

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

by Guy N. Woods (1908-1993)

What is “the righteousness of God” (*dikaïosunen Theou*)? Thayer, in an unusually fine statement, says that *righteousness*, “denotes the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner’s possession through that faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ.” By *faith*, this lexicographer means “a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—the divinely appointed author of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God, *conjoined with obedience to Christ.*” The same authority says that righteousness (*dikaïosune*) in “the broad sense” is the state of one “who is such as he ought to be,...the condition acceptable to God.” It is, then, simply and solely a state of justification established on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ and man’s acceptance thereof through the conditions required.

This lexical definition is completely and fully confirmed by affirmations of inspired writers. “Then Peter opened his mouth and said, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*” (Acts 10:34-35). Righteousness is thus that state or condition wherein one is in a *right* relationship with God. Our English word “righteousness” derives from the word “right,” which, in turn, literally suggests that which is straight (as, for example, a straight line), and so designates a relationship with God which he approves. A “righteous man” is, therefore, one who is *straight*, lined up properly with God! (Psalm 119:172; 1 John 2:29).

A simple and brief definition of righteousness is, therefore, *right-doing*; to be righteous one must do right. “*He that doeth righteousness in righteous, even as he is righteous*” (1 John 3:7). Of a certain type of character it is affirmed that he is righteous. Who is he? He that *doeth*

righteousness. No other is. He who does righteousness is righteous; but he who is righteous is one who does right; therefore, he who does right possesses righteousness. Conversely, an unrighteous person is a perverse one; a perverse one is an individual in a twisted (as opposed to a straight) relationship with God. It is hence clear that righteousness is that state or condition wherein one is approved of God; but God approves of those only who do right (keep his commandments); therefore, to possess the approval of God and the righteousness which he requires one must do right, by keeping his commandments.

Here is unmistakable evidence of the falsity of the denominational doctrine of *transferred* righteousness. It is by some alleged that in the process of conversion Christ transfers to the sinner the righteousness which he possesses, and thenceforth the sinner is clothed in the righteousness which Christ himself exhibits! One can only sadly wonder what the future holds for us as more and more writers among us, following the lead of denominational theologians, adopt the view of an imputation of righteousness on this basis, an idea repugnant to both reason and Scripture. It is absurd to assume that one person is good *because* another is. True, through the merits of Christ’s blood shed in our behalf, our guilt is cancelled and through obedience to his will we are privileged to go free; but this is far from declaring that we thereupon become positively good in the absence of good works. There is a vast difference between (a) *not* imputing guilt (this, the Lord does for us) and (b) in conferring merit (this, the Lord does *not*) in the process of salvation. The primary import of the word translated righteousness indicates a change in position and in relationship to God, and not, *on that basis alone*, a life of personal purity. A

pardoned criminal is no longer regarded as guilty of the crimes which led to his arrest and conviction, but he is thence by no means a valuable citizen with a long record of civic goodness back of him simply because he has been pardoned. Righteousness is right-doing. *To be righteous, one must do right.*

But, was not Abraham’s faith reckoned (imputed, counted) to him for righteousness? Yes. In the absence of further duties at the moment God accepted Abraham’s faith as an *act* of righteousness itself. Thus faith itself became *the act of obedience*, on the basis of which God accepted Abraham as in *I* right relationship with him (James 2:20-22). Did not David speak of “*the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works?*” (Romans 4:6.) The works contemplated here (as the context clearly shows) were the works of the law. The man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness is the one whose “*iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered*” (Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:8). Such a one actively complies with God’s plan for his forgiveness, and is thus declared righteous (justified). *We must distinguish between a righteousness imputed to (credited to) man because he has a right relationship with God through obedience to his will, and a righteousness which Christ (through his own submission to the will of the Father) is alleged to transfer to the sinner. The former the New Testament teaches; the latter is Calvinism.*

