

# Present Truth

2 Peter 1:12

April, 1998

Dear Readers,

*“Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”* (2 Corinthians 1:2-4) It is good to know that we have a God who comforts us in all our trouble. The following article is a slightly edited study taken from an excellent book published in 1890 entitled, *Christ and His Righteousness*, by E. J. Waggoner. I believe that you will enjoy the logical and biblical manner in which he presents *The Righteousness of God*.

## **The Righteousness of God**

*“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”* (Matthew 6:33)

The righteousness of God, says Jesus, is the one thing to be sought in this life. Food and clothing are minor matters in comparison with it. God will supply them, as a matter of course, so that anxious care and worry need not be expended on them; but to secure God's kingdom and His righteousness should be the only object of life.

In 1 Corinthians 1:30 we are told that Christ is made unto us righteousness as well as wisdom, and since Christ is the wisdom of God and in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, it is evident that the righteousness which He is made to us is the righteousness of God. Let us see what this righteousness is.

In Psalm 119:172 the Psalmist thus addresses the Lord, *“My tongue shall speak of Thy word, for all Thy commandments are righteousness.”* The commandments are righteousness, not simply in the abstract, but they are the righteousness of God. For proof read the following:

*“Lift up your eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath, for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be forever and my righteousness shall not be abolished. Hearken unto me, ye that know righteous-*

*ness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.”* (Isaiah 51:6, 7)

What do we learn from this? That they who know the righteousness of God are those in whose heart is His law, and therefore that the law of God is the righteousness of God.

This may be proved again, as follows: *“All unrighteousness is sin.”* (1 John 5:17) *“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law.”* (1 John 3:4) Sin is the transgression of the law, and it is also unrighteousness; therefore sin and unrighteousness are identical. But if unrighteousness is transgression of the law, righteousness must be obedience to the law. Or, to put the proposition into mathematical form:

Unrighteousness = sin. (1 John 5:17)

Transgression of the law = sin. (1 John 3:4)

Therefore, according to the axiom that two things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other, we have:

Unrighteousness = transgression of the law

...which is a negative equation. The same thing, stated in positive terms, would be:

Righteousness = obedience to the law.

Now what law is it obedience to which is righteousness and disobedience to which is sin? It is that law which says, *“Thou shalt not covet,”* for the apostle Paul tells us that this law convinced him of sin. (Romans 7:7) The law of ten commandments, then, is the measure of

the righteousness of God. Since it is the law of God and is righteousness, it must be the righteousness of God. There is, indeed, no other righteousness.

Since the law is the righteousness of God—a transcript of His character—it is easy to see that to fear God and keep His commandments is the whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Let no one think that his duty will be circumscribed if confined to the ten commandments, for they are “*exceeding broad.*” “*The law is spiritual,*” and comprehends a great deal more than can be discerned by an ordinary reader. “*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” (1 Corinthians 2:14) The exceeding breadth of the law of God can be realized only by those who have prayerfully meditated upon it. A few texts of Scripture will suffice to show us something of its breadth.

In the sermon on the mount Christ said, “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*” (Matthew 5:21, 22) And again, “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” (verses 27, 28)

This does not mean that the commandments, “*Thou shalt not kill,*” and “*Thou shalt not commit adultery*” are imperfect or that God now requires a greater degree of morality from Christians than He did from His people who were called Jews. He requires the same from all men in all ages. The Saviour simply explained these commandments and showed their spirituality. To the unspoken charge of the Pharisees that He was ignoring and undermining the moral law, He replied by saying that He came for the purpose of establishing the law and that it could not be abolished, and then He expounded the true meaning of the law in a way that convicted them of ignoring and disobeying it. He showed that even a look or a thought may be a violation of the law and that it is indeed a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In this Christ did not reveal a new truth but only brought to light and unfolded an old one. The law meant just as much when He proclaimed it from Sinai as when He expounded it on the mountain in Judea. When, in tones that shook the earth, He said, “*Thou shalt not kill,*” He meant, “*Thou shalt not cherish anger in the*

heart; thou shalt not indulge in envy, nor strife, nor anything which is in the remotest degree akin to murder.” All this and much more is contained in the words, “*Thou shalt not kill.*” And this was taught by the inspired words of the Old Testament, for Solomon showed that the law deals with things unseen as well as things seen, when he wrote:

“*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)

The argument is this: The judgment passes upon every secret thing; the law of God is the standard in the judgment—it determines the quality of every act, whether good or evil; therefore, the law of God forbids evil in thought as well as in deed. So the conclusion of the whole matter is that the commandments of God contain the whole duty of man.

