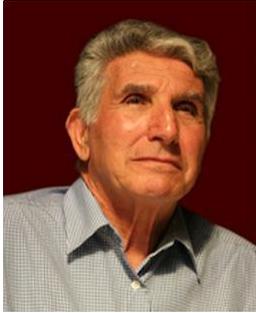


God as Father and The Righteousness of God

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God as Father

Two messages regarding God as Father

I rarely, if ever, call on God the Father. My prayers are always directly to the Lord Jesus. Even though Jesus said we should pray to the Father in Jesus' name, I pray directly to the Lord. I am more comfortable with the word *Lord* than I am with the word *Father*. Maybe this is true for you also. You would think it is a small matter how we address God, but I am being persuaded it is a great matter. I believe we have all suffered appreciable loss by the failure to acknowledge and to call upon God the Father. When the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, this is how he answered them, "Pray in this way: *Our Father...*" And when He was resurrected, He said, "I am going to My Father and your Father." So this is more than just a little punctuation. This is at the heart of the mystery of the Godhead, of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Not the least of the functions of Jesus as Son is to reveal the Father who sent Him. All that He did was performed through the inspiration of the Father, never speaking His own words, but only what the Father gave Him. Even at the last He prayed, "Father, if this cup could pass, let it pass; nevertheless, Your will be done."

Jesus is a remarkable statement of a son who reveals the Father, but if that is not taken into our deepest consideration, we are missing something foundational to the faith. Evidently it is on the heart of God to correct this deficiency because through Jesus we have been given the privilege to call on God the Father. Not just any father, or just an abstract little term, but a distinctive person who has certain characteristics. If God is an abstraction, the fleshly mind is quick to fill in with a god of our own choosing. We might find ourselves worshiping an idol just by reference to the word *God*. So it is very important that when we use the word God, it is a reference to the one and true God.

If we do not have a concept of God the Father, what concept do we have of fatherhood itself? If we have not understood the authority that is inherent in fatherhood, what are we able to recognize when it is set before us in the Church? So everything is adversely affected to the degree that we do not have a right reckoning and understanding appropriate to us as God's children. How shall we be children in a serious way if we have not understood the Father in a serious way? Everything suffers loss in one form or another. The recognition of God the Father and the recognition of

ourselves decline in proportion to the inadequate understanding of the Father. The Father is the pivot of every consideration that makes the faith the faith and by which we can call ourselves Christian. Many of us have suffered loss; either we have grown up without fathers, and therefore could not lay hold of the concept of God the Father, or we had fathers who were derelict, either in their neglect or their abuse. They have given us a terrible slant and prejudicial attitude about the word *father* itself, so we are not comfortable in invoking that word in reference to God. Our own human experience has colored the way in which we perceive God. Maybe the reason we have had derelict fathers, those who did not set forth the genius of fatherhood from the great prototype of the God who is in heaven, is because they themselves were not instructed. Therefore generation to generation suffers loss, and we communicate to our children less than what ought to be communicated as fathers.

The scriptures emphasize the chastening aspect of fatherhood. The Father chastens those whom He loves. For the lack of that chastening we have many derelict sons today, children that are unwise or unruly. The rebellion in the children of our generation may be an organic cry for the lack of a fatherhood that chastens. Chastening is painful, and only a father's love will enable it to be expressed. A father who does not love his children will shrink from chastening them because it hurts him to inflict it. The thing that distinguishes God the Father is that He does not hold back. He bears the pain, but He performs it. If you can follow me, the crucifixion of Jesus was the Father chastening the Son, who knew no sin, but became sin for our sake, that we who knew no righteousness might become righteous. There was a chastening that was required. The Son bore that penalty freely and voluntarily, but the Father did not withhold it.

