

How to Live a Life that Pleases God

Millions of people have had moments when they wished they were more holy/righteous. But not many have tried with all their might to live a truly holy life for more than a month or two. Most people who do attempt to live a truly holy life (with all their might) give up after a very short time concluding that they don't have what it takes to be a truly holy person.

Now there are some people that convince themselves that they are holy because they accomplish notable things that most people do not accomplish. For example, some people have memorized the entire Quran, the Torah, or large portions of the Bible. Some have acquired above average knowledge about religious matters in colleges and universities. Some have gained a reputation as being spiritually-minded for frequently attending Mosque, Church or the synagogue.

In Jesus' time, there were religious leaders that lived blameless lives. Outwardly they appeared very righteous. They kept God's laws so religiously that nobody could accuse them of breaking them. In spite of this, Jesus said that the level of their righteous living was insufficient. He said that unless a person's righteousness exceeds this, he will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. *(Matthew 5:20)* (He is headed for everlasting hell.)

Many people think that because they have chosen the right religion, they will be one of those who most likely end up in heaven. The Bible teaches that what a person believes is indeed important. But according to Jesus, believing a set of doctrines is insufficient. Unless God considers our life to be truly righteous by the things we do (and how we do them), we will spend eternity in hell. Based upon the level of righteousness on display in most people these days, many people (from all religions) are going to be extremely shocked on Judgment Day when they hear, *"Depart from Me you workers of lawlessness into everlasting torment! I never knew you."* *(Matthew 7:23)* Hell will include people who regularly attended churches, synagogues, mosques, including many who have accomplished notable spiritual things. This is because God is not satisfied with accomplishments or religious observance unless true righteousness is in the life. Outward spiritual appearance means nothing to Him.

So, this begs the question, "What does God consider righteous?" The best way to understand what God considers righteous is to examine the attitudes, behavior and words of Jesus because He lived a perfectly righteous life. He did nothing to please Himself. Everything He did was to help others and please God.

One of the ways He tried to help others was to teach them what God considers truly righteous. For example, He taught that it was insufficient to merely love those who love you. He taught that we should love our enemies and bless those who persecute us. *(Matthew 5:44)* He said if someone slaps you on the cheek, turn and let him slap the other cheek also. *(Matthew 5:39)* He also said that unless we forgive others from the heart, neither will God forgive us. *(Matthew 18:35)* He taught that to fulfill God's desire, we should love God with ALL of our heart, mind, soul and might – ALL THE TIME. And we should always be thinking and looking for ways to bless others, even if they continually mistreat us. *(Matthew 22:37-39)* If you are being honest with yourself as you read this, then you will conclude that you have utterly failed to live according to this level of righteous standard. In addition, you should admit that you don't have it within you to achieve this level of righteous living.

If you are like most people, you might reply, "Everyone makes mistakes. Nobody is perfect," or "God weighs the good and the bad." You may insist that because God is merciful, He will hopefully overlook all your past and present failures. This is not wise. It does not take into account that according to the Bible, God is a jealous God, an all-consuming fire. *(Deuteronomy 4:24)* If God desires this type of righteousness, it is insulting to simply disregard His desires. It shows a lack of respect and love for Him. If we really love Him, we will at least want to please Him. If we find ourselves unable to do the things that please Him, we should at least tell Him we are sorry and beg Him to do whatever is required to change us inside and out. We should at least be extremely troubled with our performance to date. If a person shrugs this off, he proves that he really does not properly fear and respect the Almighty God. It is completely disrespectful to God to put the blame on Him by saying, "Everyone makes mistakes. This is the way He made me."

But it is also inappropriate to settle for outward performance and accomplishments rather than true righteousness that flows from within us. The Bible calls this pretending, or hypocrisy. According to the Bible, if a person resorts to living a life that is only righteous outwardly, he is merely a pretender – a hypocrite! The Bible teaches that no hypocrites will be in heaven!

At this point, you might be wondering that if God desires this type of righteousness, then how will anyone make it to heaven? If you are one of the rare people who have attempted to live in this deeply righteous way, you know better than most people that it is impossible to accomplish it by sheer determination. According to the Bible, no one, whether they are Muslim, Christian, Jewish or any other religion, can accomplish this level of righteous living by sheer determination. Yet, this is the level of righteous living that God desires.

Though it is impossible for people to accomplish by sheer determination, God has made a Way for people to increasingly fulfill God's desire for righteousness in their lives. But it cannot be accomplished through the power of man.

