

Doing Righteousness

Kim Myers

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We just finished getting leaven out of our homes, our garages, and our cars. If we deleaven our homes properly, it takes a lot of time and energy. I know that because I started very early and by the time it is all over, I am pretty worn out. It takes work and a lot of it to deleaven our homes. Now God is showing us how hard it is to get sin out of our lives. This also takes a lot of work and it takes time.

We also just observed the Night to be Much Observed and we just finished keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread. We also just took Passover and reconfirmed the agreement, or the covenant, we made with God at our baptism—the most holy time of the year.

So there is a question for us, brethren: how are we doing with our agreement with God? What will this year be like for us? Will it be business as usual? The same old, same old? Will we live in the same old rut, will it just be another new year? Are we just like the people of the world that make New Year's resolutions or agreements, and then we fall off the wagon in the first few weeks and we never change? We have all known people that say, "Hey, my New Year's resolution is I'm going to lose weight." But in three or four weeks of dieting, they fall off the wagon, and next year they are fatter than they were this year, right? We have all known people like that. It is always business as usual. Nothing ever changes. If anything, we just get worse.

What we have agreed to cannot compare to a New Year's resolution, and that is not what I am saying. We *must* make changes in our lives. We *must* become righteous. Obtaining righteous character is crucial to all firstfruits.

Think about where we are right now, both within the church and in the world because of a lack of righteousness. With the scattering of God's church, there has become more unrest within the churches. We now have more divorce among God's people than we did back in the 70s. In society, we now have

shootings on the freeways, killings and outright slaughter in our schools and universities. These things did not happen when I was a kid. We suffer now with disobedient children within the church and in society. We now live where mass murder can take place almost anywhere in the country at any time. You and I could be walking down the street, minding our own business, and some crazy nut could run us down, a terrorist in a truck or automobile. Terrorism is alive and well all over the world. Peace eludes us in the world and in our country, in our cities, and our homes, and even in the church to some degree.

Romans 3:15-17 "Their feet are swift to shed blood [We are living with this right now.]; destruction and misery are in their ways [Think of all the mass shootings in the last ten or twenty years and think about what goes on within the church. There is a lot of misery within the church also.]; and the way of peace they have not known." [peace completely eludes us]

Now I am pretty sure that all of us want world peace. We want universal peace and well being for all mankind. We all want peace in our families and homes, and we like it when there is lots of love within our families. We all want good and respectful, obedient children. Nobody likes a brat, do they? We all want to be safe when we move about in society. I also think that we want God to hear our prayers. And we also would like Him to answer our prayers, would we not?

None of this can ever happen, though, without righteousness. Righteousness is the key to peace— world peace, peace with our neighbors, peace within our families, and good, respectful, and obedient children are all blessings from God. And all this cannot happen without personal righteousness on our part.

Proverbs 12:28 In the way of righteousness is life [and peace], and in its pathway there is no death.

Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

How exalted is America today? There is no peace in our country. There is no peace in the workplace. There is no peace in our schools or our homes. And there is no peace in our government. Our government fights among itself constantly. So the question is: what is righteousness and how do we obtain it?

Righteousness is our actions. It is our words. It is our morals and it is our virtue. It is what we *do*. It is keeping God's laws correctly. It is living by every word of God. It is keeping the commandments of God correctly.

Psalm 119:1-3 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.

All of this is righteousness. This is what we should try to do every day of our lives all day long. Let us turn and look at I Corinthians 6. In these verses, God is showing us the other side of the coin. These acts are unrighteous acts as opposed to righteous acts.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. [Do not be fooled. Unrighteous acts like these will keep you out of the Kingdom of God.] Neither fornicators, nor idolaters [And anything can be an idol to us. It can be our mates, our children, our money, our hobbies, our cars, anything.], nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers [party animals], nor extortioners will not inherit the kingdom of God.

These acts are all unrighteous acts. The problem with all of this is that some of these acts go on in God's church and with God's people. If we do not repent, make changes in our lives, and try to become righteous, then we are just wasting our time coming to church. Do you like to waste your time? I am not much for that.

Let us look at Psalm 92, verses 12-15. These verses talk about what righteousness will bring.

Psalm 92:12-15 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in their old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

It is vital to all of us to work on becoming righteous. There will be no unrighteous people in the Kingdom of God. We need to constantly be aware of our actions, our mouth, our words, our thoughts, and our overall conduct. We must always be trying to give God the honor and glory He deserves. We do this by working on being righteous. We, as God's people, must know and understand that God blesses righteousness. God does not bless unrighteousness.

Let us turn to I Samuel 13. We all know this story. Saul was the king of Israel. He was at war with the Philistines. The Philistines came up to make war with Saul in Israel. The Philistines had 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen and a very large number of troops. Saul and all Israel was terrified at this very large and well-equipped army of the Philistines. Saul was with his army at Gilgal waiting for Samuel. The Bible says the Israelites were so afraid that they were trembling. They were really scared.

