

#3. WHAT CAN I DO?

Sometime between 1510 and 1512, Martin Luther made a trip to Rome. While there he accepted the pope's offer of an indulgence (whereby he could merit forgiveness) for all who would ascend Pilate's Staircase on their knees. While climbing, he sensed a voice within his heart thundering, 'The just shall live by faith!' Luther rose and fled the scene. It was from this point in his life that he more clearly saw the error of trusting to human works for salvation, and the necessity of constant faith in the merits of Christ.

The teachings of Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation of 1517. But by the 1700s, Satan had drawn people back to trusting to their good works for salvation. John and Charles Wesley had been taught that the favor of God was secured by a virtuous life.

When Charles Wesley fell ill and was not expected to live, a friend visited and asked him on what he based his hope of eternal life. Wesley replied, on his best endeavors to serve God. The friend seemed not fully satisfied with the answer and Wesley would later recount, "What! are not my endeavors a sufficient ground of hope? Would he rob me of my endeavors? I have nothing else to trust to." This illustrates the dense darkness that had settled on the church, hiding the atonement of Christ, robbing Christ of his glory, and turning people's minds from their only hope of salvation – the blood of Jesus Christ.

By the late 19th century, the same idea of trusting to good works for salvation was leavening the church. So God sent a most precious message to encourage His church. All knew that they must keep the law. They had been preaching obedience to the 10 commandments. They had been preaching the seventh-day Sabbath. They taught that all must overcome to gain an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. It was a condition of eternal life – perfect obedience, perfect righteousness. Yet we were incapable of rendering obedience.

The big question was **how**? How could I be good enough? How could I gain an entrance through the gates of heaven? How could I attain to everlasting life? For Luther and others, trying to gain the favor of God was discouraging. God seemed hard by requiring what seemed like an impossibly. Yet perfect obedience was needed in order to gain heaven or you would end up in the 2nd resurrection. Many still struggle with these feelings today. But there is good news.

"What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;" Romans 3:9

Paul had proved both Jew and Gentile were under sin. Everyone had sinned and come short of God's ideal.

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:" Romans 3:10

There was none righteous, no, not one. Paul described both inward and outward sins and concludes that everyone was guilty before God. Not one person who has ever lived (save for Jesus Christ) could claim to have never committed a sin.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.” Romans 3:19

Every mouth is stopped and everyone is guilty. Why? Because all have sinned. No one’s life has been flawless.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:20

Since everyone has sinned, it is impossible to be justified by your deeds or your works. Attempts at obedience will never satisfy the law because all have sinned. The Law can only accept flawless perfection. A bowl with a hole in it could represent each of our lives. We all come into this world broken and defective. We could plug up the hole but that would not be acceptable to the Law. It can only accept a bowl (a life) that has never had a hole in it. Yet all bowls have holes. What could be done?

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;” Romans 3:21

God would provide a bowl (a life) that has never had any holes in it to meet the demands of the Law. The righteousness of God, apart or separate from the Law, is provided to the repentant sinner. It is the only righteousness that the Law will accept.

There are two kinds of righteousness, God’s and man’s. My righteousness, or my attempt at obedience, and God’s righteousness, or His attempt at obedience.

“But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Isaiah 64:6

My righteousnesses, my attempts at perfect obedience, are but filthy rags since I have sinned.

“The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” Psalm 145:17

But God is righteous and holy in everything He does. And my righteousness will never meet the demands of the Law for I have sinned at least once in my life. My future obedience can never atone for the sins of my past. Therefore, if I’m ever going to meet the demands of the Law, I must have a righteousness that the Law will accept. Praise God, the Bible tells us how we can!

“Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:” Romans 3:22

The flawless righteousness of God was lived for us by Jesus Christ and offered up to His Father on the cross of Calvary. It is the only life that the Law can accept since Christ alone never sinned. This unique, flawless life is offered to all and is upon all that believe. This righteousness is received by faith no matter how sinful you have been since all have sinned and come short of God’s glory.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” Romans 3:23

It doesn’t matter how low you’ve fallen we’re all in the same boat. We all have holes in our bowl. How, then can you have a life that meet demands of law? How can you have eternal life?

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:” Romans 3:24

You can be justified freely. You are regarded by the Law as righteous, as if lived Christ’s life, the only life that the Law accepts. But what do you do to deserve this blessing? You will never be worthy of the blessing. It is freely given. There is nothing you can do in order to deserve it. You can only accept it. It’s of God’s grace, not of debt. God does not owe you anything, it is His free (to you, for it cost God the life of His Son) gift. The full ransom has been paid. How do you come in possession of such a righteousness? By faith.

