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# **What is Righteousness?**

**533-A**

**Series: The Beatitudes**



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# What is Righteousness?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Matthew 5:6 NKJV)

Literally this says, “Oh, what bliss for those who are starved and cannot continue to exist without the righteousness of God.” As we shared in the last lesson, this study divides itself into two parts, The Practical, which is this lesson and The Principle which was in the last lesson.

The Principle began with the question—What is hunger? By means of making the Spiritual Switch, we discussed what spiritual hunger was. Many of us decided that we don’t experientially have a grasp on the concept of hunger. The problem seems to be that in the modern usage of the word, there are three kinds of hunger: responsive hunger, relative hunger and real hunger.

Responsive hunger is to respond to the physical senses of smell, sight, hearing and taste. If we smell something good, we get hungry. If we see something like a hot juicy hamburger, we get hungry. We also discussed in the last lesson how we can hear about a certain kind of food and hunger strikes. Responsive hunger is responding to one of our senses which sends a message to our brain to tell us that we are hungry.

The next was relative hunger. This sets in as a result of patterns that are set in our lives. At 12:01 PM on Sundays during church, no matter what state of mind we are in concerning the passage the pastor is preaching, our stomach’s alarm clock goes off and says, “Food!” We may arrive home at a certain hour every night according to habit and expect our dinner at that time whether or not we are hungry. It is relative hunger.

Real hunger is the kind of hunger that is a total need resulting from an absolute desperate condition. It is absolute starvation. This is the kind of hunger that if it is not satisfied will cause you to die. Stated another way, “Oh what self-contained joy for the man who is desperate and parched for spiritual things, he will be filled with the righteousness of God”.

We differentiated slightly between hunger and thirst. Hunger involves the body’s need to be strengthened and sustained. Thirst involves the body’s need to be refreshed and renewed. Together, they paint a portrait of desperation, unless those needs are met.

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The key to this lesson is in making the spiritual switch to the kind of desperate hunger and thirst for the things of God that the children of God are supposed to have. This hunger and thirst is supposed to increase daily until the Lord calls us home. The things that satisfy that hunger and thirst today ought to require more to satisfy that hunger and thirst tomorrow. Paul said in II Corinthians 3:1 there ought to be ever increasing splendor from one degree of glory to another in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and spiritual things.

In the last lesson, we took five principles of hunger in the physical realm and tried to make the spiritual switch. These five principles in review are:

1- A hungry man is desperate to be filled. He has an attitude of intensity that will drive him to wherever the food is. God wants us to have that kind of desperation over spiritual things.

2- A hungry man takes nothing for granted. He won't wait for the banquet. He will get excited over the scraps. God, likewise, wants us to be hungry over every morsel of spiritual truth. Rather than running from feast to feast, He wants us to bathe ourselves with appreciation for every morsel of the Word that we receive.

3- A hungry man will let nothing stand between him and food. He is single-minded. If he has to choose between pleasures and nourishment, he will take nourishment because he is dying. God wants our priorities to be that definite.

4- A hungry man is aware of his weakness. He knows he is not as strong as he would be if he were filled. His knowledge of his weakness is, in itself, a strength. God wants our self-sufficiency dealt with in such a way that we recognize our weaknesses and are filled with His righteousness.

5- A hungry man eventually loses his capacity to eat if he is not fed. His stomach shrinks, his capacity to eat lessens, and finally his appetite begins to diminish. God wants us aware that our appetites can change.

We closed the last lesson by taking thirteen key passages on hungering in the Scripture and drawing three conclusions. These conclusions were:

Conclusion 1- God will fill you proportionate to your hunger. The hungrier you are, the more capacity you have to be filled. We see this illustrated in Matthew 5:6, the passage we will deal

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with today. In Luke 1:53, we see, “the hungry He fills with good things”, and in Psalm 107:9, “He satisfies the longing soul and He fills the hungry soul with goodness.”