I Samuel 13:8-14 Then he [Saul] waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. [Saul's army was deserting him. They were scared. They were running for their lives. Saul was in a tough spot and his faith was being tested.] So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and a peace offering here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. [Saul knew that he had no authority to offer or cause others to offer any of God's sacrifices. Yet because of fear and a lack of faith. He disobeyed God. This is unrighteousness.] Now it happened as soon as he had finished the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. [The lesson for us in this verse: we must have faith and patience and always wait on God. God wants obedience from us, not sacrifice. That is what righteousness is. God wants righteousness, and He wants obedience.] And Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul

said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."

He forced himself. Saul in this first did what we all do or at least have a tendency to do. Saul put the blame for his unrighteousness, his sin, on the circumstances that he found himself in, and on others. 1) My army was deserting me. What would you expect me to do, Samuel? 2) You, Samuel, did not come at the time appointed, but Samuel did come within the time appointed. It was just at the end of the time appointed. 3) The Philistine army was coming fast upon me.

We, as humans, are really good at making excuses and pointing the finger and justifying our actions.

I Samuel 13:13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. [He said, "Saul, you're a dummy."] You have not kept the commandments of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever." [if you would have obeyed Him]

There is always a price to pay for unrighteousness and Saul paid a very heavy price. To whom much is given, much is expected. You and I have been given so much that it boggles the mind. And all God wants from us is obedience and for us to grow in righteousness, because obedience is righteousness. But now here comes the penalty, brethren.

I Samuel 13:14 "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart [one that would be obedient], and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

There is always a penalty for unrighteousness. God blesses righteousness but He does not bless unrighteousness. That is something we need to remember.

Let us think about the predominant attitude within the greater churches of God today, right now. This neither cold nor hot attitude. God says in Revelation 3:15, "I know how you are. You go to church, you keep the holy days. You take Passover so you're not cold, but you're not not hot either. You're just there, but you're not growing in righteousness, either." It is the same old, same old for us, year after year.

Let us look at some righteous acts now opposed to unrighteous acts. Let us look in Ezra.

Ezra 10:3 Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and those who have been born to them, according to the advice of my master and those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

These Jews wanted to repent at the cost of giving up their wives and children. Repentance is a righteous act, brethren, and that was a good move on their part. This is what God wants from us. He wants us to make changes in our lives and become righteous when we are doing the wrong thing. If we are acting unrighteously, He just wants us to change and try to become righteous.

What happened here was, when the Jews had come back to the land of Judah, they married the people that now lived in the land. God had commanded the people that were to return to the land, not to get mixed up with these people because they were very pagan and He knew that His people would start to compromise God's laws and commandments if they intermarried. This is what happened. This happens all the time within the church of God. We marry outside the faith and eight out of ten times the unions end and the called-out one compromise themselves out of the church or it ends in divorce. God does not want either. God does not want any of us to leave or quit the church—leave the faith. He also hates divorce. It will lose-lose situation eight out of ten times.

Ezra 9:11-12 Which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, 'The land which you are entering is an unclean land, with the uncleanness of the peoples of the land, with their

abominations which have filled it from one end to another with their impurity. Now therefore, do not give your daughters as wives to their sons; nor take their daughters for your sons; and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.'

It is the same today. The people of this world are just people. They are not deformed or physically handicapped. They are not ugly, and they do not look like Frankenstein. The problem is, they do not understand what we understand. They have not been called. They have not been given the Holy Spirit, so the rub is they cannot see any wrong in Sunday worship. They do not get it. They do not see any wrong in Christmas. Christmas is a very enjoyable time of the year to them. They do not see any wrong in Easter, Halloween, birthdays, or even abortion. We voted abortion in this country. They do not see any wrong in that.

They do not see any wrong in cheating on their mates as long as they do not get caught. They do not see any wrong in stealing as long as it is from the government or big business. They do not see any problem with lying as long as it does not hurt anybody. They do not see anything wrong with eating unclean animals. And why in the world do you crazy people keep these holy days? It makes no sense to them. We give up our jobs for the holy days. None of this makes sense to them.

God knows if we marry and get mixed up with the world and its ways, it will water us down. We will compromise our beliefs, and at the very least we will become lukewarm, if not compromise ourselves right out of the Kingdom of God.

Let us go to Galatians 5. What God has listed for us here is righteous acts, and there is no law anywhere in the world against righteous acts and righteousness.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy [or gladness], peace, longsuffering [patience and even temper], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [or discipline]. Against such there is no law.