As anyone who has contemplated the cross knows, Jesus bore it in full, and even as a Son. He trembled in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing what it was going to mean; not only the physical torture, brutal though it was, but the denial of the presence of the Father. The exquisite and final mark of that chastening was the absence of the sense of the Father at the most critical, crisis moment, when a Son, who has eternally lived with that presence, has in that moment to forsake it. Few have considered the history of Jesus before His birth. Before His human advent, where was He? What was He doing? With whom was He? Jesus had a relationship with the Father since time immemorial. He lived and basked in that presence. It was His chief delight. He forsook and left that to come to the earth, retaining

that presence with Him, but at the cross it was removed. Therefore, we have His great cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

We have a whole generation of unruly, wild, unmanageable children who are registering their lack of love, most profoundly expressed by their parents' failure to chasten them, by going off into forms of rebellion. They humiliate their fathers by puncturing their skin with earrings, tattoos, and every kind of grotesque thing, letting their hair grow long and looking wild, anything they know that will discomfort their fathers, because those fathers have failed to express deepest love through chastening.

This prototype of God the Father is critical. It is not a little luxury, or icing on the cake; it is the cake itself. If we miss God the Father, how do we understand the Son? How do we understand ourselves as sons and daughters? How do we understand authority? The precious thing about the fatherhood of God is not only providing the prototype by which fatherhood can be modeled, but also the grace to be it. It takes grace to be a father, and it is my most conspicuous failure naturally-speaking, as the present condition of my sons testifies. I have no natural qualification to be what the Lord is calling for. Praise God, there is a prototype of the Father in heaven, and grace from that Father to be that in the earth. As Paul said, we have many teachers, but few fathers.

Jesus is the epitome of brokenness, and therefore, this quality is at the heart of sonship. He made himself a voluntary candidate to experience the cross in obedience to the Father, which was not academic or antiseptic, but out of the love of the Father, because the activity of the Son glorified the Father. We read that "to Him every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus, the Christ, is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." So we need to come into the realization that our every action, every service and conduct has as its ultimate consideration the glory of God the Father. That is how it was for Jesus unto death at the cross, and that is how it must be for us also. But if the Father is only an abstraction, if it is only a word that has no palpable meaning, no cogent image that is true, what kind of glory can be rendered, and what kind of sacrifice and service can be performed if it is not to the glory of God the Father in a way that is really relative to our cognizance of God as Father. So are you persuaded that the concept of God the Father is no small thing?

I have been reading *The Forgotten Father* by Thomas Smail. He is one of the leaders of the British charismatic movement. Back when this book was

written, he was sensing certain unhappy aspects of *charismatica* that were the result of the absence of this consideration of God the Father, and that the Spirit of God was being extracted from the trinity, but independent of the rest of the triune godhead. It is always a danger to celebrate the Spirit as an independent entity. Smail writes that the evangelicals or fundamentalists are equally as guilty in celebrating the Son independent of the Father. So you must not allow the Father to be extracted as some kind of hidden, invisible entity that is behind the scenes, in favor of an emphasis on the Son or the Spirit. This gives a disfigured view of God, and a disfigured Christianity that will find itself difficult to submit to authority. I am not talking about grim submission, but a joyous submission. This is what Jesus demonstrated in His continual obedience, both in word and in deed.

I cannot even begin to measure the heartache and problems that we have had to experience in the history of this little community just over the issue of authority. There are believers who have come to us who have been so disfigured by their own earthly experiences, or religious experiences, that they are unable to recognize and submit to the measure of authority that is here in this place. We have had to struggle through their misconceptions because they simply cannot relate to authority. They have never settled the issue, nor known it at its foundation with God the Father.

Jesus came to reveal God as Father. That is so profound a requirement for the sanity and reality of true living, that the Father did not think it too costly to send His Son for that very demonstration. Many of us have an unconscious way of relegating the Father to the dustbin. This is like those deists who believe that He somehow set everything in motion, set the clock ticking, and then absents Himself as the hidden God. God the Father is relegated as an afterthought, when He is the central and foremost reality.

Until we call upon Him as Father, until we can employ that word with meaning and with the reality that pertains to that Center of the godhead, then what else can be in right place and relationship? That is why Jesus taught the disciples to pray, at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father..." Until you begin with that, there is no beginning. If the word *father* is an abstraction, or you feel uncomfortable about using that word, then there is a way in which we will suffer loss to one degree or another. God the Father is the beginning and the foundation. He is a God who is, and ever and always was, the great Creator, the source of

everything. He desires that He should be addressed as *Father*, but He should be addressed with meaning, with comprehension, that when we speak that word, there is an image that rises up in conjunction with it that is true, fitting and appropriate to Him who desires to be known and called upon as *Father*.