Conclusion 2- Our hunger is proportionate to our need, so God has to create needs. We see this in Deuteronomy 8 and Isaiah 41. Isaiah tells us that when the poor and needy seek water and there is none, that is when God can minister to our needs. We see in Psalm 63, “In a dry and thirsty land where no water is”, is the place where we will learn to thirst.

Conclusion 3- The level of hunger that God is looking for is intense hunger. In Psalm 42, God is looking for the kind of hunger and thirst a hunted animal has. In Psalm 84, we see the kind of hunger a bird has to return to its nest after a long flight. We see in Proverbs 2 the kind of desperation a treasure hunter has as he digs for hidden treasure.

### THE PRACTICAL

God wants us to be desperate, craving and starving in spirit, which brings us to this study on the Practical. If that is the essence of hunger, then what is the object of hunger? The Scripture cries out that it is those whose hunger is for righteousness who will be filled.

What is righteousness? How many of you consider yourself righteous? How many of you consider yourself to be partially righteous? How many of you think that if you are not righteous now that someday you will be? To a degree, all of us are righteous, but all of us aren't. The Scripture tells us that there are none righteous, no not one, so those of you who didn't raise your hand are right according to this. However, the Scripture goes on to say that in Christ, you are all righteous so those who raised their hand in this instance are right. However, the Scripture also goes on to say that one day, we who are in Christ will be righteous. So who is right and who is wrong? Likewise, the Scripture teaches that there is a righteousness of God that we can possess on a day to day basis, from moment to moment, as we appropriate the life of Christ; so therefore, you are all wrong again.

Let's see if we can find why we are all wrong. If we focus the lens of the camera on the word righteousness and then bring it into focus as clearly as we can, maybe we can remove the fogginess from the subject. There are three kinds of righteousness:

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positional righteousness, eventual righteousness and experiential righteousness. Positional righteousness has to do with the spirit. Eventual righteousness has to do with the body. Experiential righteousness has to do with the soul-mind, emotion and will. Positional righteousness has already happened. Eventual righteousness will one day take place. Experiential righteousness is happening in varying degrees, moment by moment in every Christian's life.

Rightly defined, most commentaries and study guides explain righteousness as follows. Righteousness is the state of one who is such as he ought to be, that is approved and acceptable to God.

If you are a Christian, that is an accomplished fact. If I were to ask the question again, "How many of you are righteous?" would you raise your hand? Positional righteousness is the miracle through which, at the moment of your conversion, God imputed all of your sins to His Son's account and all of His righteousness to your account. He then closed the ledger and sealed it. Let's look in Romans 3.

As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;  
There is none who understand; there is none who seeks  
after God.  
They have all turned aside; They have together become  
unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."  
(Romans 3:10-12 NKJV)

Now if you were to underline the no's, the none's and the all's to get the absolute affect of that passage, you would be overwhelmed with the fact that there are no exceptions. Romans 3:10-12 can be paraphrased,

There is none that does good, there is none that is righteous,  
no, not one. They are all become unprofitable, they are all  
gone out of the way.

Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no righteous person on earth, none. But the Scripture goes on to teach us that if you are not a Christian, you are not righteous. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no righteousness. So if you have not given your heart personally to Jesus Christ, there is no righteousness in you. However, in I John 2:1b we read,

And if any man sin, we (believers) have an advocate (one  
who intercedes on our behalf) with the Father, Jesus Christ  
the righteous:  
(I John 2:1b)

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There is righteousness, and it is in the person Jesus Christ.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things.

(Revelation 16:5 NKJV)

In Jeremiah 23:6b we read,

Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD  
OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

(Jeremiah 23:6b NKJV)

So not only is there righteousness, but that righteousness by title deed belongs to His children. In I Corinthians 1:30 we read,

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—

(I Corinthians 1:30 NKJV)

What that literally means is that you can't be righteous, but He is, so He decided to be in you. He is our righteousness. This is imputed righteousness. Let's look in Romans 4.