Do you know why God says there is no law, brethren? Because no nation or people in the whole world have laws against any of these acts. You will not be arrested for any of these righteous acts, but you will be arrested for a number of unrighteous acts. These acts are the things God wants us to grow in. The righteous will inherit the Kingdom of God.

In verses 19-21 the Bible also lists some unrighteous acts. Not all unrighteous acts are listed here, just a few to give us the flavor of unrighteous acts that will keep us from the Kingdom of God. Let us look at these unrighteous acts.

Galatians 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, . . .

All of these unrighteous acts are sexual acts or sexual sins. The world does not get it, either. God created sex between a husband and a wife to bring about a closer bond, to create a oneness and to have love one for another and, of course, to produce children. When we, as God's people, get mixed up in any of these unrighteous acts outside of marriage, it only brings heartache and destruction to ourselves, our families, our children, and to our friends.

Another unrighteous sexual act that goes on in the greater churches of God today is pornography. You might not think that goes on, but it is alive and well, brethren. And I am sure God would have listed pornography with these other unrighteous acts if when the Bible was written there had been computers because that is where most people go to look at pornography, or if there had been sexual magazines in print and sexual fantasy stories, you could go into.

Mankind has now become so unrighteous that the world, and especially in America, is very involved in sexual unrighteousness. Our families are breaking down over it. We have come to the point now where men prefer men over women. How gross is that? That makes me shiver. To think of some hairy guy that you are going to hug on if you are a man, makes me want to puke when I think about it. Women also prefer women over men, and we now have major cities that are known for homosexuality, and they

are proud of it. Cities like San Francisco, the queer capital of the world. In Portland, Oregon, which happens to be the dike capital of the world and Portland is proud of that.

Galatians 5:20-21 . . . idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies [all of this is unrighteousness], envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past [Now here comes the warning and the penalty for being unrighteous because there is always a penalty.], that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We already went over this in I Corinthians 6:9-10 so I think all of these things were going on to some degree both in the Galatian church and with the brethren there and within the Corinthian churches. Things never change. God mentioned it twice in the Bible to get our attention.

What we are involved in is very serious business. How much plainer can the Word of God be? The Kingdom of God and our future is involved in all of this. We need to be working on becoming righteous like Christ is. How many people have you known that you really think are righteous in your lifetime?

Now I would like to tell you a little bit about a man that I knew in God's church that I feel was very righteous. He is dead now, but a few of us in the church of God knew him. Mr. and Mrs. Ritenbaugh knew him and so did the Delores Reid, as well as Rick and Linda Stites and Sheila Hill. This man's name was Stan Norton. Stanley was a farmer from Nebraska. He was a very simple man that lived in a small, rented home in Huntington Beach, California.

On this particular Sabbath, he came to church in a new nine passenger Mercury station wagon. I think I mentioned this once before in a sermonette. This Mercury had 390 cubic inches and 300 horsepower and was a huge gas guzzler, 10 to 11 mpg and that was with the tail wind and the sail up, if he was lucky. This was back in 1972 or 73.

Now think about what was going on at that time in America. We were in a gas crunch, and you could only purchase gas for your car every other day. This was determined by the numbers on your license plate. The lines for gas at the gas stations were very long. You could sit in line for hours. On top of all this, the cost of gas was going up and nobody had any idea what was going to happen or how much gas was going to cost in the future. It seemed like everybody and their grandmother was down at the Honda store, standing in line 10 or 15 deep to buy a car that got better gas mileage because people were scared. They were very unsure of the future, and they did not know what all this meant and what was going to happen.

But not Stan. He rolled up the church in a new gas guzzler, a nine passenger beast. Why? What was Stan thinking? That is exactly what I asked Stan when he rolled up in his shiny new gas guzzler that sounded like it was saying at idle, "more gas, more gas. I need more." You know what Stan's reply was? He said, "I pick up a number of older brethren for church each week. They can't drive, and they couldn't get here if it was not for me." Stan says, "My old car didn't have air conditioning so it was uncomfortable and was a sedan and was hard for the brethren to get in and out of." He said that this new car would be much more comfortable for the brethren.

Stan was not worried about gas or the cost of it. Stan's concern was the brethren, their comfort and need them to assemble themselves for church on the Sabbath. Stan loved God's people. All of this is righteousness. These types of actions are righteous acts. Stan put the needs of God people before money, before worrying about gas and the cost of it, and before his own wants. All of this is righteousness.

I would like to share another quick story about Stan. Stan had four children, three boys and a girl. One of his sons, Leonard, had come down with cancer. Leonard's cancer was terminal. Leonard and his siblings were all part of God's church. It was the last Sabbath before the Feast of Tabernacles and Leonard was in the hospital that year. That Saturday, 30 or 40 people went and visited him in the hospital. The lobby was full of brethren, and the last people to leave the hospital that day were Stan, his wife Verna, and Debbie

and I. On the way out to the parking lot, I asked Stan what he was going to do about keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, because it was coming up in a couple of days. And Stan said that he was going to keep the Feast.