“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;” Romans 3:25

Faith that the death of Christ is an atonement for your sins; that He paid the penalty for your sins by suffering and dying in your place. When you realize your sinful condition that caused the suffering of Christ on Calvary, when you are sorrowful for the suffering you have caused Him, when you ask for His forgiveness and resolve to follow Him, God, for the sake of Jesus, forgives your sin, accepts you as His child and loves you as He loves Jesus. God declares you righteous and you stand before Him just as if you had never sinned, ever. It’s as if you lived the life of Jesus.

Jesus took upon Himself your sins and your take upon yourself His righteousness. He did not live your life but paid the penalty as if He did. You did not live His life but God considers that you did. God declares you righteous and treats you as righteous, just as if you had never sinned. You are justified by God when He pardons your sins, takes the punishment you deserve, and treats you as though you were really righteous never having committed a sin, receives you into

His favor and treats you as if you were righteous. You are justified alone through this gift of Christ's righteousness. The Father accepts Jesus, and through His atoning sacrifice accepts you.

In accepting His death for your sins, you are pronounced innocent, while your guilt is placed on Christ. The righteousness of Christ is placed on the your account, and against your name on the balance sheet is written: Pardoned. Eternal Life.

Where does this righteousness come from? From God. Notice in the following verses that God is the source of righteousness.

“Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even to* him shall *men* come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.”
Isaiah 45:24

“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue *that* shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is of me*, saith the LORD.” Isaiah 54:17

“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”
Jeremiah 23:6

“In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this *is the name* wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.” Jeremiah 33:16

My righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith. It is a gift from God.

“8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: 9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9

“5) Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6) And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” Romans 11:5,6

Salvation is all of Christ and none of my own merit. It is all of grace or all of works. It's either a gift or it's not. It's either something God gives me or it's something God owes me. The Bible says it's a gift.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1

The yoke of bondage is seeking the favor of God through faith plus works of merit. However, Paul wanted to warn the Galatian believers that salvation was not some of God’s merit and some of our own merit.

“Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” Galatians 5:2

If you are seeking to be justified by something you do, circumcision in the case of the Galatian believers, then Paul says, Christ is of no profit to you. Salvation, then, is partly your merit and partly Christ’s. Paul strongly contends that Christ, then, is of no value to you.

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.” Galatians 5:3

If works is the basis of your salvation, even partially, then you must keep the whole law on your own. However, that’s not possible as all have sinned. Even if we lived a flawless life from this point forward, that still cannot atone for our past.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:4

Paul lets us know that Christ is useless to us if we want to be justified by our works. Some seem to think that Jesus will do some of the saving and we must do the rest. We need to see by faith that the righteousness of Christ is our only hope for this life and the next.

Eternal life is an infinite gift. Because it is infinite, it is outside the possibility of our earning it. It must necessarily be a gift. As a gift, it can only be received by faith. Once we accept salvation by faith, gratitude and praise will be offered to God. It is Satan who leads us to look to ourselves for some merit instead of looking to Jesus for merit.

“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” Galatians 5:5

Eternal life is the hope of righteousness by faith. Over and over, the Bible declares that salvation and righteousness are freely bestowed as gifts by God through Jesus Christ.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Galatians 2:16

Three times Paul says justification is by faith, not works.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Jesus died for us, and offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned. More than this, Christ changes my heart so that my great desire is to follow Him. He then lives in and through me by faith.

"Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

I'm a new person with new desires and new goals. The things I once loved, I now hate and the things I once hated, I now love. But now that Christ has made this change in me, I don't begin to think that my new lifestyle has any merit to it.

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Galatians 2:21

I still realize that my salvation is a gift and the works I do are the fruit of that connection with Christ, not the cause of the connection.

"3) Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: 4) According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6) To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." Ephesians 1:3-6

God has chosen us to be like Him through the power of His Spirit living in us but we are still accepted by Him through Christ. It is in Him that we are complete or perfect.

"9) For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10) And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:" Colossians 2:9,10

In ourselves we are sinners; but in Christ we are righteous.

Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to cry to Him, Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness and I am Your sin. You have taken on Yourself what was mine, and given to me what was Yours. What You were not, You became, that I might become what I was not. I lifted You up and nailed You to my cross. You lifted me up to sit me on Your throne. In myself I am a sinner, but in Christ, I am righteous.

If you have not asked Jesus to forgive your sins and accepted Jesus as your Saviour, why not ask Him to do that now? Let Him know it's your desire to serve Him and He will give you of His Spirit to keep you from falling.