For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

(Romans 4:3-8)

If you have at any time by faith received the Lord Jesus Christ, Titus 3:5 tells us,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,

(Titus 3:5 NKJV)

If at any time by faith you have received Jesus Christ, for you the correct answer positionally is, “Yes, I am righteous.” In God's eyes, even before the foundation of the world, God in His foreknowledge, knowing you would say, “Yes,” to Jesus, counted it as unto righteousness.

Now we need to know what happened the day you accepted Jesus Christ into your heart. The word impute is a bookkeeping

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term. It literally means to charge to an account an item or an amount to keep the ledgers in balance. Some of you have checkbooks that you have to occasionally impute certain sums in order to balance the books. When you open your ledger before God, apart from Jesus Christ, what you see on the negative or debit column is all of your sins. You see that you are a sinner by nature and a sinner by choice. You recognize that there is nothing good there. You glance to the other side of the page to see your righteousness and the page is blank. We know this, because *there is none that does good, no, not one*. All of your righteousness at its best is but filthy rags. So you open your book and see a hopeless bank account. You are bankrupt with no hope.

If you open the ledger to the page of the Lord Jesus Christ, you see under sin a blank page, because there is none. Under righteousness you see all the righteousness of the ages is found in Him. When you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you see the Lord Jesus Christ take the computer in heaven and press a button to transfer all of the sin in your life to His account. He transfers all the righteousness in His life to you. He stamps in big letters DEBT CANCELED. Over your name He has written, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. That is what happened when you were converted. Now God cannot positionally look upon you and see sin. When He looks at you, He opens the book and in blood, the most indelible ink that has ever been used, He reads DEBT CANCELED, and then He closes the book. You have imputed righteousness, and you are now in the state of one who is such as he ought to be. In God's perspective, you are righteous.

If you are not a Christian, there is some divine bookkeeping that needs to be done on your behalf. Our Lord is excitedly waiting to make that transaction. There is a degree to which all of the Beatitudes have significance in the realm of the process of salvation. Several books have taken the Beatitudes and used them in a stair step process by which you find Christ. First, a man must be poor in spirit, because man cannot save himself. He must realize his relative insignificance apart from God. Secondly, he must mourn and repent of his sins. He must realize that he is a sinner, and that he needs a savior. Thirdly, he must meekly come without retaliation to God and humble himself. Then, hungering for God's righteousness. he must ask that God's righteousness be transferred to his account.

However, in these passages that we are looking at, Lawler

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points out, the happy man is the one who has already received the blessedness. In the Beatitudes we are dealing primarily with the happy, blissful, Christ-controlled Christian life. So while spiritually we are righteous, that is not the real meaning of this Beatitude.

The second kind of righteousness is eventual righteousness. I asked the question, "How many of us will be righteous some day?" There will come a day in which every believer will receive a spiritual body from God. We will stand before God physically clothed in the same righteousness with which we are now clothed in the mind of God and have been for all eternity. We will be physically then, what we are in the spirit today in the eyes of Almighty God. We read this in II Timothy 4,

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (II Timothy 4:8 NKJV)

In Revelation 19 we see,

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife (that's us) has made herself ready."

And to her (the church) it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. (Revelation 19:6-8 NKJV)

Sin will no longer be preeminent. Sin will no longer be a pressure. Sin will no longer even be present. We will then be as God sees us now, righteous in spirit and in body. It is the state of one who is such as he ought to be. Oh, what bliss.

