

Are We Ever Good Enough?

Conviction of Sin

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As we face the modern world with all its trouble and turmoil, and with all its difficulties and sadness, it is important that we, who call ourselves Christian, should be representing God in such a way before others as to give them the impression that here is the solution, and here is the answer. In a world where everything has gone so madly astray, we should be standing out, and we should be a people characterized by a fundamental joy and certainty in spite of conditions, in spite of adversity.

I think that you will agree that this is the picture that is given of God's people everywhere in the Scriptures, whether it is the Old or the New Testament. Those men and women of God stood out in that way, and whatever their circumstances and conditions, they seemed to possess a secret that enabled them to live triumphantly, and to be more than conquerors.

So, it is wise for us to examine why we still slip into states of spiritual anxiety about whether we are good enough to be accepted by God.

According to the psalmist, we must really face ourselves. In other words, we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing ourselves to talk to us. We must have self-control, and we must address ourselves as the psalmist addressed himself, and asked the question in Psalm 42:5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?"

The heading over Psalm 42 is "Yearning for God in the Midst of Distresses."

Psalm 42:1-5 As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast. Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.

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So the psalmist here recognized that he was feeling times of distress and anxiety, but that he really should not, because hope is in God, and he knew that God would build him up in times of despair. Why would he feel cast down if he knew all that? In Psalm 42, he faces himself and talks to himself, he argues with himself, and brings himself back to the position of faith. He exhorts himself to have faith in God, and then he is in a condition to pray to God.

What does the psalmist here advocate? The vital principle is that we must face ourselves, and examine ourselves. If we are among those who never seem to know the joy of salvation, and the joy of the Lord, we must discover the cause. At this pre-Passover time, it is very important for us to examine ourselves. I think that the examination that I am going to admonish us to take today is a little different than you would expect.

The causes are many, and we have to deal with these causes one by one. Nothing must be taken for granted. It could easily be established that the main cause of trouble, in the area of a lack of joy, is the fatal tendency to take things for granted. This is an ever-growing problem.

The particular trouble with which we are dealing tends to be common among those who have been brought up in a religious manner, or you might say those who have been raised in the church, or the second and third generation within God's church especially, rather than in those who have not been brought up in a religious manner. It is more likely to affect those who have been brought up in Christian homes and families, and who have always been taken to church services, than those who have not. There are many people who seem to go right through their lives in a varying state of misery. They never seem to get out of it, and cannot figure out why.

Many are in the realm of the church, and very interested in Christian things; yet when you compare them with the New Testament description of the new man in Christ, you see that there is a great difference.

Even they themselves recognize that, and this is often the main cause of their unhappiness. They see other Christians rejoicing and they say: "Well, I can't say that I am like that. That person has something I don't have." They would give almost anything if they could just have that hidden "something" that the joyous person has.

They read the stories of the patriarchs, prophets, and the apostles; and they read about the lives of the early Christian saints, and they realize that they are not like them. They know that they have never been like them, and that there is something that those people

obviously enjoy that they themselves have never had. Sometimes we call that first love, or a zeal for God that second and third generation Christians sometimes seem to lack.

There are lots of people in this unhappy situation. God's way of life seems to be a constant problem, and they are always asking the same question. "Why can I not be like that?" They read their Bible to receive instruction about God's way of life; they attend Sabbath services every week, always seeking something they do not find. And they are cast down, and they are in turmoil.

Often these people are clear in their minds about the primary and most fundamental principles of the doctrine of the church. Frequently, you will find in talking to them that their real trouble lies just in that area. I would not say that they are not Christians, but I am suggesting that they are what I would call miserable Christians, simply because they have not understood the way of salvation, and for that reason all their beliefs and efforts have been more or less useless.

They often concentrate on the question of sanctification, but it does not help them because they have not understood justification. Having assumed that they were on the right road, they assume that all they have to do is to continue along that same road that they have always gone on since childhood.

It is an interesting theological point as to whether such people are Christians, or not. Maybe they are, maybe they are not; I do not know! That is for God to judge! But I do know that many of these people try to find happiness in this Christian life by doing things.

