

A Marvelous Message: Christ our Righteousness

Dear Andrew,*

The topic of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ is a joyful and marvelous message in the Bible. Unfortunately, it isn't rightly understood by many Christians. Then the joy of salvation is also missing. I have personally experienced this. Although I had read about it in books, I still lacked the right perspective. And I wasn't the only person.

John Wesley's Problem

John Wesley, the son of a clergyman, also had big problems with this, even though he had read the Bible in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He went as a missionary to the Indians in America. On his return voyage from America to England, his ship ran into a severe storm. He was afraid for his life. However, there were other Christians on board, who were singing hymns and praising God in the middle of the storm. John Wesley thought, **what have they done, which I haven't?**

So, when he was in London he visited the church of these people. There he heard a lecture on righteousness by faith, which Martin Luther had written as an introduction to the book of Romans. It became clear to him that we are saved by God's grace, which we accept by faith.

Previously, John Wesley had toiled away at trying to earn God's grace by doing good deeds. Not until he heard this message in this church were his eyes opened to the fact that he was already saved because he trusted Jesus Christ as his redeemer. This overjoyed him. Later, he founded the Methodist Church.

What was his problem? John Wesley wanted to obey God in his own strength. He thought he had to earn eternal life. This approach is burdensome, strenuous and never gives you peace. It also doesn't bring us to the goal. This shows us: a person can be a great biblical scholar and still be completely wrong about basic biblical topics.

* Andrew according to the biblical Andrew in John 1:41-42.

Why do we need Christ's righteousness?

Sin is the opposite of "righteousness". We are all sinners – every single person without exception. Paul wrote in Romans 3:10: "... *there is none righteous, no, not one.*" (NKJV)

Since the first people, our ancestors, transgressed against God's law out of distrust, they were banned from paradise. This was the result of a sin. This shows us: There is no access to God's kingdom for a sinner, an unrighteous person, even with only one sin. If God would allow this, then sin with all its consequences would remain for eternity. Then God would have once and for all made evil immortal for eternity. God doesn't want that. And we naturally don't want that either. Because we are waiting "... *for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*" (2 Peter 3:13 NKJV). That's why God requires each person, who wants to enter God's kingdom, to keep His laws. Only those, who live in complete harmony with God's laws, can come near to Him. But unfortunately, it doesn't look good for us. God's Word says in Isaiah 64:6: "... *all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags ...*" (NKJV)

How can our problem be solved?

But there was one, who lived in complete obedience as a human. The only righteous one is Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:8-9 says about the Son: "... *Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.*"

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." (NKJV)

Jesus' scepter, His ruler's staff, is what we are missing: the complete righteousness.

This was already prophesied in the messianic promises about Christ: "... *Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*" (Jeremiah 23:6 NKJV; compare with 1 Corinthians 1:30; more about messianic prophecies in *Letters to Andrew 1 and 8*)

The Apostle Paul shows us the Solution

He wrote in 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 gospel) **the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'**" (NKJV)*

The gospel is the **power of God** to save those who believe. **What is the main point of the gospel, which saves us?** Answer: That we can become children of God. John shows us how we can become God's children.

John 1:12-13 RSV: "*But to **all who received him, who believed in his name**, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

Before this important statement, John shows us who Jesus is, who we are to receive into our lives.

Verse 1: God (*the Word was God*), verse 3: Creator (*all things were made through him*), verse 4: Giver of life (*in him was life*). When we understand who Jesus is, then we will realize that He can only come into our lives, when we surrender the lordship of our lives to Him.

Verses 12 and 13, which we just read, are the biblical passage which shows us most clearly how we can become children of God. We have to receive Jesus in our lives, trust Him and receive new life through Him. It is unbelievable: our God, our Creator, our Life Giver wants to connect His life with ours. He wants to live in and through us. Then His righteousness applies to me. It is clear to me that there is no better life than to live under His leadership. He is love, all-powerful and all-knowing. He wants my new life to be an abundant life here (John 10:10) and eternal life in glory (1 Peter 5:10).