Take the first commandment, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*” The apostle tells us of some “*whose god is their belly.*” (Philippians 3:19) But gluttony and intemperance are self-murder, and so we find that the first commandment runs through to the sixth. This is not all, however, for he also tells us that covetousness is idolatry. (Colossians 3:5) The tenth commandment cannot be violated without violating the first and second. In other words, the tenth commandment coincides with the first, and we find that the decalogue is a circle having a circumference as great as the universe and containing within it the moral duty of every creature. In short, it is the measure of the righteousness of God, who inhabits eternity.

This being the case, the correctness of the statement that “*the doers of the law shall be justified,*” is obvious. To justify means to make righteous or to show one to be righteous. Now it is evident that perfect obedience to a perfectly righteous law would constitute one a righteous person. It was God’s design that such obedience should be rendered to the law by all His creatures, and in this way the law was ordained unto life. (Romans 7:10)

But for one to be judged “*a doer of the law*” it would be necessary that he had kept the law in its fullest measure every moment of his life. If he had come short of this, he could not be said to have done the law. He could not be a doer of the law if he had done it only in part. It is a sad fact, therefore, that there are in all the human race no doers of the law, for both Jews and Gentiles are “*all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*” (Romans

3:9-12) The law speaks to all who are within its sphere, and in all the world there is not one who can open his mouth to clear himself from the charge of sin which it brings against him. Every mouth is stopped and all the world stands guilty before God (verse 19), *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* (verse 23)

Therefore, although *“the doers of the law shall be justified,”* it is just as evident that *“by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”* (verse 20) The law, being *“holy, and just, and good,”* cannot justify a sinner. In other words, a just law cannot declare that the one who violates it is innocent. A law that would justify a wicked man would be a wicked law. The law should not be reviled because it cannot justify sinners. On the contrary, it should be extolled on that account. The fact that the law will not declare sinners to be righteous—that it will not say that men have kept it when they have violated it—is in itself sufficient evidence that it is good. Men applaud an incorruptible earthly judge, one who cannot be bribed and who will not declare a guilty man innocent. Surely, they ought to magnify the law of God, which will not bear false witness. It is the perfection of righteousness and therefore it is forced to declare the sad fact that not one of Adam’s race has fulfilled its requirements.

Moreover, the fact that to do the law is simply man’s duty shows that when he has come short in a single particular he can never make it up. The requirements of each precept of the law are so broad—the whole law is so spiritual—that an angel could render no more than simple obedience. Yea, more, the law is the righteousness of God—a transcript of His character—and since His character cannot be different from what it is, it follows that even God Himself cannot be better than the measure of goodness demanded by His law. He cannot be better than He is and the law declares what He is. What hope, then, that one who has failed, in even one precept, can add enough extra goodness to make up the full measure? He who attempts to do that sets before himself the impossible task of being better than God requires, yea, even better than God Himself.

But it is not simply in one particular that men have failed. They have come short in every particular. *“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”* Not only so, but it is impossible for fallen man, with his weakened power, to do even a single act that is up to the perfect standard. This proposition needs no further proof than a restatement of the fact that the law is the measure of God’s righteousness. Surely

there are none so presumptuous as to claim that any act of their lives has been or could be as good as if done by the Lord Himself. Everyone must say with the Psalmist, *“My goodness extendeth not to Thee.”* (Psalm 16:2)

This fact is contained in direct statements of Scripture. Christ, who *“needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man”* (John 2:25), said, *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; all these evil things come from within and defile the man.”* (Mark 7:21-23) In other words, it is easier to do wrong than it is to do right, and the things which a person naturally does are evil. Evil dwells within, and is a part of the being. Therefore, the apostle says, *“The carnal [fleshly, natural] mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”* (Romans 8:7, 8) And again, *“The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”* (Galatians 5:17) Since evil is a part of man’s very nature, being inherited by each individual from a long line of sinful ancestors, it is very evident that whatever righteousness springs from him must be only like *“filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6), compared with the spotless robe of the righteousness of God.

The impossibility of good deeds proceeding from a sinful heart is thus forcibly illustrated by the Saviour, *“For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his*

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*heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.”* (Luke 6:44, 45) That is to say, a man cannot do good until he first becomes good. Therefore, deeds done by a sinful person have no effect whatever to make him righteous, but, on the contrary, coming from an evil heart, they are evil and so add to the sum of his sinfulness. Only evil can come from an evil heart, and multiplied evil can-

not make one good deed; therefore, it is useless for an evil person to think to become righteous by his own efforts. He must first be made righteous before he can do the good that is required of him and which he wants to do.