But was not Christ made “righteousness” for us? (1 Corinthians 1:30). The Lord became *the means* of righteousness for us; i.e., it is through him that we are privileged to receive “the gift of righteousness” (Romans 5:17); but this is accomplished through compliance with his will, and in obedience to his commandments, and not through some mysterious bestowal of merit. We should ever remember that justification does not eliminate the fact of sin; it simply releases the sinner from the guilt thereof. The history of the act must forevermore remain. Paul, through mindful of the great grace which he had

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P.O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

Lee Moses . . . . .EDITOR  
Phone . . . . .(870) 625-3217  
E-Mail . . . . .cocfcgn@centurytel.net  
Website . . . . .www.fultoncountygospelnews.org  
Brian Dixon . . . . .Webmaster  
E-Mail . . . . .sales@halopages.net

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experienced, was never without the consciousness of the fact that he had persecuted the church of God and wasted it. Pardoned, saved, justified, acquitted, no longer under guilt, it now remained for him, through faithful adherence to the Lord's will to exhibit personal righteousness, "right standing" with God. And so with us all. The marvelous blessing of salvation is available through Christ. He is the means of righteousness, through him we receive the gift of righteousness, and in him we partake of God's righteousness; i.e., the righteousness which God makes available to us, through unswerving allegiance to his will. The law of Moses was powerless to provide justification. It provided a perfect standard to which man, in sin, could never measure. A measuring cup will indicate the amount of the substance it contains, but it will not increase it; a tapeline will reveal the length of a string, but it cannot make it longer. It was, therefore, necessary that justification "apart from the law" be provided for man. This, we rejoice to say, was accomplished in Christ.

From *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1982), pp. 76-79.

# Characteristics of a Congregation Conducive to Conversion

by Lee Moses

It is a scene that always brings joy to every Christian blessed to be present—congratulations are extended, hugs are exchanged, and joyful tears are shed. An honest soul has just confessed Christ and put on Christ in baptism. Indeed, no time is more joyous for a Christian than when he receives a new brother or sister in Christ. It is a joyful time in heaven as well, as "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10; compare with 1 Timothy 2:4; Luke 19:10).

We as members of the church of Christ might wonder, "Why is this not happening more often? Why are we not saving more people?" Part of the answer certainly lies in the condition of the soil in which we are trying to sow. Jesus let us know that we would have to deal with contrary soil (Luke 8:4-15), and the present culture is particularly contrary to receiving the word of truth. However, we should not be too eager to defer blame when at least part of the answer may lie within ourselves (Haggai 1:5; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Revelation 3:2). Consider yourself and the congregation with which you worship and serve, and ask, "Are we a congregation conducive to conversion?" There are at least four characteristics of a congregation conducive to conversion.

## Shine as Christian Lights

Children are taught to "let their little lights shine" from a young age, and it is a truth that needs to be hammered into older Christians as well. It was in an evangelistic context that Jesus said,

*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).*

Each congregation within the body of Christ has the responsibility to be a light to its local community and to the world. The Greek word for "light" denotes "truth and its knowledge, together with the spiritual purity congruous with it...especially the saving truth embodied in Christ and by His love and effort imparted to mankind."<sup>1</sup>

How one individual acts can affect how many others perceive the church bought with the blood of Jesus Christ. I recall hearing the account of what happened to a foreign evangelist in Italy as he was leaving the country. While going through customs, the customs man asked him what he was doing in Italy. He responded, "I am a Christian; a Gospel preacher." The man told him, "Go ahead and close up your bags—I know you are honest." It turned out that the customs man knew this because he had a next-door neighbor (native Italian) who was a Christian, and he knew the Christian neighbor lived right and never did anything dishonest. There are some members of the church that foreign evangelist would have been thankful that the customs man did not have living next door.