John also shows us that there were people so foolish that they preferred to control their own lives. He said in John 1:11: *“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.”* (NKJV) Unfortunately, this problem is also in the church of the last days, because Jesus says in Revelation 3:20: *“Behold, I stand at the door [of the heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* (NKJV)

A new life follows accepting Jesus and thus step by step a new lifestyle. In a conversation with the theologian, Nicodemus, Jesus explained with other words and expressions how we can receive this new life. It is good when contemplate this important question in different ways.

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 3:3: *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’”* (NKJV) Jesus repeated this with other words.

John 3:5: *“Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”* (NKJV)

John 3:6-7: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* (NKJV)

Was does “born of water” mean?

This refers to the biblical baptism by immersion. We can read about it in Romans 6:3-4:

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (NKJV)

So, the biblical baptism by immersion shows that the old person is buried with Christ and that a new person is raised with Christ. **For a baptism it is therefore presupposed** that I give up my old life by entrusting my life through surrender with all that I am and have to Jesus and thus arise to a new life with Him. It means that I have accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord and from now on I let Him direct my life.

Ideally, a person decides to take this fundamental step before baptism and the symbolic act of a water baptism shows this publicly. Unfortunately, I didn't take this step until years after my baptism.

To understand this better, here are some thoughts from Jesus in Luke 9:23-25: *“Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?’”* (NKJV)

Jesus explains that our **discipleship is a daily matter**. Our whole life is governed by a daily 24-hour rhythm. In modern terms we could say that we are “programmed daily”. We eat and drink every day, we move daily, we sleep every day and the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:16: *“... the inward man is being renewed day by day.”* (NKJV)

It is a matter of renewing our surrender to Jesus every morning with everything we are and have and praying for the Holy Spirit together with a promise and receiving Him.

When we pray with a promise, then we know that our prayer has been answered (1 John 5:14-15; 2 Peter 1:4). This helps us to firmly believe that it has taken place.

What does it mean to “deny himself”? It means that we say to our ego: You no longer control my life. Jesus is now my Lord.

What does it mean to “take up his cross”? It means the same thing, but with the addition that I take on hardships, problems and disadvantages for the sake of my faith.

It is easy for us to submit our will to God's will when we trust God's love and pray every morning (amongst other things): Lord, prepare me to be willing for everything You want (Hebrews 13:21).

Jesus makes it very clear that we have to give up our own egotistical plans and desires, while we daily receive Him through the Holy Spirit and let Him counsel and guide us. Is there a better exchange than this? NO! It is unbelievable what God's grace does for us.

Are Jesus' expectations too high?

Is Jesus' expectation that I give up my own life going too far? From a human, egoistic standpoint a lot is being demanded.

But thankfully God doesn't deal with us according to these human points of view. **God's motive for inviting us to completely surrender to Jesus is His love.** Christ completely gave His life for us out of unfathomable love.

And He asks us to completely entrust our lives to Him so that He can make us happy in this life and in eternity. He wants to give us abundant life here (John 10:10) and a life of glory in God's kingdom (2 Timothy 2:10).

The Bible compares our relationship with Jesus to a marriage (see Ephesians 5:32).

Think about the marriage: At the wedding a bride entrusts her whole life to the groom and vice versa the groom to the bride. That is quite natural for lovers. Neither sees this as a demand. No one would get married, if the partner wanted to reserve one day of the week for an affair. Love gives itself completely and expects the same thing from the other person. It is so important for us to understand that God's actions with us are governed by pure divine love.

The main point of the gospel is to have a new life. It has to do with a new birth by surrendering our life to Jesus Christ and through a "renewing by the Holy Spirit". Being born of water refers to the surrender of our life to Jesus; it is attested in baptism.

What does it mean to be "born of the Spirit"?

The term "Spirit" refers to the renewing and change through the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5 explains:

"But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." (NKJV)

In Romans 8:1-2 the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth is also mentioned: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."* (NKJV)

When we are born again, we are "in Christ". Whoever is "in Christ" already lives in a new life and whoever is not in Christ, is still in death. How are we in Christ?