The case, then, stands thus: 1) The law of God is perfect righteousness, and perfect conformity to it is demanded of everyone who shall enter the kingdom of

heaven. 2) But the law has not a particle of righteousness to bestow upon any man, for all are sinners and are unable to comply with its requirements. No matter how diligently nor how zealously a man works, nothing that he can do will meet the full measure of the law's demands. It is too high for him to attain to; he cannot obtain righteousness by the law. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified [made righteous] in His sight." What a deplorable condition! We must have the righteousness of the law or we cannot enter heaven, and yet the law has no righteousness for one of us. It will not yield to our most persistent and energetic efforts the smallest portion of that holiness without which no man can see the Lord.

Who, then, can be saved? Can there, then, be such a thing as a righteous person? Yes, for the Bible often speaks of them. It speaks of Lot as "that righteous man." It says, "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings" (Isaiah 3:10), thus indicating that there will be righteous persons to receive the reward, and it plainly declares that there will be a righteous nation at the last, saying, "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." (Isaiah 26:1, 2) David says, "Thy law is the truth." (Psalm 119:142) It is not only truth, but it is the sum of all truth; consequently, the nation that keeps the truth will be a nation that keeps the law of God. Such will be doers of His will, and they shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

### **The Lord Our Righteousness**

The question, then, is, How may the righteousness that is necessary in order that one may enter that city, be obtained? To answer this question is the great work of the gospel. Let us first have an object lesson on justification or the imparting of righteousness. The fact may help us to a better understanding of the theory. The example is given in Luke 18:9-14 in these words:

*"And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon 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 that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*

This was given to show how we may not, and how we may, attain to righteousness. The Pharisees are not extinct; there are many in these days who expect to gain righteousness by their own good deeds. They trust in themselves that they are righteous. They do not always so openly boast of their goodness, but they show in other ways that they are trusting to their own righteousness. Perhaps the spirit of the Pharisee—the spirit which would recount to God one's own good deeds as a reason for favor—is found as frequently as anywhere else among those professed Christians who feel the most bowed down on account of their sins. They know that they have sinned, and they feel condemned. They mourn over their sinful state and deplore their weakness. Their testimonies never rise above this level. Often they refrain for very shame from speaking in the social meeting, and often they do not dare approach God in prayer. After having sinned to a greater degree than usual, they refrain

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from prayer for some time, until the vivid sense of their failure has passed away or until they imagine that they have made up for it by special good behavior. Of what is this a manifestation? Of that Pharisaic spirit that would flaunt its own righteousness in the face of God; that will not come before Him unless it can lean on the false prop of its own fancied goodness. They want to be able to say to the Lord, "See how good I have been for the past few

days; you surely will accept me now."

But what is the result? The man who trusted in his own righteousness had none, while the man who prayed, in heart-felt contrition, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," went down to his house a righteous man. Christ says that he went justified; that is, made righteous.

Notice that the publican did something more than bewail his sinfulness; he asked for mercy. What is mercy? It is unmerited favor. It is the disposition to treat a man better than he deserves. Now the Word of Inspiration says of God, "as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him." (Psalm 103:11) That is, the measure by which God treats us better than we deserve when we humbly come to Him, is the distance between earth and the highest heaven. And in what respect does He treat us better than we deserve? In taking our sins away from us, for the next verse says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." With this agree the words of the beloved disciple, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

For a further statement of the mercy of God, and of how it is manifested, read Micah 7:18, 19, “*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast their sins into the depths of the sea.*” Let us now read the direct Scripture statement of how righteousness is bestowed.

The apostle Paul, having proved that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so that by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight, proceeds to say that we are “*justified [made righteous] freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.*” (Romans 3:24-26)

“Being made righteous freely.” How else could it be? Since the best efforts of a sinful man have not the least effect toward producing righteousness, it is evident that the only way it can come to him is as a gift. That righteousness is a gift is plainly stated by Paul in Romans 5:17: “*For if by one man’s offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ.*” It is because righteousness is a gift that eternal life, which is the reward of righteousness, is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ has been set forth by God as the One through whom forgiveness of sins is to be obtained; and this forgiveness consists simply in the declaration of His righteousness (which is the righteousness of God) for their remission. God, “*who is rich in mercy*” (Ephesians 2:4) and who delights in it, puts His own righteousness on the sinner who believes in Jesus, as a substitute for his sins. Surely, this is a profitable exchange for the sinner, and it is no loss to God, for He is infinite in holiness and the supply can never be diminished.