They are often diligent about doing things: they may work several jobs or long hours even to the detriment of their families. They may sometimes volunteer at their local food bank, or homeless shelter, while neglecting their relationship with God; or they may spend a great deal of time on their numerous hobbies, a welcome distraction from the weightier matters of God's law. These things that we do are not necessarily wrong in and of themselves, unless they are superseding our relationship with our Creator.

Many people assume that they have been right about the foundational doctrines, but they never have been right about their justification, and it is right here that Satan causes confusion. It suits Satan well, that such people are concerned about sanctification and holiness and various other things—as they should be—but they can never be right until they get rid of the confusion, and that is why we must start with this.

It is no use going on to deal with the superstructure if the foundation is not right. We

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therefore start with this. This confusion is an old trouble. In a sense, it is a masterpiece of Satan. He will even encourage us to be righteous as long as he has us confused about this point.

The incident where Jesus counsels the rich young ruler illustrates the question of whether we are good enough or not.

Matthew 19:16-22 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

So, "No one is good except One!" The proof that Satan is deceiving people in this way today is clear from the fact that the average person in the church seems to regard people as Christian simply because they do good works, even though they may be entirely wrong about foundational truths. It is an old trouble, and it was the essential trouble with the Jews at the time of Christ, and even on into today.

Of course, it is understood that Christians are to continue doing good works.

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

So it is obvious that we are to be careful to maintain (or continue doing) good works, by obeying the commandments, serving others, and seeing to their needs. However, the problem with the Pharisees and many other Jews was that they did things to impress others, and to try to earn salvation for themselves.

The Jews were entirely wrong with regard to the whole question of the law, and the

main problem was to show them the right view of it. The Jews believe that God made the law so that people might save themselves by keeping it. They said that all one had to do was to keep the law, and that if you kept the law you would justify yourself, and that if you lived your life according to the law, God would accept you, and you would be well pleasing in His sight.

Basically, they thought they could force God to save them, because they thought that He would be obligated to them to do it, since they were good enough. And they believed that they could do that because they had never understood the law. They put their own interpretation on it, and thought it was something that was well within their reach. And so, they thought that all was well with them, and they felt so good about themselves.

That is the picture of the Pharisees that is given in the Gospels, and everywhere in the New Testament. Here is an example:

Matthew 15:1-11 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

They placed their tradition ahead of, and superceding, God's law and God's way of life.

It was the whole essential trouble with the Jews, and it is still the essence of the problem with many people today. We must realize that there are certain things about which we must be perfectly clear before we can hope to have peace, and to enjoy God's way of life. The Pharisees tried to become righteous by keeping their own traditions.

This preliminary point is one that we can present as a general explanation of the teaching of the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans. The first four chapters of Romans are devoted to this one theme. The one thing that Paul was anxious to make clear was his message about the righteousness of God, that is by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul had already said in Romans 1:

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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

But the question was: Why did everybody not believe that? Why did all who heard it, as the greatest good news that had ever come into the world, not accept this almost automatically?

The answer is that they did not see the need for it! They had the wrong view of righteousness. The righteousness of which Paul speaks means rightness with God. There is no happiness, and there is no peace or joy, except that we are right with God. The Jews thought that they were right with God, but they were actually right with their *traditions*. They thought that through their efforts they could gain righteousness, and be good enough.

The miserable Christian has the wrong idea about how this righteousness with God is to be obtained. That was the trouble with the Jews also. They believed that conforming to the law attains this rightness, as they understood it, and were keeping it. But their whole view of the law was entirely wrong. They perverted it, with the result that the very thing that God had given them to further His way of salvation had become the main obstacle to them. They could not get over their own traditions, and keeping of the letter of the law.

What then is the Biblical answer? There are certain simple principles about which we must be clear before we can ever hope to enjoy God's gift of salvation.

The first is conviction of sin. We must be absolutely clear about our sinfulness. The apostle Paul raised an imaginary objection. Paraphrased, their argument goes something like this:

Are you going to preach to us about sin, are you going to preach about conviction of sin? You say your object is to make us happy, but if you are

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going to preach to us about conviction of sin, surely that is going to make us still more unhappy. Are you deliberately trying to make us miserable?