Can we say the word *Father* with the kind of reality for which God waits? Maybe it is an ultimate place to where we are being brought, and we have not yet come to it. It is no more possible than saying that Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit, except by the reality to which we are brought into the wonderful sanctifying work of God. When we can say *Father* with affection and esteem, when it conjures up a sense of something that is not imagined, but real, we have come to a very great place. In fact, can we be sons until we can say that? Maybe it would be better if we would hold the word *Abba* until the reality has broken into our hearts. That is true for everything. Maybe one of the things that hinders the reality is our premature vocalizing of it before the Lord Himself has made it real. So we need to guard our mouths and desire the foundational reality of God as *Father*. Jesus has revealed the *Father* in aspects of His fatherliness that we would not have seen if the *Father* had not sent His Son. When we say *Father*, something should well up in us of a recognition and an affection and worship appropriate to Him. Until that time we need to hold back in any kind of premature expression of the word, so that when the expression comes, it comes in spirit and in truth. The *Father* is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. What kind of worship have we been emitting until we have come to this kind of recognition? It is clear that our worship is lacking in exact proportion to the lack of this foundational reality. God is addressing it now.

Until that reality comes, our worship will be ambiguous and vague, our service will be shallow, our relationships will be lacking, and our submission to His authority on earth, through the appointed sources, will be lacking. We will be rebels in our hearts, and in a place of unhappiness, until the reality that comes with the word *Father* can truly be spoken. God is not just asking us to articulate a word. Who could not say *Father*? But He wants the word spoken with the comprehension of what it designates in truth. The title signifies what He is in Himself, not some vague term that we suppose refers to Him. Abstract and ambiguous Christianity is a failure, a formula for heresy, for apostasy, for all of the slipshod things that prevail in

Christendom today. Maybe the root of it is the failure to know and acknowledge God the Father for who and what He is specifically in Himself.

The centrality of God the Father is the pivot, the foundation of reality. Jesus said, "The Father is greater than I." When Jesus finally finishes the totality of His work, and brings every kingdom into submission, He then turns them over to the Father, who will be all in all. In the end, the Father who sends Him, receives the full work of the Son that He might be all in all, because He *is* all in all, or He would not have sent His Son. God the Father, as Father, in Himself has got to be understood and become real for us. It is God's provision to save us from floundering, from having an *it* rather than a God, a neutral entity rather than the actual Father, whom Jesus depicted in His every word and gesture and act.

Jesus said, "If you see Me, you see the Father." God does not want us playing about with an idea about Himself when He desires to be known for what He is in Himself as a distinct aspect of the godhead, the foundation of the Godhead, the Father who sends. When the word is spoken with comprehension and reality, requiring a revelation by which the Father becomes cognizant, and is an object of affection and obedience, then we have come to that reality. It is our supreme privilege to speak, "Our Father, which art in heaven."

So much is at stake here. What does it take to blow up this invisible barrier where God's people are just minimally polite and minimally cordial, but are not at a place where there is any real integration, though we are physically in the same building or on the same property together? Is it because there is an inherent suspicion about authority in a man, because it does not trust authority that is given, because it has never really understood and submitted to the authority that is above by the Father who is in heaven, and therefore is disqualified and unable to recognize the authority of the father who is on earth? Is it because they cannot release themselves, because they have had an unhappy relationship with earthly fathers, and therefore are prejudiced against and resistant to *any* father? There is not going to be the glory of God in the Church until those resistances, those prejudices, those restrictive and intimidating things are shattered. There is a profound and foundational thing that needs to be rectified. Do we know God the Father, do we revere Him, do we have an affectionate regard for Him? To what extent have we either celebrated the Holy Spirit as charismatics, or the Son as evangelicals,

and extrapolated them from their greater context in the mystery of the triune Godhead, of whom the Father is pivot and center?