This Beatitude is dealing primarily with the third kind of righteousness, experiential righteousness. This has to do with the soul, (mind, emotion and will) and our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the world in which we live and sin during our duration of life on this earth. This is the day by day becoming such as we ought to be, approved and acceptable to God. It involves looking at Jesus, who is our righteousness, and receiving His character which ought to result in the keeping of His standards and behavior in our life, our thought, and our conduct. In order to do this, we need His life. He has given us



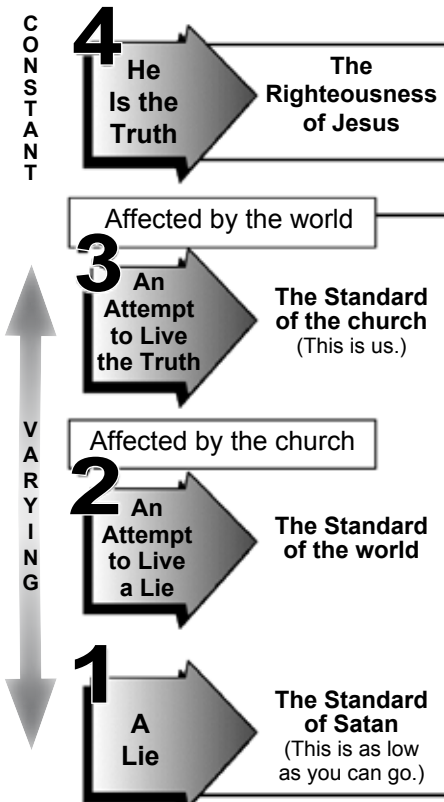
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standards that no one but He can reach. Therefore, He has given us Himself to reach them.

There are four standards in the world. The diagram below should help us visualize them. There are 4 arrow-boxes one on top of the other with numbers 1 through 4 on them starting from the bottom and going up. They are.

- 1) The standards of Satan. This is the lowest position.
- 2) The standards of the world.
- 3) The standards of the church, that is us. There is a separation between these three and the top box.
- 4) The righteousness of Jesus Christ.

### THE FOUR STANDARDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS



In the bottom box is written A LIE. By the standards of the world is written, AN ATTEMPT TO LIVE A LIE. Next to the church is written, AN ATTEMPT TO LIVE THE TRUTH. By the name Jesus Christ write, HE IS THE TRUTH. You will notice to the left of the bottom three arrow going up and down which simply stands for the fact that these three factors vary. The standards of Satan don't vary, or compromise in order to accomplish his purposes. The standards of the church should not vary, but they do compromise because of the world in which we live. The world moves in both directions. By the top box write the word CONSTANT. Over the second block, which is the church, is

written AFFECTED BY THE WORLD. Above the world is written AFFECTED BY THE CHURCH. Through history, the higher the

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church's standards are, the greater its effects on the world in which we live.

We discussed at a Bible study the effect Jesus Christ had on the liberation of women and the putting back together of the Christian home. There was no home life prior to the time Jesus Christ came into the world, either in the Roman Empire or among the Greeks or the Jews. Marriage had dissolved into nothing, and there was no such thing as a standard of marital fidelity or oneness in the home. Jesus Christ came into a world like that and lifted marriage up to its place of sacredness and holiness. For nearly two thousand years, the impact of what happened then, and what has been happening in the lives of Christian homes has so changed, in particular, Western society and in much of the world, that the home has, to a large degree, occupied a place of importance and prominence in the world.

Now the pendulum is swinging, and as we approach the latter days, we see the home begin to degenerate into the same state it was when Jesus entered the scene. The reason is that for all of these years, though Satan's lie would say, "Do your own thing", the world was affected by the message of the church. Even laws, unbelieving governments, and peoples were affected to the point that the home occupied a primary place in society. There were certain moral and character qualities existing in society that were Christian qualities, though they existed in many cases apart from Christ, as a result of the impact of the church on the world.

But today, the world has had an impact on the church as well. While you see these standards in terms of the truth in Jesus Christ that have not changed, the standards of the world and the church have vacillated back and forth and are melding, unfortunately, in many cases into one. We could look at the concept of stealing, concepts of lying, the concept of loving your enemies, the concept of immorality and many others. Satan says, "Do what is right in your own eyes." The world says, "Do your own thing within reason, but don't ruin others and don't get caught." The church says, "Be holy, but be holy by today's standards." The Lord Jesus Christ simply says, "Be holy."