Because the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit was able to make us alive through our wholehearted surrender, in other words achieved the new birth. In addition, we were freed from the power of sin, which means that we don't have to sin anymore or want to sin anymore. Nevertheless, we can still fail out of haste, carelessness or by foolish decisions (see 1 John 2:1).

Jesus: Abide in Me!

John 15:1-8 shows that after this new birth we should remain in this new relationship, this new life. Jesus said: *"Abide in Me, and I in you."* (NKJV) How do you do that? In the book *The Desire of Ages*, p. 676.2 Ellen G. White explains how to do that.

It means:

- › a constant receiving of His Spirit and
- › a life of unreserved surrender to His service.

Through these two elements or relationships – surrender to Jesus and renewal by the Holy Spirit – we were born again.

By constantly living in the fundamental relationship with Jesus and the resulting relationship with the Holy Spirit, our new life is retained by renewing this relationship every morning. May I say it this way: After the wedding you live together.

Abraham's Example

The Bible says: **The just shall live by faith.**

The Bible gives us Abraham as an example. He was a man, who through his trust in God received righteousness, which is valid before God. Romans 4:3: *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”* (NKJV)

How did Abraham express trust in God?

In Genesis 12 Abraham is mentioned the first time by his old name Abram. God told him: *“Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you ... So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him ...”* (verses 1 and 4 NKJV)

In chapter 15 God promises the childless Abram innumerable descendants – as the stars of the heaven. Verse 6: *“And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”* (NKJV) After many years his son Isaac is born.

When Isaac was a young man, God gave Abram a shocking order:

“...Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” (chapter 22:1-3 NKJV)

Here is a short summary of the three biblical examples:

1. At God’s command Abraham left his comfortable home in Ur, later he separated himself from his relatives in Haran and made his way to an unknown destination and from then on lived in a tent (Genesis 12).
2. Abraham believes God that He will give him and his wife a son in their old age (Genesis 15).
3. Abraham is prepared to offer his long-awaited promised son at God’s behest (Genesis 22).

These examples show us that Abraham acted in complete surrender to God. From time to time, he had doubts and wanted to “help God out” (see Genesis 12:10-20; Genesis 15:1-16). But the basic tenor of his life was complete trust in God. Genesis 15:6: “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” (NKJV)

Romans 8 and Righteousness by Faith

Personally, the study of Romans, chapter 8 helped me significantly to understand righteousness by faith.

Romans 8 is a **message of a victorious life**. It is a **great source of encouragement**. The Holy Spirit plays the main role: He is mentioned 21 times and is described as a power, which **empowers believers to triumph over the power of sin** (see verse 2) and *“yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (verse 37 NKJV).

Romans 8:1: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ...”* (NKJV) What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus?

The expression “in Christ” is found 170 times in the New Testament. It describes the intimacy of the personal connection between a Christian and Christ. It describes a daily, living connection with Christ through the Holy Spirit. We surrender to Him every morning with everything we are and have and are willing to follow Him in everything (John 14:20; 15:4-7).

John describes this oneness as *“being in Him”* (1 John 2:5-6,28; 3:24; 5:20). Peter, as well as Paul, speaks about *“being in Christ”* (1 Peter 3:16; 5:14). Jesus emphasized the intimacy of this union with the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15:1-8. For example, verse 4: *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”* (NKJV)

When someone hasn’t experienced this life-altering oneness with Christ yet, because he hasn’t surrendered or has a lack of the Holy Spirit, then he hasn’t understood the liberation from condemnation yet. **Saving faith, which brings reconciliation and righteousness (Romans 3:22-26), refers to a life “in Christ Jesus”. “In the Lord” I have righteousness and strength (Isaiah 45:24).**

The Law of the Spirit

Romans 8:2: *“For the law of the Spirit, which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus, has set me free from the law of sin and death.”* (GNT)

The **“law of the Spirit” is the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit**, which works like a law in the life of those who are filled by Him. The expression “which brings us life in union with Christ Jesus”, shows that the Holy Spirit achieves in our life what Jesus accomplished on the cross for us.

The Holy Spirit ensures that the treasure of grace, which Christ secured on the cross, becomes reality for us. In contrast, the law of sin, produces only death and condemnation (see Romans 7:21-24).