To which the simple reply is, 'Yes!' That is the teaching of the apostle Paul, in the first four chapters in Romans. It may sound paradoxical, but beyond any question that is the rule, and there are no exceptions. You must be made miserable before you can know true Christian joy. And, of course, we are made miserable by having our sins pointed out to us initially. We realize how rotten we are, and when we face that point, and that realization in our lives, then we can actually enjoy the joy in Christ.

Paraphrased, that was the mood and the attitude of many of the people that were in the Worldwide Church of God, as it splintered. Because the people that remained in Worldwide, at that time, kept complaining of how miserable the ministers were making them feel, by pointing out sin to them. It is very important to realize that sometimes we have to face our conviction of sin, (well we should always be facing it in a sense), but sometimes we have to *emphasize* it.

The real trouble with the miserable Christian is that he has never been truly made miserable because of the conviction of sin. He has bypassed the essential preliminary to joy; he has been assuming something that he has no right to assume. Again, remembering the second and third generation Christians, or those who grew up in the church, who really are not sure what sins they are supposed to overcome. Sometimes they do not see any in their lives.

You remember the aged Simeon standing with the infant Jesus in his arms.

Luke 2:25-35 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel,

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and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Simeon said a very profound thing when he said, "this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel." There is no rising again until there has been a preliminary fall. This is an absolute rule, and yet this is the thing that is being so sadly forgotten by so many today, and assumed by as many more.

But the Scripture has its order, and its order must be observed if we are to obtain the benefits of God's gift of salvation. Ultimately, the only thing that is going to drive a person to Christ and make him rely on God the Father and Jesus Christ only, is a true conviction of sin. That is, realizing that *every human being on earth has a problem with sin*.

We go astray, because we are not truly convicted of our sin. That is why this is in particular the problem of all those who have been brought up in a religious, or Christian manner. Their primary trouble often is their wrong idea of sin.

One woman, who had been brought up in a religious home, who always attended church, and was busily and actively involved, was a member in a church where a number of people were converted suddenly from the world, and from various kinds of evil living. She made this comment:

You know, I almost wish that I had not been brought up in the way I have been brought up. I could wish that I had been living their kind of life, in order that I might have their wonderful experience of conversion.

Now that is a paraphrase, but that is a comment that I have heard half a dozen or a dozen times, from individuals over the last four decades or so. Those who have grown up in the church think that they have lost out on that first love. What did she mean? What she was really saying was that she had never seen herself as a sinner. Why not? There are many reasons. That kind of person thinks of sin only in terms of action, in terms of visible wrongdoings. She views sin in terms of certain particular actions only. These are things that she has judged to be sin from her own human reasoning.

Let me give you a specific vivid example, from the best that my memory can recall, of something that I heard a while back.

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When we lived in Atlanta in the early 90s, Sean Hannity was the talk show host for a local radio program. The discussion subject was something like: "What determines whether a person is good or bad?" or, "Do you think that you are a good person?" A girl in her late teens called in to the program to give her opinion. With confidence she said, "I think I am a pretty good person."

Sean replied by launching into a series of simple questions during the ensuing discussion with her. It went something like this:

"Have you ever smoked pot?" To which she replied, "Hardly ever."

"How often is hardly ever?" "Maybe only once or twice a week."

"So you are a pothead then?" "No, I 'm not a drug addict."

"Have you ever taken illegal drugs like cocaine?" "I've tried it."

"How often?" "Not very much."

"How often is not very much?" "Only three or four times a week."

"So, let me get this straight, you smoke marijuana once or twice a week, and you use cocaine three or four times a week, and you say you are not a drug addict."

"No, I'm not! I only use it at parties and with friends."

"Do you consider yourself a 'good' person?" "Yes I do."

"Have you ever lied?" "Only white lies; I never hurt anyone."

"Have you ever stolen anything?" "No!"

"Have you ever shoplifted?" "Only if I need it and don't have the money for it."

"Do you have sex?" "Hardly ever."

"With how many different people have you had sex?" "Only one guy this week."

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"How many times each month?" "I don't know?"

"With how many different guys have you had sex?" "I don't know."