Ephesians 5:8-14 discusses the "light" that people become when they become Christians. This light stands in contrast with the darkness of immorality and ungodliness (verses 8, 3-4, 11-12). If our lives perfectly conform to the immorality and ungodliness surrounding us, how can we serve as a contrast? If we look just like the darkness, how can we shine as lights? The church needs to stand up against sin, and it need to expose sin (verse 13). If we fail to do this, we fail to demonstrate the attributes of light, and we will not be conducive to true conversion. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

## Congregational Commitment to Scriptural Practices and Speaking

When visiting the assemblies of the Lord's church, non-Christians must be able to find a "thus saith the Lord" for everything practiced and said. Some churches are very adamant in doing some things a specific way, yet are very loose regarding others. They may be very adamant about teaching and practicing baptism for the

remission of sins, yet accept someone's denominational baptism as sufficient for membership. They may be very adamant about teaching and practicing singing in worship without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments, yet have a "praise team" including women leading the worship. In effect, they say, "**Sometimes** we need Scriptural authority; but other times, we will do whatever we please." Such is inconsistent and hypocritical, and intelligent non-Christians will be able to see this. It is when we commit to doing things only and always according to Scripture that we may be "*without rebuke*" (Philippians 2:14-16). It is when we commit to speaking only and always where the Bible speaks that we may have "*[s]ound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*" (Titus 2:8).

Each church must have a congregational commitment in its use of terminology. Churches will preach against the sin of denominationalism; yet members will refer to the church of Christ as a denomination. They may do this fairly directly, by mentioning "**other** denominations," implying that the Lord's church is likewise within the class of denominations. Or they may do it more subtly, perhaps by using "church of Christ" as an adjective, much like denominations use their manmade designations as an adjective. Members will refer to a "church of Christ preacher" the same way denominationalists refer to "Baptist preachers" or "Methodist preachers." Scripture does not refer to preachers by such terminology, and it does not use the name of the bride of Christ in such an adjectival sense. Some go further, referring to what we believe as "church of Christ" doctrine. or, even worse, "church of Christ" tradition. What would compel any non-Christian to believe and obey such doctrine, if it originated with the church? The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:11), not vice versa. Our speech and practices should make this clear.

Each church should have a congregational commitment to being Scripturally loving (1 John 2:9-11; 4:20; 3:17; Galatians 6:10). This includes withdrawing from unfaithful children of God (2 Corinthians 2:8). Some snidely refer to this as "kicking people out of the church," or "disfellowshipping" them. In actuality, every congregation is commanded to withdraw themselves from those who have already "disfellowshipped" themselves from God

(1 John 1:7, 3; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). There are purposes for such church discipline. One purpose is to keep the sin from infecting the entire congregation (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). But the ultimate goal is to save the soul of the person withdrawn from (verses 4-5). At any rate, when those who walk disorderly are withdrawn from, they are hindered from representing the church of our Lord in a bad light.

Each church should have a congregational commitment to maintaining the distinct nature of the Lord's church set forth in Scripture (2 Corinthians 6:16-17; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Peter 2:9). Can those who visit see the distinction, or do they view the church of Christ as simply another option among the numerous religious bodies in town?

Paul wrote of the potential non-Christian visitor to an assembly, who, upon seeing the evidence in that church, "*so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth*" (1 Corinthians 14:25). Among other factors, it is when they can observe a congregational commitment to Scriptural practices and speaking that honest-hearted non-Christians will similarly respond.

### Trust in the Gospel to Effect Conversion

While we want to assess our efforts toward conversion and make changes as needed, we need to be careful that we give ourselves neither too much credit nor too much blame for the number of conversions that occur. We are merely instruments through which others can know the truth—the Gospel of Christ is the seed and source of growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-7; compare with Isaiah 55:10-11; Acts 20:32). While Christians are to shine as lights, our light is merely that of reflectors, reflecting the light of God and of His truth.<sup>2</sup> Some of our "brethren" (?) apparently do not believe that the Gospel effects conversions. I question whether they can rightly be called brethren, because if they were not converted by the Gospel, they are most certainly **not** brethren (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

We must understand that some are going to be offended by the true Gospel. Many were offended when Jesus taught (John 6:60-61), and "*[f]rom that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*" (verse 66). However, Jesus could not water down the Gospel to procure more followers. He simply turned to His apostles and asked, "*Will ye also go away?*" (verse 67). His apostles were honest-hearted enough to acknowledge that He alone

provided "*the words of eternal life*" (verse 68). If we preach the Gospel in all its hard-hitting truth, many are going to turn away. However, there will still be the honest-hearted souls who will acknowledge that it is the sole source of salvation—those who do will be truly converted, as opposed to those whose presence is retained by watering down the message.