What is the law of sin and death?

This is the power, which is exerted by sin. It ends in death. For those, who are freed from the power of sin, it is no longer the dominating and controlling power.

The indwelling Spirit of life enables us to be obedient and gives us power to *“put to death your sinful actions”* (verse 13 GNT), overcoming egoistic, unloving and evil desires, thoughts, words and deeds. It is a wonderful message. The substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus gives us acquittal and His Holy Spirit breaks the chains of evil one.

Romans 8:3: *“What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like our sinful nature, to do away with sin.”* (GNT)

As a result of this, what has become possible?

Romans 8:4: *“That the righteous requirement of the law might **be fulfilled in us** who do not walk according to the flesh but **according to the Spirit.**”* (NKJV)

A wonderful truth about a life with Christ through the Holy Spirit is expressed here. The required righteousness isn't accomplished by us, but rather through Jesus in us.

This shows that when Jesus is in me through the Holy Spirit, then through His presence in my life His righteousness also applies to me.

The Bible compares our relationship with Jesus to a marriage. Example: a young woman had 50,000 Euros in debts. She married a billionaire. Now what he owns, belongs to her as well. The husband will gladly pay the debts for his wife so that she is finally free from this burden of debt. It is the same way when we "marry Jesus".

1 Corinthians 1:30 shows that "... *you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*" (NIV)

It is impossible to fulfill all of God's necessary requirements for admission into God's kingdom in your own strength. But it is all accomplished with Jesus Christ in us, when we live in complete surrender to Him and live with the Holy Spirit.

It is so important to be in Christ and to live a new life that Paul wrote to young Timothy the following: "... *pursue righteousness ...*" (1 Timothy 6:11 NKJV)

Through trust in Jesus we can give ourselves in complete, joyful and wonderful dependence on God. As a result of this love relationship, I listen to God's advice and do what He says. Christ in me wants to keep God's commands.

Jesus is our Sanctification

We shouldn't overlook an important correlation. Jesus is also our sanctification. This means that his indwelling in us has a justifying side (righteousness) and a sanctifying side (made our holiness).

This means: God's grace gives me Jesus' righteousness. This is fully imputed to me. I neither need nor can I contribute anything to this. At the moment of my complete surrender to Jesus and when I abide in Him, then I am and remain justified and am eligible for admission into God's kingdom.

Jesus accomplishes sanctification in us through the Holy Spirit so that we can lead a life of obedience. When I am willing to be obedient, then the Holy Spirit is ready to give me the necessary power, joy and success.

Acts 1:8: "*But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you ...*" (NKJV)

And a few more important verses:

Ephesians 4:22-24: "*That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*" (NKJV)

This is exactly the problem we are dealing with. It is about receiving a new character and losing the joy of sinning. In short, it becomes a joy for me to be obedient.

The Holy Spirit helps us here to accomplish the impossible. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8: *“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”* (NKJV)

The effectiveness of the Holy Spirit has lasting implications.

Galatians 5:22-23: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”* (NKJV)

We can summarize the fruit of the Spirit in one word - OBEDIENCE.

My Part

Through my willingness and by living in obedience, I am involved in sanctification, although this is primarily the work of Jesus. We are really privileged people. Only a God of love could make such a wonderful provision. Every person can receive forgiveness of sins through Jesus and every one can receive power from the Holy Spirit to be obedient. God doesn't demand that we force ourselves to be obedient. This is the wrong idea. Obedience should be a joy for us. The Holy Spirit gives us this joy. Obedience is the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit. If you should have a problem, then pray to will and to do. Philippians 2:13: *“For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”* (NKJV)

Obedience isn't a prerequisite for receiving a new life – we receive a new life as a **gift based on God's grace**, when we accept Jesus as our Savior.

Obedience follows as a **fruit** from our relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:8,10: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God... For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

May the Lord help us all to live in complete surrender to Jesus and to be filled with the Holy spirit so that we can have a fulfilled, rich and joyful life here and a glorious life in eternity in God's kingdom.