"Why don't you know?" "I'm always high."

"You do all these things that are against the law, and are immoral, so how can you say that you are a good person?" "Because I've not killed anyone, yet."

So that was her entire standard of whether she was a good person or not, so long as she did not kill anyone she was good.

I use that extreme example of someone in the world, to illustrate how any human being can justify in their own minds that they are not sinning, or that what they are doing is righteous.

Most people lie to themselves in the same way, but in varying degrees. Their tendency is to think that because they have not been guilty of these particular things, which they have judged to be acceptable actions, then they are "Okay!" They have convinced themselves that they are not really sinners at all.

Even people who have grown up attending Sabbath services all their life, sometimes put it quite plainly and say: "I've never really thought of myself as a sinner: but of course that's not surprising as my life has been sheltered from the beginning. I've never been tempted to do things, and it's not surprising therefore, that I've never felt myself to be a sinner."

There we see the very essence of this fallacy. Their thinking is in terms of actions, particular actions, and of comparisons with other people and their experiences, and so on.

For this reason, they have never had a real conviction of sin, and because of that they have never plainly seen their absolute need of Jesus Christ, nor can they ever appreciate the sacrifice that Jesus made, until they come to a realization of the conviction of sin. They have heard it preached that Christ died for their sins, and they say that they believe that; but they have never really known its absolute necessity for themselves.

How then can such people be convicted of sin? That is Paul's subject in this third chapter of his epistle to the Romans. He had been dealing with it through the second chapter also. And this is his way of doing it, and this is his argument. The book of Romans is such a storehouse of spiritual knowledge.

Romans 3:10-12, 23 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Who are these 'all'? Paul keeps on telling us; 'all' means Jews as well as Gentiles. The Jews would of course agree that the Gentiles were certainly sinners, sinners against God. 'But wait a minute,' Paul says in effect, 'you are equally sinners as well.'

The reason why the Jews hated Christ and crucified Him, and the reason why Paul was treated as he was by his fellow countrymen, who hated anything connected with Christ, was that Christ and His apostles said that the Jew was as much a sinner as the Gentile. They declare that the Jew—the person who thought he had always lived righteously—is as much a sinner as the most flagrant sinner amongst the Gentiles. 'All have sinned,' and Jews and Gentiles are equally condemned before God.

The same is true today, and if we are concerned about having a conviction of sin, the first thing that we have to do is stop humanly reasoning that this is a sin, and this is not, using worldly standards. We feel much better about ourselves when we compare ourselves with the world.

The apostle Paul even warns us not to compare ourselves with one another in the church.

II Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

How difficult that we all find this. We all have these prejudices. We confine sin to only certain things, and because we are not guilty of these things we think that we are not sinners. But that is not the way to know conviction of sin. The essential point is, that the way to realize you sin is not to compare yourself with other people; it is to come face to

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face with the law of God. And, what is God's law? You shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not lie, and so on.

A young person may say, 'I've never done that, so I'm not a sinner.' But, that is not the law of God in its entirety. You already know what the law of God is. As a reminder, here it is:

Mark 12:30-31 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

It is not just about drunks and others like them. It is not just about all the people that you read about on the Internet or watch in the news.

Here is the test for you and me: Do you love God with all your being? If not, you are a sinner. That is the test. It is impossible for a human being to love God with all his being without a full measure of the Holy Spirit. So we try to do the best that we can, and we try to move on toward perfection.

Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

God made us; and He made us for Himself. He made human beings for His own glory and He intended us to live entirely for Him. We are meant to know God.

So the question is: Do you know God? I am not asking if you believe in God, or if you believe certain things about Him. Even Satan and his demons believe, and know that God exists. It takes faith that leads to repentance. It takes faith with works to know God, and to understand Him. You are very familiar with this section in James, saying that 'Faith without works is dead.'

James 2:14-20 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith

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by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Remember, Romans 14:23 says, "whatever is not of faith is sin." If you are not fully satisfied in your mind that something is permitted by God's law; or, if you do not do something with a clear conscience, it is sin. In other words, whatever is not done with a full conviction that it is right, it is sin. Whatever is done when you doubt whether it is right, it is sin. We should not do anything doubting its lawfulness and appropriateness.