The scripture that we have just been considering (Romans 3:24-26) is but another statement of verses

21, 22, following the declaration that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be made righteous. The apostle adds, “*But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.*” God puts His righteousness upon the believer. He covers him with it, so that his sin no more appears. Then the forgiven one can exclaim with the prophet:

“*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*” (Isaiah 61:10)

But what about “*the righteousness of God without the law?*” How does that accord with the statement that the law is the righteousness of God, and that outside of

its requirements there is no righteousness? There is no contradiction here. The law is not ignored by this process. Note carefully: Who gave the law? Christ. How did He speak it? “*As one having authority,*” even as God. The law sprang from Him the same as from the Father, and is simply a declaration of the righteousness of His character. Therefore the righteousness which comes by the faith of Jesus Christ is the same righteousness that is epitomized in the law, and this is further proved by the fact that it is “*witnessed by the law.*”

Let the reader try to picture the scene. Here stands the law as the swift witness against the sinner. It cannot change, and it will not call a sinner a

righteous man. The convicted sinner tries again and again to obtain righteousness from the law, but it resists all his advances. It cannot be bribed by any amount of penance or professedly good deeds. But here stands Christ, “*full of grace*” as well as of truth, calling the sinner to Him. At last the sinner, weary of the vain struggle to get righteousness from the law, listens to the voice of Christ and flees to His outstretched arms. Hiding in Christ, he is covered with His righteousness, and now behold! he has obtained, through faith in Christ, that for which he has been vainly striving. He has the righteousness which the law requires, and it is the genuine article, because he obtained it from the Source of Righteousness, from the very place whence the law came. And the law witnesses to the genuineness of this righteousness. It says that so long as the man retains that,



**E. J. Waggoner: 1855 - 1916**

it will go into court and defend him against all accusers. It will witness to the fact that he is a righteous man. With the righteousness which is *“through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith”* (Philippians 3:9), Paul was sure that he would stand secure in the day of Christ.

There is in the transaction no ground for finding fault. God is just and at the same time the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. In Jesus dwells all the fullness of the Godhead. He is equal with the Father in every attribute of His character. Consequently the redemption that is in Him—the ability to buy back lost man—is infinite. Man’s rebellion is against the Son as much as against the Father, since both are one in character. Therefore, when Christ *“gave Himself for our sins,”* it was the King suffer-

ing for the rebellious subjects—the One injured passing by, overlooking, the offense of the offender. No skeptic will deny that any man has the right and privilege of pardoning any offense committed against himself; then why cavil when God exercises the same right? Surely if He wishes to pardon the injury done Himself, He has the right, and more because He vindicates the integrity of His law by submitting His own Son to the penalty which was due the sinner. *“But the innocent suffered for the guilty.”* True, but the innocent Sufferer *“gave himself”* voluntarily, in order that He might in justice to His government do what His love prompted, namely, pass by the injury done to Himself as the Ruler of the universe.

Now read God’s own statement of His own Name—a statement given in the face of one of the worst cases of contempt ever shown Him:

*“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.”* (Exodus 34:5-7)

This is God’s name. It is the character in which He reveals Himself to man, the light in which He wishes men to regard Him. But what of the declaration that He *“will by no means clear the guilty?”* That is perfectly in keeping with His longsuffering, abundant goodness and His passing by the transgression of His people. It is true that God will by no means clear the guilty. He could not do that and still be a just God. But He does something which is far better. He removes the guilt, so that the one

formerly guilty does not need to be cleared—he is justified and counted as though he never had sinned.

Let no one cavil over the expression, *“putting on righteousness,”* as though such a thing were hypocrisy. Some, with a singular lack of appreciation of the value of the gift of righteousness, have said that they did not

want righteousness that was *“put on,”* but that they wanted only that righteousness which comes from the life, thus depreciating the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe. We agree with their idea insofar as it is a protest against hypocrisy, a form of godliness without the power; but we would have the reader bear this thought in mind: It makes a vast deal of difference who puts the righteousness on. If we attempt to put it on ourselves, then we really

get on nothing but a filthy garment, no matter how beautiful it may look to us, but when Christ clothes us with it, it is not to be despised nor rejected. Mark the expression in Isaiah: *“He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.”* The righteousness with which Christ covers us is righteousness that meets the approval of God, and if God is satisfied with it, surely men ought not to try to find anything better.