Think about that. That is a big decision, brethren. He said that we are commanded to keep the Feast. He said Leonard is part of God's church, and if it were at all possible, Leonard would also keep the Feast. Then Stan just asked Debbie and I to please pray that God will allow Leonard to live through the Feast so he and Verna could be with their son when he died. We went to Tucson that year. You know what God did that year for Stan? He allowed Leonard to live for two weeks after the Feast. Stan and Verna had two more weeks to talk with and spend time with Leonard and God granted all of this because of Stan's righteousness. God always blesses righteousness, and that was quite a deal for Stan and Verna to be there when their son died. Stan's act of living by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God was rewarded with Leonard living two more weeks.

God makes a fantastic promise to us. He tells us in Deuteronomy 28 if we will only live by every word of God and keep His commandments, He will bless us as no other people on earth.

Deuteronomy 28:1-7 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you on high above all nations of the earth. [If you will just do what He says, He will give us the following fabulous blessings.] And all of these blessings shall come on you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. Blessed shall you be in the fruit of your body [speaking about our children. Think about how many of our kids are now on drugs in this country or are alcoholics and some are even homeless.], and the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be

when you go out. The Lord will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways."

God wants to bless us. But we, and I am talking about us in the church, will not let Him because of our unrighteousness. So God tells us what things will be like because of unrighteousness in Deuteronomy 28:15-48. We will not read all of this. I just want to pick out a few verses to show us where the nation we live in and where God's church is today.

Deuteronomy 28:15-16 "But it shall come to pass, if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all of His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country."

This verse really is a mouthful. How are things in our cities today, brethren? Because of the violence and murders in Chicago, and other factors such as taxes and lack of jobs in the state of Illinois, the population in the state of Illinois is now receding by 68,000 people per year. Illinois was before one of the most populated state in the country—just a few years ago. It has now fallen to the fifth most populated state, behind Pennsylvania.

Now, I am going to ask you a question. Would any of you like to live in downtown San Francisco, downtown Detroit, Newark, New Jersey, or downtown Portland or maybe Memphis, Tennessee, just to name a few? Do you not think we are cursed in the cities and the fields right now, today? We are. Cancer is now out of control in America, adult onset diabetes is also out of control. Kidney failure is also on the rise in America. A lot of our sicknesses and our diseases come directly from the food we eat. Read the ingredients on the labels, brethren. They use everything that is not good for us.

Deuteronomy 28:23 "And your heavens that are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron."

This verse is talking about drought. California is still having water issues, as well as a lot of the Southwest. When these things happen, our government

calls it global warming or climate change. We never say this has anything to do with our unrighteousness, do we? Or our morals or our Creator God. We do not say those things.

Deuteronomy 28:35 "The Lord will strike you in the knees and on the legs with the severe boils which cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head."

Does this not sound kind of like arthritis which we have no cure for? Lots of us have arthritis. I have some of that in my neck and it makes us uncomfortable and it hurts.

Deuteronomy 28:43-44 "The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. [This is happening right now in most of the Israelitish nations.] He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail."

We owe the Chinese and think about the tremendous amount of money, just to name one nation that we are indebted to.

Brethren, God blesses righteousness. He does not bless unrighteousness. And as the nation continues to become more unrighteous, these things will happen. We, as God's people, cannot be involved in any of these acts. But God does bless us for righteous acts. These things such as daily prayer, love, and service to the brethren. For a mouth and a tongue that speaks with wisdom and judgment.

God also blesses righteous thoughts. He blesses Bible study. He blesses us for keeping the Sabbath properly. He blesses us when we are in positions of authority and we treat people properly. He blesses us for keeping the commandments. He blesses us for righteous judgment. He blesses us for confessing our sins to Him. He blesses us for repentance and changing our ways. God blesses us when we pray and plead the cause of the poor and the needy. He blesses us for living soberly. We are blessed for paying tithes, brethren. And we are blessed for deleavening our homes correctly.

There are so many things we are blessed for.

I John 3:7-10 Little children, let no man deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin because he has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother.

For us to do right, or righteousness, we must know what righteousness is. We must know what we need to do. The Bible tells us what righteousness is.

We do not have to turn there but in Psalm 119:142, it says, "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is true." speaking of God and Jesus Christ. That is what we are supposed to grow and try to become like.

So, in order to please God, we must be working becoming righteous like Christ. But to do that we must know what righteousness is. That is why we read and study our Bible—God's Word—because God's Word is righteousness.

The lesson for us is: just coming to church each week and knowing what righteousness is, is not enough. We must do that which is righteous all the time. So let us make this a very righteous year for all of us.