it was the same thing all over again. No one knew the metric system. The men started to argue about their relative heights

and soon they were standing up, back-to-back, to see who was the tallest man in the unit.

Finally, they knew their comparative heights, all the way from Slim down to Shorty. Slim was very proud and told them that he would send them a post card from Rome and would take a look at the English girls for the rest of them. Poor Shorty received the good-natured ribbing that his buddies deemed appropriate.

Under the circumstances, they did the normal, natural thing. They didn't understand the required standard. They all wanted an appointment to march in the peace parades. This led them to set up artificial standards of their own and measure themselves by themselves. It was natural that some pride developed in those who were taller. After all, weren't they the most probable candidates?

When the lieutenant returned from his leave and heard about General Pershing's order, he asked if there were any candidates. The sergeant replied, "The trouble is, sir, that we don't know what one meter and eighty-six centimeters is."

Now, the lieutenant didn't know the metric system either and thus couldn't tell the sergeant that one meter and eighty-six centimeters was just over six feet, one and one-fifth inches. But, the lieutenant did know enough French to go into the village and bring back a meterstick.

Unfortunately, the meterstick soon revealed that there would be no candidates from the unit: even Slim was a quarter inch short of the standard!

The point of this story, of course, is that General Pershing did not get any of his marching men from this unit of soldiers. He was not asking that they be about one meter and eighty-six centimeters tall, but that they fill the minimum requirement without any shortcoming whatsoever. His was no request for an approximation; it was a rigid, inflexible demand. Tall Slim didn't march in the parades any more than short Shorty did!

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The analogy should also be clear: The rule which God has made for entry into Heaven is that all men shall measure up to His glory and be as perfect as He is. This rigorous standard is to be found throughout the Bible and is clearly stated in Leviticus 11:44, "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy."

Thank God for Romans 3:21-23:

21. "But now the righteousness of God 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: for there is no difference:"

23. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"

The source of man's righteousness is in the sinful nature and being of man. But the righteousness of God has its source in the nature and being of God. And now we see that God's righteousness is revealed, is available "unto all" the world, and is placed like a new clean garment "upon all them that believe" on our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, God has laid Jesus' mantle of perfection over you! When God looks at you now, no matter how evil and imperfect you still are, God sees Jesus' perfection and declares that you are perfect in His sight. You are therefore acceptable and welcome in Heaven!

How wonderful it is that God demands absolute perfection! How unjust God would be if He made salvation on the basis of something in man. For, if He had made such a standard, it would mean that some would be totally incapable of fulfilling the requirements, and others would have a natural advantage that would give them a head start.

Suppose that God had made entrance into Heaven on the basis of money. If the requirements were the possession of a billion dollars, then well over ninety-nine percent of all humanity would be condemned to Hell at the start without any possible hope of meeting the requirements.

If God had made salvation on the basis of human intelligence, then Heaven would have a few Einsteins and the rest of us would be in Hell.

In the same way, if God had made salvation on the basis of human character or "man's righteousness", He would have been unjust. A man or woman fortunate enough to have been born into a home where godly parents taught them right from wrong; where a godly father gave them a spanking whenever they misbehaved; that man or woman would have a tremendous advantage.

A poor unfortunate born to parents who either didn't care or who had fallen into Satan's trap of permissiveness would never have a chance. ~~We see many such children today; tripped-out on drugs and sex and already marked for Hell!~~

Thank God that He does not work on any such unjust basis! He puts up His perfect standard for you to see, measures you by it, declares that you are short and can never do anything to meet his requirements, and then proceeds to declare righteous all the ungodly who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!

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Do you think that you are good enough to make it to Heaven without God's grace?

Suppose that you were in the desert, suffering terrible thirst, and I came to you and told you that I had some pure distilled water and would be happy to give you a drink. You say "YES" eagerly! I then pour you a glass of the pure distilled water and hand it to you.

Just as you are raising the glass to your lips, I comment, "Oh, by the way. That glass was just used to store a laboratory specimen of typhoid toxin before I poured the water into it."

You think again. You don't drink the water. As pure as it may have been before I poured it into the glass, it is now deadly poison.

This is the way God looks upon those who try to rely on their own good behavior to get themselves into Heaven. They may argue or boast about the things they have done and the works they have produced, but the Word of God bluntly declares that their good works are contained in the glass of their sinful nature.

Since that nature has infected every part of their being, all their works are an offense to God because the works have been poisoned by their sinful natures. The source of man's righteousness is in the sinful nature and being of man. But the righteousness of God has its source in the nature and being of God!

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God!

Nobody can make it to Heaven on their own!

But God is ready to cover you with Jesus' perfection!

This doesn't mean you instantly become perfect in all your ways and immediately become totally perfect and sinless. I John 1:8-10 says:

8. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

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

10. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

When we accept Christ, God declares us to be righteous. As we live in Christ, God guides us to become more and more righteous in all our deeds - to be more and more closely conformed to the image of Christ. And, when we die and go home to be with Christ, then we shall be completely perfect and just like him!

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Hallelujah! Amen!

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