But we will carry the figure a step further and that will relieve the matter of all difficulty. Zechariah 3:1-5 furnishes the solution. It reads thus:

*“And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the Angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a fair miter upon his head. So they set a fair miter upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the Angel of the Lord stood by.”*

Notice in the above account that the taking away of the filthy garments is the same as causing the iniquity to pass from the person. And so we find that when Christ covers us with the robe of His own righteousness, He does not furnish a cloak for sin but takes the sin away. And this shows that the forgiveness of sins is something more than a mere form, something more than a mere entry in the books of record in heaven, to the effect that the sin has been canceled. The forgiveness of sins is a reality; it is something tangible, something that vitally

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affects the individual. It actually clears him from guilt, and if he is cleared from guilt, is justified, made righteous, he has certainly undergone a radical change. He is, indeed, another person, for he obtained this righteousness for the remission of sins, in Christ. It was obtained only by putting on Christ. But *“if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) And so the full and free forgiveness of sins carries with it that wonderful and miraculous change known as the new birth, for a man cannot become a new creature except by a new birth. This is the same as having a new, or a clean, heart.

The new heart is a heart that loves righteousness and hates sin. It is a heart of willingness to be led into the paths of righteousness. It is such a heart as the Lord wished Israel to have when he said, *“O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!”* (Deuteronomy 5:29) In short, it is a heart free from the love of sin as well as from the guilt of sin. But what makes a man sincerely desire the forgiveness of his sins? It is simply his hatred of them and his desire for righteousness, which hatred and desire have been enkindled by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit strives with all men. It comes as a reprover. When its voice of reproof is regarded, then it at once assumes the office of comforter. The same submissive, yielding disposition that leads the person to accept the reproof of the Spirit, will also lead him to follow the teachings of the Spirit, and Paul says that *“as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* (Romans 8:14)

Again, what brings justification or the forgiveness of sins? It is faith, for Paul says, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Romans 5:1) The righteousness of God is given unto and put upon everyone that believeth. (Romans 3:22) But this same exercise of faith makes the person a child of God; for, says the apostle Paul again, *“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:26)

The fact that everyone whose sins are forgiven is at once a child of God is shown in Paul’s letter to Titus. He first brings to view the wicked condition in which we once were and then says:

*“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being*

*justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:4-7)

Note that it is by being justified by His grace that we are made heirs. We have already learned from Romans 3:24, 25 that this justification by His grace is through our faith in Christ, but Galatians 3:26 tells us that faith in Christ Jesus makes us children of God; therefore, we know that whoever has been justified by God’s grace—has been forgiven—is a child and an heir of God.

This shows that there is no ground for the idea that a person must go through a sort of probation and attain to a certain degree of holiness before God will accept him as His child. He receives us just as we are. It is not for our goodness that He loves us but because of our need. He receives us, not for the sake of anything that He sees in us but for His own sake and for what He knows that His Divine power can make of us. It is only when we realize the wonderful exaltation and holiness of God and the fact that He comes to us in our sinful and degraded condition to adopt us into His family that we can appreciate the force of the apostle’s exclamation, *“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”* (1 John 3:1) Everyone upon whom this honor has been bestowed will purify himself, even as He is pure.

God does not adopt us as His children because we are good but in order that He may make us good. Says Paul, *“God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loves us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us [made us alive] together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”* (Ephesians 2:4-7) And then he adds, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (verses 8-10) This passage shows that God loved us while we were yet dead in sins. He gives us His Spirit to make us alive in Christ, and the same Spirit marks our adoption into the Divine family, and He thus adopts us that, as new creatures in Christ, we may do the good works which God has ordained.

**God does not adopt us as His children because we are good but in order that He may make us good.**

*E. J. Waggoner*

**Editor’s Note:** This study was a slightly edited version of two chapters from the book entitled *Christ and His Righteousness* by E. J. Waggoner, published by Pacific Press Publishing Co., 1890.

# Thomas Jefferson on Religious Freedom

religion. I know but one code of morality for men whether acting singly or collectively.” (A quote from Thomas Jefferson, carved into the wall of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington DC.)

*Thomas Jefferson*

“Almighty God hath created the mind free. All attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens... are a departure from the plan of the holy Author of our religion. ... No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall feel free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of

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**Editor:** Lynnford Beachy, HC 64 Box 128-B, Welch, WV 24801, Phone: (304) 732-9204, E-mail: berean@smyrna.org.

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May God Bless You Richly!

*“To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.”  
(1 Corinthians 8:6)*

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13264 Jobs Road  
Newark, Ohio 43055

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