

## The Gift of Righteousness

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### How God Makes Us into Who He Sees Us to Be

What keeps us pure? That's the question behind a key point of Christian theology called sanctification. I have read all kinds of books on sanctification. Yet in reading page after page, I have only grown more and more confused. It seems every church leader had his own idea on the subject. After much prayer, I believe God gave me a way to understand his work of purifying and sanctifying us. Here is a simple definition, as the Holy Ghost explained it to me.

*Sanctification is the Spirit of Christ in us—making us to be in reality what God sees us to be already through justification.* Plainly stated: God has already made us “just” (or, right) in his eyes, and that is a wonderful holiness. But now he is bringing this holiness down to our practical lives. This is the work of the Spirit of Christ in us—to conform us to what God already sees us to be. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 *Thessalonians 5:23*).

Paul writes: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (4:3-4). The apostle is saying, “It is God’s will that you live a holy life—that no sin has power or dominion over you.”

I don’t know what your temptation is. But the Bible clearly states, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (*Romans 6:14*). The Lord intends that every believer have a controlling power in his life, real authority to reign over sin.

“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness* will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (5:17, *emphasis mine*).

The Greek word for “reign” here means “to rule from a foundation of power.” When Paul talks about “reigning in life,” he’s talking about having ruling power over sin—and not just in heaven but in this life. We are to reign over every demonic power, every lust, every principality that comes against us. That is true sanctification.

Yet another powerful truth is contained in this verse: “those who receive abundance of grace and of the *gift of righteousness*” (*same verse, my emphasis*). Here Paul calls righteousness a gift. It is something given to you, put in your possession—something you can touch and feel!

### This “gift of righteousness” is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

When you surrendered your life to Christ, you were adopted as a son and made a joint heir with God’s own Son. At that moment, God sent forth the very Spirit of Christ to abide in you—to live in you, empower you and actually live your life for you. “Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?” (2 *Corinthians 13:5*).

Jesus is the only victor over sin, flesh and the devil. He alone is the conqueror, the Lion of Judah. And God sends forth the Spirit of this mighty warrior to be our sanctifier. We have no power in ourselves. All power over sin, flesh and the devil is in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who has been sent to dwell in us.

Do you think God would justify us but then leave us totally powerless against the principalities and powers of darkness? Do you think he says to us, “I consider you righteous by your faith in the accomplished work of my Son. Now, go—resist sin and fight the devil as best you can. I’ll give you credit for good effort”? No, never!

Christ did not do battle with the devil, defeat him, return to the Father and then quit on us. He did not merely say, “I did my part. Now, you do yours.” No, our blessed Savior ascended to heaven with a blood-stained banner of

total victory over all the power of the enemy. And he is still there now, as God and as victorious man, sitting in glory at the right hand of the Father. And he has sent us his Spirit, who abides in every true believer's heart: "The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (*John 14:17*).

You and I are never to face the tempter in our own strength. Nothing we have is adequate. And we cannot face our lusts and habits as weak, simpering, cowardly soldiers. Rather, according to God's holy Word, we have a Spirit in us that is greater than any demon in this world: "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (*1 John 4:4*). His Spirit empowers us in all battles with the flesh and the devil: "Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (*Ephesians 3:20*).

We reign in life only when we allow the Spirit of Christ to live his life in us and through us. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (*Romans 8:13*). All power over sin, flesh and the devil lies in the indwelling Spirit of Christ: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man" (*Ephesians 3:16*).

Every sin that enslaves you—every demonic stronghold—demands a miracle from God. Only he knows how to deliver his people out of the power of darkness. It must be done supernaturally: "Therefore he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (*Galatians 3:5*). God works miracles not for those who labor under their own power, but for those who trust him to do it completely.

### **The greatest release of power and faith possible is to be wholly convinced God loves you.**

Paul says it's love that releases faith in us to walk as Jesus walked. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (*Galatians 5:6*). "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (*Romans 8:37*). In these two verses, Paul connects our victory with God's love for us. Indeed, this whole concept of sanctification is all about love.

Paul says the life of Christ was released in him through a faith that worked by love: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (*Galatians 2:20*). Paul was convinced the Lord loved him. His standing as a son of God produced faith in him—and that faith released the life of Christ in him. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (*2 Corinthians 3:5*).

Paul further says, "God loved you even when you were dead in sins. And now that you trust his love, he gives you resurrection power." "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (*Ephesians 2:4-5*).

Let me give you a powerful example of God's great resurrection love, from my own life. In 1958, I went into the Fort Greene projects in Brooklyn, turf of the notorious Mau Mau gang. When I got up to preach, gang members made cat calls, hooting and yelling. After I finished, I went over to speak to the leaders. One of them was Nicky Cruz, who had tried to kill his own brother. I said, "Nicky, Jesus loves you." He spat in my face and laughed. Then he cursed me.

But Nicky couldn't shake those words: "Nicky, Jesus loves you." Those words made their way into the gang leader's heart, and he couldn't escape their power. He thought, "Who could ever love me? I hate people. Nobody has ever loved me!"

Yet the Lord came into Nicky's heart—and Nicky finally knew who he was: a beloved son of God. The truth of God's love changed Nicky Cruz's life.

Years later, after he had become an evangelist himself, Nicky came to visit our ministry in Texas. I asked him what had kept him true to Jesus all these years. He said, "Brother David, you told me once that Jesus loved me. I became convinced of that. So, I just started loving him back. That's what has kept me."

Nicky didn't have any theology of sanctification. But he was being sanctified—because he was loving his Father, and receiving his Father's love.

### **You may wonder, “I believe God loves me, but what’s my part in all of it?”**

Here is your answer: “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9). The Lord knows all about your struggle. He is touched with the feelings of your infirmity. To you it looks hopeless—but God knows exactly when and how he will deliver you. Thank God, he didn't leave it up to us! Our part is simply to acknowledge that our own efforts are useless. We must submit to the Spirit of Christ in us—to call upon him in trust, crying out, “Lord, I can't do it, but you can. I turn it all over to you.” I want to give you one of the most important passages in all the Bible. It concerns this necessity of trusting God's love as a means to being delivered:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

Jesus has the power to purify us. And that power is available to us only as we rest in knowing we are children of God—and that he loves us. You may have spent weeks, months, years doing battle with your sin. You may have gritted your teeth and promised both God and yourself, “I will beat this thing. I will win.” No! Talk to your Father today. Take a look at that life-sucking habit that holds you, and let faith pour out of your heart: “Oh, Lord, my powerful Savior, I know you love me. And you have all the power I need. I am weak, helpless. But I trust in your power to cast out this evil thing. Lord, I need a miracle of deliverance. You are going to set me free!”

Then listen for him to speak. When he speaks to you, the inevitable result is always peace. Claim your miracle—by the hearing of faith, not by the power of the flesh. Your Father loves you. Now, love him back as a son or daughter. Amen!

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