

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

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The great prophet, Isaiah, declared: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."¹ And Daniel prayed: "We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies."² In recognition of these basic deficiencies and distortions in human life in the earth's fallen mortal state, Jesus admonished his disciples in Palestine and on the Western hemisphere: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and *his righteousness*."³ And in his ministry to the Nephites, Christ quoted Isaiah's statement of faithful saints in the latter-day Zion: "Their righteousness is of me."⁴ One charge the Lord made against many modern Christians is that "they seek not the Lord to establish *his righteousness*, but every man walketh in his own way, after the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world."⁵

The scriptural word "righteousness" very often denotes an anointing or endowment--something with which faithful people are clothed or crowned by the Lord who possesses righteousness as his composite attributes and powers of truth and light. The metaphor of endowment or clothing with righteousness is beautifully symbolic of the divine attributes and powers which the faithful receive from him. Having been shown the ministry of the resurrected Christ to his people, Nephi wrote: "I looked, and beheld three generations pass away in righteousness; and their garments were white even like unto the Lamb of God."⁶

This suggests a marked difference between the righteousness of God and the righteousness of man, even though the latter may be made up of many good principles and be accompanied by great religious zeal. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness," Paul said of his contemporary Israelites who in their devotion to the Mosaic order rejected Christ, "and going about to establish *their own righteousness*, have not submitted themselves unto *the righteousness of God*. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."⁷

Nephi call⁸ Emer, the faithful Jaredite ruler, was one who "saw the Son of Righteousness."⁹ Through Isaiah the Lord declared; "My

righteousness is near. . . . My righteousness shall not be abolished, . . . but my righteousness shall be for ever."¹⁰ To the Nephites, Jesus quoted Malachi's prophecy of the last days, that "unto you that fear my name shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings."¹¹ Having quoted Isaiah's declaration of Christ, that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins," Nephi spoke of the time in the last days when this righteousness will be made manifest in great power to the faithful of Zion.¹²

The great antediluvian patriarchs "were preachers of righteousness."¹³ Because Christ abode with Enoch's people and endowed them with his glory, "they dwelt in righteousness."¹⁴ Abraham was "a follower of righteousness" who sought to be "a greater follower of righteous."¹⁵ And the Book of Mormon prophets spoke repeatedly of "the things pertaining unto righteousness."¹⁶ When Lehi saw that the river which he named after his oldest son, Laman, emptied into the Red Sea, he exclaimed to that wayward one: "O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness."¹⁷ Later, Lehi exhorted: "Awake, my sons; put on the armour of righteousness."¹⁸ In response, Nephi exclaimed: "O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy Righteousness!"¹⁹

The endowment of Christ's righteousness is so transforming that Mormon explains "that after a people have been once enlightened by the Spirit of God, and have had great knowledge of things pertaining to righteousness, and then have fallen away into sin and transgression, they become more hardened, and thus their state becomes worse than though they had never known these things."²⁰ Repeatedly Alma declared that there is a death "as to things pertaining unto righteousness."²¹ And Samuel the Lamenite prophet explained that, after people have been spiritual death which Adam brought about by the Fall, the second death is to be "cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness."²²

The Apostle Paul explained that in making the atonement Christ paid the debt of sin "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."²³ The precious faith of the gospel, said Peter, is given to true believers "through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."²⁴ Paul spoke of "the *gift of righteousness*,"²⁵ and declared that God sent Christ "to declare *his righteousness* for the remission of sins."²⁶ Said the Apostle: "I count all things but loss for the excellency

of the knowledge of Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, *not having mine own righteousness*, . . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, *the righteousness which is of God by faith.*"²⁷

The righteousness of God is received by the exercise of true faith in Christ, so that Paul makes reference to "the righteousness which is of faith."²⁸ To him the gospel is the divine channel through which true righteousness is bestowed. "Therein," the Apostle declared, "is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith."²⁹ The Patriarch Noah, for example, "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."³⁰ This righteousness is a continuing living principle and power within each true believer. "The righteousness which is of faith," Paul explains, "speaketh on this wise: . . . The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith."³¹ *This Paul identifies as being the true New Testament that God writes, "not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."*³²