We have to have a strong conviction (not just a preference) that what we do is right; and that if we do not have this conviction, it is sin. The rule is of universal application. In all cases, if a person does something that he does not "believe" to be right, it is a sin, and his conscience will condemn him for it. Now there are varying degrees of sin, as I have mentioned in previous sermons.

It is important to realize that the converse of this is not always true, that if a man believes a thing to be right, that therefore it is not sin. But it may very well be sin. A vivid example of this is that the persecutors of the early church were conscientious; and the murderers of Christ did it ignorantly; and yet were judged as guilty of enormous crimes.

The test is a positive one:

Is God the center of your life, the source of your greatest joy? He is meant to be! Have you really accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? He meant for you to!

We are meant to know Them—intimately in sincerity and truth—for eternity.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

They are the center of our world.

He made us in such a way that we might dwell in spiritual union with Him, and enjoy Him and walk with Him. You and I are meant to be like that, and if we are not like that, it is sin. That is the essence of sin—when we 'fall short of the glory of God.'

We have no right not to be like that. That is sin of the worse kind. The essence of sin, in other words, is that we do not live entirely to the glory of God.

Of course, by committing particular sins, we aggravate and magnify our guilt before God, but you can be innocent of all gross sins and yet be guilty of this terrible thing, of being satisfied with your life, of having pride in your achievements, and of looking down on others, and feeling that you are better than them and have nothing to overcome.

One of the reasons that I am giving this sermon is to wake up the youth in the church, and the young adults, and those of us who have grown up in the church that we do not fall into this pit that Satan wants us to go into. And we are thinking that we are fine, that we are okay, and that we have very little to overcome. Everyone who has grown up in the church, and those who have not, have to overcome sin.

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisee had never seen the need of forgiveness, and there is no more terrible sin than that. I know of nothing worse than the person who says: 'You know, I have never really felt that I am a sinner. That is the epitome of sin, because it means that you have never realized the truth about God and Jesus Christ, and the truth about yourself.'

Read the argument of the apostle Paul and you will find that his logic is not only inevitable, but also unanswerable.

Romans 3:10, 19 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

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It is impossible to have joy in Christ, if you never realize your guiltiness before God.

Mark 2:17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

So if you are somebody like myself, who has grown up in the church, and you reach the point where you want to be baptized, you must remember that God has called those who are sinners, even those who have grown up in the church have sinned.

That is the first thing—conviction of sin. If you do not realize that you are not good enough before God, and that you are unacceptable without the righteousness of Christ attributed to you, you will never find joy, and you will never get rid of spiritual anxiety until you are right about that. Conviction of sin is an essential preliminary in the conversion process of salvation.

This brings me to the second principle. The second thing that the true Christian realizes is God's way of salvation in Christ. This is the good news the apostle Paul is preaching to the Romans.

Romans 3:21-23 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

This righteousness that is of God is in Jesus Christ, and it is His righteousness. So, the question remains, 'What is your view of Christ?' 'Why did He come into the world?' 'What has God done in Christ for you?' Is He merely a teacher, an example, or what? There is utter futility in such a belief. In contrast, righteousness of God in Jesus Christ is something wonderfully positive. Salvation is in Christ.

The righteousness of God in Jesus Christ means that God has sent Him into the world in order that He might honor the law, and so people might be forgiven. He is the One who gave perfect obedience to God. He is the One, who became God in the flesh and, as a human being rendered perfect allegiance, perfect obedience. He kept God's law completely and absolutely without a failure. But not only that, Paul adds other things in his statement.

Romans 3:24-26 Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Without faith in Jesus we cannot be justified.

Before a person can be reconciled to God, before he can know God, this sin of his must be removed. God said that He will punish sin, and that the punishment of sin is death. This has to be dealt with. So, what has to happen? Well everyone knows that.