According to the Bible, God will not share His glory with anyone. *(Isaiah 42:8)* Therefore, any religious attempt to fulfill His desire for righteousness by sheer determination robs Him of glory and is completely unacceptable to Him. To fulfill all righteousness, God must receive all the glory.

God's Way of producing righteousness requires people to first agree with Him that they are unable to fulfill His righteous desires. They must also agree that, in themselves, they are wretched sinners who fully deserve everlasting punishment. So, if you are hoping that your religious efforts might persuade God to accept you, you are not coming His Way. In fact, your mere attempt to come your way insults Him!

All of God's true prophets, including Moses, have taught about God's Way. To come God's Way, a person must first agree with God's true prophets about His righteousness. Moses, and other prophets have declared that God's righteousness is so severe, that He will not let a single sin go unpunished. God is not like human judges who accept plea bargains. Because God is so holy, He is called a consuming fire. Anyone who attempts to stand in the judgment on the basis of his own righteousness will suffer everlasting punishment because God will not let the guilty go unpunished. ^(Nahum 1:2-3) Everyone coming God's Way must first agree with God's true prophets that they are rightly condemned before God because of their rebellious, sinful life. And they must not hope that God will excuse their sin at the judgment simply because He is merciful. God is indeed merciful, but He will not violate His righteousness on the day of judgment.

God has made a righteous Way for sinners to come to Him, but it required the punishment of all the sins. The true prophets spoke of this righteous Way. Because God is merciful, He sent His only begotten Son, who always existed with Him, to leave heaven and take upon Himself human flesh - in order TO DIE as a substitute sacrifice. 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah said concerning Him, *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* ^(Isaiah 53:5-6)

Because God's perfect righteousness will not allow Him to excuse a single sin, God will not accept anyone attempting to come another way. This is why Jesus said, *"I am THE WAY, the truth and the life. Nobody comes to the Father except through Me."* ^(John 14:6) To come God's Way, a person must depend solely on the righteousness of Jesus. He earned a perfect righteous standing by His perfect obedience, even to the point of death on the cross. Therefore, God accepted His death as righteous payment for sins. We know this because He raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His right hand forever in glory. ^(Philippians 2:5-11) Now, all who come through Him receive remission of sins and eternal life. ^(Acts 10:43) And God is perfectly righteous to grant it because of Jesus' perfect obedience.

Jesus' sacrificial death is the only Way to escape the wrath of God that is coming. But God did all this for even a greater reason. God's ultimate purpose for sending His Son down out of heaven to die for sinners, was to produce a holy people that live truly righteous lives. ^(Titus 2:11-14) To make it possible, it was necessary for God to first make a righteous Way to remove the condemnation that hangs over the sinner. All those who renounce their own righteousness, and put all their trust completely in Jesus' righteous life and death on their behalf, receive remission of sins. There is no more condemnation for them! Now, they have a fresh start knowing that God loves them deeply and has washed them of their sins.

Though God has taken their sins off their record, they still are unable in their own power to live the level of righteous life God desires. But God has also promised to enable truly righteous living by giving His Spirit to live inside of them. ^(Romans 8:1-4) Though they fail to accomplish it every time that they attempt it in their own power, God increasingly is at work to help them accomplish it by the power of His Spirit. He is conforming them to the very image of His Son. ^(Romans 8:29) Their lives become increasingly like the life Jesus lived, abounding in obedient behavior and attitudes.

If you reject God's Way made possible by Jesus' work in your behalf, your life will remain unacceptable to Him because He does not consider it righteous. (You will face everlasting punishment after you die.) Those with a hardened heart will not heed this warning. But if you are weary because you realize that you continually fail to accomplish the righteous desires of God, consider Jesus' command to you personally: *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* ^(Matthew 11:28-30)

He promises to give you rest for your weary soul. But notice, you must take His yoke upon you. You can no longer live your life your way. You must surrender your life completely over to Him from now on. If you do, He promises to raise you to a new, righteous life now, and when He comes back, glorify you forever in His presence. Be warned though, that anyone who turns away will face everlasting punishment. ^(Hebrews 10:38) He promises to glorify you, but you must be willing to confess (and continue to confess) Jesus before other people, even if it means that they will ridicule you, harm you, and even kill you. ^(Luke 14:27) We strongly urge you to surrender your life to Jesus and follow Him from now on.

To learn more about Jesus, try reading the Gospel of John. We will give you one if you ask for one. Email us at DearbornBible@hotmail.com or call 313-213-1570. Tom and Linda Bear, Dearborn Bible Fellowship. (www.DearbornBible.ORG)