We must understand that some are not going to find the simple Gospel as appealing as what some denominations may offer. They may have carnivals, entertaining worship, and large youth groups. They may have the socially elite of the community among their number (compare with 1 Corinthians 1:26). Do we try to compete with the denominations in their efforts in "pew-filling," or do we simply go about doing the work of the Lord, letting the word do what it is supposed to do? "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God*" (verse 18). Are we going to try to beat men and women over the head with a social club, or to prick their hearts with the sword of the Spirit? Our responsibility is not to have as large a congregation as possible; our responsibility is not even to bring souls to Christ. Our responsibility is to preach the Gospel (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11). If the congregation with which you serve has enough faith to do this, it will likely be a congregation conducive to conversion.

### Evangelistic Enthusiasm

Consider the period of Acts. Consider the nineteenth-century restoration under the preaching of men such as Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott. Consider the period of the 1950's and '60's, in which the churches of Christ comprised the fastest-growing religious group in the United States according to the U.S. Census. These are all periods in which the Lord's church grew by leaps and bounds, as many souls were added to Lord. And a common thread found among the Lord's people at this time was evangelistic enthusiasm. They "*went every where preaching the word*" (Acts 8:4). They felt the same compulsion as the apostle Paul: "*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*" (1 Corinthians 9:16). And such enthusiasm is likely to realize similar results: "*And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women*" (Acts 5:14, et al.).

Each member of the church needs to

acknowledge his or her evangelistic responsibility. Ask friends and neighbors to study the Bible (Acts 5:42; 20:20). There are many materials available to help members do this task, and most churches could afford to make these materials available to members, and regularly let the members **know** they are available.

Each member should regularly invite friends and neighbors to come to worship. The apostle Andrew is repeatedly depicted as bringing someone to Christ (John 1:40-42; 6:8-9; 12:20-22). The Samaritan woman at the well invited those of her community to hear Jesus (John 4:28-30). Although several believed upon hearing what she had to say (verse 40), several more were convinced upon hearing Jesus themselves (verses 41-42). Regardless of who convinced them, all could be thankful for the woman who invited them.

There can be a tendency for the Lord's church to acquire "turtle complex," in which we try to avoid the world. Jesus prayed for His apostles, and implicitly for those who would believe their word, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world" (John 17:15; compare with 1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Isolation is deadly. Isolation is deadly to the world because they may not otherwise receive an opportunity to be saved. And isolation is deadly to ourselves because it will cause us to become selfish in our own concerns, dry up on the vine, and eventually kill ourselves (compare with Revelation 3:1-2, 14-19). The church should be driven to preach the Gospel to the world.

**Conclusion**

Every faithful Christian wants to see the congregation with which he serves actively involved in bringing souls to Christ. Sadly, in many congregations this simply is not the case. Perhaps the soil with which we are working may be inferior to the soil with which the saints had to work in the first century. However, it is every bit as likely that we are falling far short of the characteristics conducive to conversion exemplified by periods of abundant conversions. Let us each do our part to build congregations conducive to conversion.

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (n.p.: n.p., 1889), BibleWorks, v.8.

<sup>2</sup> Foy E. Wallace, Jr. *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State* (Nashville: Foy E. Wallace Jr. Publications, 1967), p. 26.

**BACK ISSUES ON THE WEBSITE**

We would like to encourage you to visit our website at [www.fultoncounty-gospelnews.org](http://www.fultoncounty-gospelnews.org), as several years of back issues have recently been added, with more to come. Special thanks goes to Michael Hatcher, evangelist with the Bellview church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, and to Denise Mowery, secretary at Bellview, for their efforts in making these available.

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**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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