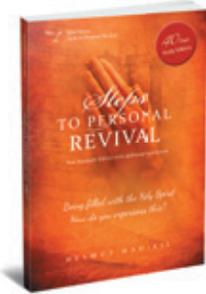
Dear Andrew, I hope that you can now truly treasure this important topic and be deeply thankful for it. I wish you great joy on this journey.

Warm greetings and blessings,

Helmut

For more on the collaboration between a believer and God in obedience please see: *Abide in Jesus*, chapter 4 “Obedience through Jesus”.

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BOOK 1: STEPS TO PERSONAL REVIVAL

Being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our lord himself has given the command:¹ Let yourselves be consistently and repeatedly filled anew with the spirit!²

1 Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing*, MB 20.3 (egwwritings.org)

2 Johannes Mager, *Auf den Spuren des Heiligen Geistes* (Lüneburg, 1999), p. 101

www.steps-to-personal-revival.info

FOREWORD FOR LEADERS AND FUTURE LEADERS MULTIPLYING THE RESULTS

CHAPTER 1: JESUS' MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

What did Jesus teach about the Holy Spirit?

Are you acquainted with Jesus' most powerful message?

CHAPTER 2: WHAT IS THE CENTER OF OUR PROBLEMS?

Is there a spiritual cause to our problems? Is the cause a lack of the Holy Spirit?

What is the main problem with being a carnal Christian?

CHAPTER 3: OUR PROBLEMS ARE SOLVABLE

What is God's solution for our problems? How can we grow to be happy and strong Christians? What is the relationship between baptism and the Holy Spirit?

CHAPTER 4: WHAT DIFFERENCES CAN WE EXPECT?

What advantage do we have with a life filled with the Holy Spirit

What do we lose when we don't pray for the Holy Spirit?

CHAPTER 5: THE KEY TO PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

How can I implement and experience God's solution for me?

How should I pray so that I am sure of being filled with the Holy Spirit?

CHAPTER 6: WHAT EXPERIENCES LIE AHEAD OF US?

Personal experiences, as well as experiences from churches, a conference and a union

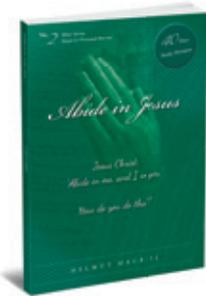
CHAPTER 7: INTEREST AND SHARING

The Joy that we give returns to our own hearts. (German Proverb)

How can I help others to experience "Life in Abundance"?

How do we pass on the message? Which ways are there?

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BOOK 2: STEPS TO PERSONAL REVIVAL

ABIDE IN JESUS – HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

“Abide in Me, and I in you.” Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service.

Ellen G. White (*Desire of Ages, DA, p.676.2*)

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Abiding in Him is not a work that we have to do as a condition in order to enjoy His salvation. Rather it is our consent to let Him do everything for us, in us, and through us. It is a work He does for us – the result and the power of His redeeming love. Our part is simply to yield, to trust, and to wait for Him to accomplish what He has promised. (Andrew Murray)

CHAPTER 1: JESUS’ MOST PRECIOUS GIFT

Are you acquainted with Jesus’ most powerful message?

What functions does the Holy Spirit have?

How can our character be changed?

Jesus on the Holy Spirit in the Parable. About the Leaven

CHAPTER 2: SURRENDER TO JESUS

Do I lose my own will? Or will I become stronger? What can prevent us from surrendering?

Does surrender to God mean that we have to give up our own will?

CHAPTER 3: JESUS ABIDING IN YOU

What effects does “Christ in me” have on my life?

The ultimate achievement: being imbued with the fullness of God.

The Effects of “Christ in you”. How do we get deliverance from the power of sin?

Will we become “carnal” again by sinning?

CHAPTER 4: OBEDIENCE THROUGH JESUS?

How can I live in joyful obedience? What is joy? How does obedience through “Jesus in me” work?

God has designed: Collaboration between God and Man.

CHAPTER 5: ATTRACTIVE FAITH THROUGH JESUS

How can oneness be achieved among believers?

What makes our faith appealing to our family and the world?

What changes in us make us witnesses? How does revival generate mission?

