

THE FREE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Growing up in Landenberg, PA, as a small boy, Christmas Eve was a special time. There was excitement in the air in anticipation of Christmas Day. The fresh cut tree being balanced inside a cinderblock, and decorated with homemade ornaments and strings of big lights! The house was abuzz with family and friends visiting and eating. There was plenty of food and noise.

Sometimes we kids would get rambunctious and start to wrestle in the living room. When the voice of authority (my Italian Grandmother) would pierce the air with her broken English, “You kids better behave or Santa Claus will not bring you any gifts!”

In our little heads, we associated a gift with being good. If we are well behaved, and do everything perfect, then we will get gifts. Unfortunately, as an adult, we carry this idea over into our relationships. Someone gives us a gift and we say, “Oh, you shouldn’t have! I don’t deserve it. Why did you go to so much trouble?”

Because we have a wrong understanding about gifts, consequently we don’t get the full impact or meaning of the gift of righteousness. Righteousness is *the ability to stand in the presence of God without any sense of guilt or inferiority, just as if I had never sinned.*

Paul says in Romans 5:17, “For by one man’s offense, death reigned by one: much more they which receive abundance of grace and *the gift of righteousness* shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ”.

Notice, Paul calls it the gift of righteousness. The word gift here is the Greek word “dorea”. The Lexicon uses the Latin word “gratuitus” which means given without equivalent or recompense, free, voluntary, not required, called or warranted by the circumstances, adopted or asserted without any good ground”.

In other words, you did not deserve it, you did not work for it, and neither can you earn it. It has nothing to do with human effort. Our right standing before God had nothing to do with our good works. Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”. Verse 24, “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ”.

If you have been born again, you have been made righteous or freely justified before God by His grace. Your right standing before God is not because you go to church, help the poor, give your tithes, and don’t drink or smoke. It is because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is because of His shed blood. It is His work of going to the cross, that was well pleasing to the Father.

II Corinthians 5:21 “For He (God) hath made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”. It was a total substitutionary exchange that took place.

The righteousness of God is a free gift. Every born again Christian has the same right standing before God. No one has more right standing than someone else. We all have the same *gift* of righteousness in our hearts.

It is the same right standing that Jesus had with the Father in His earthly walk. It is the same right standing we have with the Father. It is Jesus' righteousness in us.

Look at what Paul says in Romans 10:9-10, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in thine heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved, For with the heart man believes unto *righteousness*: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation".

Notice, it is believing with your heart on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by faith in the finished work of Christ that a person becomes righteous before God.

Titus 3:4-7, "He saved us, not by works of righteousness but because of His mercy, So that having been justified by His grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life". It is not that we loved God, but that He loved us first and reached out to us while we were still in sin. Sometimes Christian people forget that their right standing before God has nothing to do with their good works or good moral behavior.

We've been justified freely by His grace. Someone did work for our righteousness. Someone did pay the price so that we could have right standing before God. Someone's sacrifice did justify us. And that Someone is Jesus Christ! Jesus was the only One who could make us righteous before the Father.

Romans 5:14, "by the obedience of one (Jesus) many were made righteous. When you were born again, you were made new by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Your old self was crucified with Christ. There is now a new person on the inside with a new nature. (II Corinthians 5:17)

Paul tells the Ephesian Christians to put the new man on the outside. Your words, attitudes, and actions can now be governed by the new man on the inside. Ephesians 4:24 says, "And that ye put on the new man which after God is *created in righteousness*. Your new self is created in righteousness. You now have a brand new nature.

This is why Paul said to put on the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protects the heart. When the enemy tries to condemn you, and make you feel like an unworthy worm and remind you of all your imperfections, you just put on that breastplate of righteousness and remember who you are in Christ.

Confess this out loud today. "I thank you, Heavenly Father, that I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Thank you, Father, that You made me righteous through the shed blood of Jesus. I walk in this new life victoriously through the gift of righteousness. Because I have been made righteous through faith in Christ, I can now hold my head up high with confidence because Christ's righteousness is in me.