Paul says that God has 'set forth [Jesus] as a propitiation.' That is the means that God uses. His being the propitiation for our sins means that God has made Him the bearer for our sins. They have been placed on Him and God has dealt with them and punished them there, and therefore because He has punished our sins in Christ, He can justly forgive us. That should be extremely humbling and make us feel like nothing in one sense, having a future

God, because He is righteous and holy and eternal, could not forgive the sin of man without punishing it. He is just, therefore, and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Since sin has been dealt with, God, who is just and righteous, can forgive it.

It works like this. God accepts this righteousness of Christ, this perfect righteousness face to face with the law that He honored in every respect. He has kept it and given obedience to it; He has received its penalty. So the law is fully satisfied.

Matthew 5:20 For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

We not only have Christ's righteousness imputed upon us so that we can be justified, but we also have our work to do, and it must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. There is only one way for our personal righteousness to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. That is for the righteousness of Christ to be attributed to us. The Pharisees were righteous in that they carefully kept the letter of the law.

Nevertheless, they fell short of fulfilling the spirit of the law and they neglected the weightier matters. The Pharisees were "good" people according to the letter of the law; but they were still not good enough to be accepted by God. And also, without the Holy Spirit, they were not capable of keeping the law correctly and completely.

It is by Christ dwelling in us, that we are empowered to keep the spirit of the law, in addition to the letter of the law. The keeping of God's law helps define good works. Good works are an essential part of 'right living.' It is unchangeably true that without righteousness no man will see the Lord. "Neither adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards" will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Works are "good" when three principles are met:

- (1) When they spring from the principle of love to God. The moral character of an act is determined by the moral principle that prompts it. Faith and love in the heart are the essential elements of all true obedience. For this reason, good works only spring from a faithful heart, and can only be produced by one reconciled to God.
- (2) When good works have the glory of God as their object; and
- (3) When they have the revealed will of God as their only rule.

Good works are an expression of gratitude and love in the heart. Even the good works of the most sincere Christian are all imperfect; nevertheless, they are accepted through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and so are rewarded; they have no merit intrinsically, but are rewarded wholly of grace. Good works take the form of works of love towards God and others, since 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' This in no way suggests that no more is required of us than a right motive.

Rather, the point is that the specific acts that the commandments stipulate should be understood as expressions of love, so that without a loving heart the commandments cannot be fulfilled.

It is not that a right spirit excuses lapses from the letter of the law, but that goodness in the letter is not a fulfilling of the law where an attitude of love is lacking. You can keep the letter of the law as perfect as any man on earth, but if love is lacking then all it becomes is an iron-fisted rule of law without mercy.

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Christ Himself fulfills the law, in that He kept both the letter and the spirit of the law. In fact, His example shows us how to keep the spirit, as well as the letter of the law. The spirit of the law is the law's intent, having the right balance of mercy and justice.

The apostle Paul used a comparison between the righteous person and the good person. At first glance it looks like Paul sets the good person above the righteous person. But he is speaking with regard to popularity, rather than concerning theology.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The world often thinks of righteousness as a merely negative correctness, but God's written Word identifies righteousness with goodness, and goodness with righteousness, by insisting that what the law requires is, in reality, love.

We see a lot of laws being carried out and enforced in our nation, and in the world. No matter what nation that you travel to, the laws are enforced very heavily. New laws are constantly being made, and so when you go to the airport you see the new laws when you are stopped every few feet to have all your bags, or your person checked, and so on. But there is no love at all in any of those laws, and the way that they are carried out can sometimes be very harsh. And even the intention of those laws being passed is not from love, but from power and control. So we see that the laws of the land can never have a good spirit about them, because they lack that love to carry them out.

Good works then, are works of love, and the nature of love is to give, beginning with our own family, and our fellow spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ—without neglecting works of love for all human beings. Love for others is expressed by doing 'good' to and for them, laying out our own resources to relieve their need, and seeking their welfare in every possible way.

'Kind' and 'generous' are among the ordinary secular meanings of 'good,' as a description of human beings that is. Biblically, the love of God and Christ is the model and standard for the kindness and generosity required of us.

When we seek to fulfill the law in this way we are left with a good conscience, not because we think that we are sinlessly perfect, but because we know that our

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relationship with God is right, being founded on true faith and repentance.

We will genuinely appear to others as 'good,' as Barnabas did in Acts 11:24, where it is recorded that, "... he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." The insinuation there is it was because of Barnabas' good image and righteous life.