A Pope is a vicar, a vicarious substitute that has actually displaced fatherhood. Catholicism has made an earthly person significant way beyond God's intention. Why do people need a fleshly image with all of its hyped-up celebration of a human figure? If they had the Hebraic and biblical sense of God the Father, everyone, including the Pope, would be put in their respectful place; they would not be distracted from their true Father in heaven toward a piece of flesh on the earth who does not deserve that kind of acclaim. That is a grotesque distortion, and it comes out of a failure to recognize our Father in heaven.

"Our Father, which is in heaven..." We are actually commissioned and required, in our submission to Jesus, in the honoring of Him, and in receiving grace through Him, to call upon God as Father. How unable we will be to relate to men in the place of authority, how restricted we will be in our own hearts, suspicious and withholding, until we have come to a full recognition and surrender to God as Father. This is not some tyrant who occupies the ultimate throne of heaven to whom we must give regard because we have no choice. There is a place in God in which we can say, "Father" in absolute trust and affectionate regard, with gratitude that He is who He is. He is benevolent, and His greatest benevolence is His chastisement of sons. Where would we be if we had no corrective influence like that, if we could do anything we wanted and no one corrected us or challenged us? We could not be raised as sons, except that we experience the chastisement of a father. This is the heart of fatherhood. What we lack as human fathers and spiritual fathers can only be corrected as we perceive God the Father as He is in Himself, not abstractly, but in truth. Pray to the Father in the Lord's name, with real respect, real reverence, and real affection.

God: The Forgotten Father and Author of His Son's Passion

In all of the present and increasing controversy over Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion*, little or nothing is said about the role of God the Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *Israel's God*, in the suffering and Crucifixion of Jesus. It is as if Jesus is some novel and autonomous figure *doing his own thing* and constituting by it a vexation for us Jews by precipitating the historic violence that the cry of 'deicide' has historically occasioned.

How remarkable a corollary it is to observe how God is omitted from virtually all *Jewish* discussion of Israel and world Jewry's increasing predicament. He is not considered as a causative factor and neither than can He be considered as a solution. Likewise, is He omitted in every public Jewish response to the Crucifixion? Ought we Jews not to ask, *where was God?*

The New Testament, of which we remain profoundly ignorant and unwilling to consider, is not shy in answering that question. In I John 4 we read "*Love lies in this, not in our love for Him but in His love for us—in the sending of His Son to be the propitiation for our sins...and we have seen and can testify, that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world*" (verses 10, 14). Notice, **the Father** has sent; God **Himself** is the causative agent; the Son the obedient instrument. If we have a controversy then, ought it not to be with God Himself, the Sender? Indeed, in the wisdom of the Most High, if we could but see it, the issue of Jesus *is* the issue of **GOD!**

In the discussion of Atonement (propitiation cited above) in the Book of Hebrews addressed to Jewish inquirers and believers in Jesus, the author makes clear the voluntary, willing sacrifice of the Son to the Father:

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrew 9:13-14 – emphasis mine).

We need to note again the Son's willing compliance as a sacrifice offered unto God, the Father. Further, it is accomplished in *the Spirit* of the eternal. So that in this one act we have demonstrated all of the disputed expressions of a Triune Godhead; Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Little wonder then, the instinctive rejection of both Islamic and Jewish monotheists to a right apprehension of the Cross! Again, it is the Father *who sent* the Son to be the Savior of the world!

The question is then raised, how can Jesus be the High Priest while himself being the sacrifice? Even if his blood were considered as more acceptable than that of 'goats and bulls,' how being dead could He bring it to the Altar? The Book of Hebrews, as all Scripture, inspired of the Spirit, explains: "*For Christ [Anglicized from the Greek translation of the Hebrew, Moshia] has not entered a holy place which human hands have made (a mere type of the*

reality!); he has entered heaven itself now to appear in the presence of **God** on our behalf" (Hebrews 9:24).