You can take the compromises and the moral behavior of the world today, many of which are being accepted by the church and the clergy in many parts of the world, and see these standards are unfortunately being affected strongly by the world in which

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the church has been placed. We need to look back at the chart. The righteousness of God has not changed.

What does this mean in practical terms to us? We have been called to an ever increasing degree to conform to the righteousness of God, not the righteousness of the world, not the righteousness of the church at large. In II Corinthians 6:14 we are told to *awake to righteousness and stop sinning*. In I Timothy 6:11 we are told to *flee those things and to follow after righteousness*. In II Timothy 2:22 we are told to flee lusts but follow after righteousness. In I Peter 2:24 we are told to be *dead to sin, but to live unto righteousness*.

So experientially, the righteousness we are to hunger for, to crave, is that inner relationship with Jesus Christ that is unhindered by the presence of sin. We may call it “being in fellowship”, but I think that word ought to be restructured. I think we need to be careful how we use it. So many times we hear someone come up to us and say, “I’ve been out of fellowship,” or they say, “I’ve been in fellowship.” That plants the seed of pride upon you concerning whether you were or weren’t through this swinging door called fellowship. It makes righteousness a variable state, whereas His righteousness is constant. We grow, however, in our ability to relate to His righteousness. So being “in fellowship” may not be as simple as we make it out to be, because of our relative standards by which we unconsciously judge our fellowship with God.

If we are not careful, we cease to become progressive in our acceptable standards of life. We can, in fact, be clothed in self-righteousness, because God has blessed our business, blessed our home, blessed our lives, blessed our church and maybe even blessed our ministries. We then relax those standards in the name of grace. We redefined hunger in the world’s terms, responsively or relatively. We reach a plateau of supposed spirituality and forget what hunger is all about.

Literally, what does it mean for us to hunger and thirst for righteousness? It is an inner, almost insatiable desire to be closer to Jesus Christ and thus to be more like Him than even seems to be possible. It is progressive hunger. What satisfied our spiritual standards today should be subject to the scrutiny of a higher standard tomorrow, not less. For tomorrow, we have experientially known Him longer, we have known Him better, we

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have known Him more intimately. We know more of what pleases Him, so we ought not to be satisfied until we do please Him more. Our character should begin to reflect more of His character. Our behavior should reflect more of His behavior. Our self-sufficiency should diminish into insignificance. He should be everything, and we should be nothing. Yet, in Him, He can be everything in us. This is a paradox, but it is living every moment in the sheer exhilaration of unbroken communion with God which requires an ever increasing level of His righteousness. This is the righteousness of God.

What God wants from you and me today is for us to come to crave that kind of intimacy with Him more than our necessary food as the Scripture says. Spiritually, He sees you as righteous. Bodily, He promises one day you will be righteous, but what He wants is a minute by minute control of your life. That is what righteousness is.

How do we become experientially more righteous than we are? Jesus said that we are to hunger for it. Let's face it, we don't all possess the same hunger for spiritual things. None of us hunger continually at the same rate. Few of us see our hunger grow more intense as the years go by as it ought to. So what is the answer?

The next lesson will have the third part of our series on "How to Get Hungry, So God Can Fill Us". The outline for the next lesson is a three letter word. How to Get Hungry—EAT. I won't tell you what words those three letters stand for, however. You will have to study the next lesson to find out.

In closing, I want to explain one subject we will cover in the next lesson. God is not in the business of blessing your righteousness. He is in the business of blessing your hunger. Ask God this week to give you an appetite that you've never had before. Ask Him to give you an appetite that grows with every passing day, so that you cannot be satisfied until you have more and more and more of Him. Oh what bliss, what self-contained joy for those who are desperately starved for His moment by moment control of their lives for "they shall be filled with the righteousness of God".

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