The transformation by divine endowment to the righteousness of God is called, scripturally, a "new birth," or birth into "a newness of life,"³³ in which Christ makes the faithful righteous by endowing them with his righteousness. In this new birth, the Lord stated to Alma, true believers are "changed from their carnal and fallen state to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God."³⁴ Alma thus spoke of "things pertaining to things of righteousness" and stated that the spiritually reborn perform "the works of righteousness." In this Paul makes reference to "the ways of righteousness," and to "the paths of righteousness."³⁵ Those who have "experienced this mighty change" in their hearts, he taught, contemplate hearing the voice of Christ saying unto them in the day of judgment, "Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth." These were they whom God, by their faith, "awakened . . . out of a deep sleep . . . by the light of the everlasting word." Having previously been "encircled about by the bands of [spiritual] death" in their fallen natural state on earth, "their souls did expand, and they did sing redeeming love."³⁶

The scriptures make it clear that the endowment of righteousness consists of the mercy, truth, power, spiritual gifts and eternal attributes of the Father's divine nature or glory as given to the

faithful through Christ. Nephi explained that those "things which are spiritual . . . are pertaining to righteousness."³⁷ Thus the righteousness which is of God, through Christ, consists of:

The living faith which Christ bestows, as a gift of God³⁸ -- a manifestation of his grace, "lest any man should boast."³⁹

The Spirit of Revelation by which true believers come to the living knowledge of God and of his truth and power. The Prophet Joseph Smith concluded a masterful discourse on the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the statement: "The Spirit of Revelation is in connection with these blessings [of the Gospel]. A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the Spirit of Revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas . . . ; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus."⁴⁰

The supernatural gifts of the Holy Ghost which Christ gives true believers, which "never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men." "If there be one among you *that doeth good* [or that works righteousness]," Moroni declared, "he shall work by the power and gifts of Gad."⁴¹

The pure *love of Christ* -- his divine and holy attribute of love-- "which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men,"⁴² and which God bestows on all those "who are true followers of his Son."⁴³

Righteous works are those works by which the above divine elements and endowments are built into our lives, and, through us (by the grace of God) in the lives of others. When these sacred transforming endowments, as on-going, living manifestations of Christ's mercy, truth, power and love, are received and prevail in one's life, such a person is in possession of the righteousness of God, through Christ, which leads to salvation.

The Apostle Paul described the divine endowments as "the breastplate of righteousness,"⁴⁴ and the Lord admonished the saints in modern times: "Stand . . . having on the breastplate of righteousness."⁴⁵ Paul also counseled the saints to show themselves approved of God "by the armour of righteousness."⁴⁶ On

the other hand, iniquity, said Samuel the Lamanite prophet, "is contrary to the nature of that righteousness which is in our great and Eternal Head."⁴⁷

The ministry of righteousness consists of assisting others to come to the endowment of Christ's righteousness. The priests and teachers that Alma ordained nourished the people "with things pertaining to righteousness."⁴⁸ In ministering the divine program of spiritual endowment and renewal to the people of King Lamoni, Ammon taught them "all things concerning things pertaining to righteousness."⁴⁹ And angels who ministered in the conversion of these people to the gospel told them of the "things of God, and of his righteousness."⁵⁰ Thus Moroni penned his written works, that "the children of men . . . may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved."⁵¹ As this fountain, Christ said: "I will show unto the Gentiles . . . that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me -- the fountain of all righteousness."⁵²

In his vision of the last days, the Patriarch Enoch heard the earth mourn, because it would be corrupted by men, and exclaim: "When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face."⁵³ In preparation for the anticipated day, the Lord promised Enoch that he would send down "righteousness . . . out of heaven" and truth "out of the earth"; and, he declared: "Righteousness and truth will I cause to sweep the earth as with a flood to gather out mine elect from the four quarters of the earth, unto a place which I shall prepare, an Holy City . . . called Zion, a New Jerusalem."⁵⁴ This great gathering will not be peaceful. Nephi saw in vision that the ungodly will make war against Zion and that the faithful saints in America and throughout the world will then be "armed with righteousness and with the power of God in great glory."⁵⁵ And to latter-day Israel who will thereby be cleansed, "the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness."⁵⁶ Christ quoted Isaiah, who stated of the latter-day Zion: "In righteousness shalt thou be established."⁵⁷ And Nephi quoted the Isaiah as stating that when the millennial kingdom is ushered in, "God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness."⁵⁸

Here may be seen the basis of the true millennial hope. Peter spoke of new heavens and a new earth, made so by the manifestations of Christ's glory and power,⁵⁹ "wherein dwelleth righteousness."⁶⁰ Speaking of the marriage of the Lamb to his wife,

the sanctified Church that will be united with Christ at his Second Coming, a heavenly voice said to the Apostle John: "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."⁶¹