It is interesting that the statistics from the Worldwide Church of God, and even today in the dispersed churches of God around the world, that most people come into the church through contact with someone else, or through a family member. It is because of the example that their righteous living provides, giving them that true witness of God's way of life.

We are in a right standing with God when we reflect His goodness and love.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Gentiles, who were not God's chosen people and did not seek right standing with God, can now enjoy that right standing by faith. Israel pursued right standing with God through the law, but failed to achieve it.

Romans 9:30-32 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 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. As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Why did Israel fail to achieve right standing with God through the law? They did not pursue obedience to the law in humble trust and in genuine faith, but tried to make it a means of establishing their own righteousness. Such a use of the law led them to stumble over the stone (which was Christ confronting them), because those attempting to establish their own righteousness see no need to trust God and Christ. The stumbling over Christ was prophesied in Isaiah 28:16.

The Israelites have never been able to fulfill the law of righteousness because they sought to be good enough by keeping the letter of the law without faith; and without faith they ignored and failed to keep the spirit of the law, because they did not really believe and trust God. Even though they had an enthusiasm for God, they neglected 'the weightier spiritual matters of the law.'

The Israelites (specifically the Jews) tried to establish their own Pharisaical righteousness while refusing to submit to God's standard of righteousness. We know that the Talmud, their book of law, is volumes and volumes. What they have written about the Old Testament books of Moses fill libraries and libraries, in trying to set down specifics of how to keep the law of Moses, but yet they are no more righteous now that they were.

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end [or, fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The Jews' zeal and sincerity does not lead them to salvation. The broader principle is that many sincere, "religious" people are wrong in their beliefs. Many Jews did not believe in Christ, because they failed to submit to God's righteousness, and instead attempted to be righteous before God on the basis of their own works.

God's way of salvation is that God gives to us the righteousness of Christ. If we have seen our need and go to God and confess it, God will impute to us His own Son's righteousness. He imputes Christ's righteousness to us, who believe and trust in Him, and regards us as righteous, and declares and pronounces us to be righteous in Him. That is the way of salvation through justification.

So it comes to this. That we see, we believe, and we respond, and we look to nothing and to no one, except to God the Father and our Savior Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul asks:

Romans 3:27-31 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Paul had in mind the foolish Jews who were boasting about the fact that they had been

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circumcised. And, of course, circumcision also means converted today and uncircumcised simply means unconverted, spiritually speaking. Also, that the Jews had the oracles of God, and that they were God's people. Some people in the church today have done the exactly same thing. They think that they are alright, because they think their parents are alright.

That boasting had to stop, because they were taking credit for things they had not achieved themselves. The same can be possible for those who have grown up in the church. It was a gift that they abused and took for granted. This has been the attitude of many second and third generation Christians.

Just because they had this tradition, and they were the children of their forefathers, they had nothing to brag about. The Jew is not superior to the Gentile, because "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Therefore, it is imperative that we look to God and Christ, and not to ourselves. Thankfully, God puts the righteousness of Christ upon us, but we must still walk in a worthy way.

Colossians 1:9-14 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 10, tells us that our responsibility is to walk worthy of God and His Son. It says there, 'fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.' Verse 12, tells us that, ultimately, it is God the Father "who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance." We have not done it, we have not earned it. It is God the Father who qualifies us.

We betray ourselves by what we say. We are held accountable for the words we speak. What are your words saying if you say, 'I don't think that I'm good enough?'

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If those are your words, then you are still thinking in terms of yourself; your idea is still that you have to make yourself good enough to partake of the Passover, good enough to be accepted by God.

Yes, faith and obedience and love are important things to have in order to partake of the Passover in a worthy manner, but you and I will *never* be good enough by our *own* efforts. We can never earn the right to partake of the bread and wine, the body and the blood of Christ at Passover.

The emphasis of this pre-Passover time is to dwell on what Christ has done for us, not whether we are good enough. It ultimately gets down to this question: Is the spiritual quality of our relationship with God and His Son such that we are motivated to live righteous lives to glorify God, rather than ourselves?