This endowment, in its fulness, is the final reward of the faithful. If one "desired righteousness until the end of his days," said Alma, "even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness."⁶² The Lord admonished Emma Smith: "Keep my commandments continually, and a crown of righteousness thou shalt receive."⁶³ Christ promised that in his Second Coming he will "dwell in righteousness with men on earth a thousand years," and that those who come with him will be "clothed with robes of righteousness, with crowns upon their heads, in glory even as I am." The faithful who then come forth in the resurrection, he added, will "receive a crown of righteousness, and be clothed upon, even as I am."⁶⁴ This, the Prophet Joseph Smith held, will be the reward of faithful Latter-day Saints. They will "be clothed upon with robes of righteousness," he said, ". . . and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy."⁶⁵ Thus Paul wrote: "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith."⁶⁶ With the faithful of all ages, he looked forward to "a crown of righteousness," which Christ will then give him and others.⁶⁷ The Prophet Jacob therefore taught that in eternity the righteous will "have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness."⁶⁸

Endnotes

¹ Isaiah 64:6.

² Daniel 9:18.

³ Matthew 6:33; 3 Nephi 13:33 (emphasis added).

⁴ 3 Nephi 22:17 (emphasis added).

⁵ D&C 1:16.

⁶ 1 Nephi 12:11.

⁷ Romans 10:3-4 (emphasis added).

⁸ 2 Nephi 26:9; 4:35.

⁹ Ether 9:22.

¹⁰ Isaiah 51:5, 6 8, in 2 Nephi 8:5, 6, 8.

¹¹ 3 Nephi 25:2.

¹² Isaiah 11:5, in 2 Nephi 21:5; 2 Nephi 30:11.

- 13 Moses 6:23.
- 14 Moses 7:16-7.
- 15 Abraham 1:2.
- 16 Alma 35:16; Hel. 11:19; passim.
- 17 1 Nephi 2:8-9.
- 18 2 Nephi 1:23.
- 19 2 Nephi 4:33.
- 20 Alma 24:30.
- 21 Alma 5:42; 12:16, 32.
- 22 Helaman 14:18.
- 23 2 Corinthians 5:21.
- 24 2 Peter 1:1.
- 25 Romans 5:17.
- 26 Romans 3:25.
- 27 Philippians 3:8-9 (emphasis added).
- 28 Romans 9:30.
- 29 Romans 1:17 (emphasis added).
- 30 Hebrews 11:7.
- 31 Romans 10:6, 8.
- 32 2 Corinthians 3:3. Cf. vs. 6.
- 33 Cf. Mosiah 27:25-6; Romans 6:4; 7:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.
- 34 Mosiah 27:25-6.
- 35 Alma 40:26; 5:16, 35, 36, 37; 7:19.
- 36 Alma 5:14, 16, 7, 9.
- 37 1 Nephi 16:33.
- 38 Cf. Moroni 10:11; D&C 46:19-21.
- 39 Ephesians 2:9. Cf. 2 Nephi 25:23.
- 40 TPJS, p. 151.
- 41 Moroni 10:19, 24-5.
- 42 1 Nephi 11:22.
- 43 Moroni 7:48.
- 44 Ephesians 6:14.
- 45 D&C 27:16.
- 46 2 Corinthians 6:4, 7.
- 47 Helaman 13:38.
- 48 Mosiah 23:18.
- 49 Alma 21:23.
- 50 Alma 19:34.
- 51 Ether 8:26.

- ⁵² Ether 12:28.
- ⁵³ Moses 7:48.
- ⁵⁴ Moses 7:62.
- ⁵⁵ 1 Nephi 14:14.
- ⁵⁶ Isaiah 10:22, in 2 Nephi 20:22.
- ⁵⁷ 3 Nephi 22:14.
- ⁵⁸ 2 Nephi 15:16.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. D&C 101:23 ff.
- ⁶⁰ 2 Peter 3:13.
- ⁶¹ Revelation 19:8.
- ⁶² Alma 41:6.
- ⁶³ D&C 25:15.
- ⁶⁴ D&C 29:11, 12, 13.
- ⁶⁵ D&C 109:76.
- ⁶⁶ Galatians 5:5.
- ⁶⁷ 2 Timothy 4:8.
- ⁶⁸ 2 Nephi 9:14.