So then, if these Scriptures be true (and what evident justification for their dismissal?), Jesus is both sacrifice and High Priest and could only have brought his own blood before the Father in heaven by virtue of His resurrection! But in being dead, that resurrection could itself only have been affected by the power of **God**, the glory of God **the Father**! The resurrection therefore in New Testament understanding, is the very attestation of the Father's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice, wherefore, as Paul tells us *God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus*[Again, Greco-English equivalent of the word Yeshua, God, ('Ya") is (shua) salvation] *every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things of earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus [the] Christ is Lord **to the glory of God the Father***" (Philippians 2:6-11). This makes indubitably clear that the God of Israel, the Ancient of Days, is not just a witness of these things, or a compliant accessory, but the very Author who is indeed Himself *glorified* by the Son's obedience in accordance with **His** explicit will, so fulfilling what was foretold by the prophets (especially in the controversial text of Isaiah 53)!

The great 19th century English preacher, Charles Spurgeon comments: "*It is a sweet thought that Jesus Christ did not come forth without His Father's permission, authority, consent and assistance. He was sent of the Father, that He might be the savior of men. We are too apt to forget that... Didst thou ever consider the depth of love in the heart of Jehovah when God the Father equipped His son for the great enterprise of mercy? If not, be this thy day's meditation. **The Father sent Him!** Contemplate that subject... In the wounds of the dying Savior see the love of the great I AM... for 'It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief'" (Isaiah 53:10) (from *Morning and Evening*, February 5; my emphasis).*

Now as then, then as now, "the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11). *When I see the Blood, I will pass over you* (Exodus 12:13).

The Righteousness of God as Revealed in the Baptism of Jesus

What are the implications for the church?

At the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, the heavens were opened and the voice of the Father was heard, "*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased.*"

I have always appreciated that episode. It was a significant event at the very commencement of the wilderness trials of Jesus. The voice of the Father was heard and the heavens were opened, and the Spirit came down as a dove and abode and dwelt upon Him. Like two mighty manifestations of God, both by His Spirit and by His voice, to attest that this Jesus was the Son of God. It was an age that was punctuated and characterized by a great messianic expectation. A number of false messiahs had already come. But the thing that distinguished Jesus from all the others was His being sent by the Father. The voice of the Father and the Spirit came to attest that "*this was the beloved Son.*" It came when Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan. As a baptism for sinners, it was a profound call to repentance for the nation of Israel.

The author, Adolph Schlatter*, takes up the question as to why Jesus insisted that He be baptized, when John himself was reluctant, "I have more need to be baptized by You, because this is a baptism of sinners and You are clearly not a sinner." To which Jesus replied, "Allow this to be done, because it fulfills all righteousness" [paraphrased].

So there is something in this voluntary act of Jesus to be identified with the sin of Israel that is at the heart of the righteousness of God. I have always loved the word *righteousness*. We should all desire to know what the righteousness of God is, because **everything** is summed up in that word. The Son displayed it fully in that identification, and here we have a remarkable insight and revelation about the Lord and what His Sonship meant. It was a willingness to put Himself into the place of baptism as a sinner—though not a sinner.

I culled out some quotes on righteousness from the Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, where it speaks of New Testament righteousness as having to do with 'Covenant fulfillment.' Anything that promotes and supports the covenant of God is the issue of God's righteousness. Nor is the issue of

covenant a personal thing. But one of the evidences of having entered into that covenant is the new relationship with others who have equally entered it. Covenant means coming into covenant community. Anything that fosters and facilitates the community of God, which is like a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, is itself also the issue of righteousness. When Jesus entered the waters of baptism, He was identifying Himself with the community of God in Israel—a sinful community. He was identifying Himself with its sin, though He Himself was without sin.

This identification is at the heart of the righteousness of God. It is a picture of the Last Days in Psalm 102, when,

Thou wilt arise and have compassion on Zion; for it is time to be gracious to her, for the appointed time has come. Surely Thy servants find pleasure in her stones, and feel pity for her dust.

That is a remarkably pregnant and poetic statement that has not to do with archaeology, but with a people mysteriously called *servants* who identify with Israel. Israel has been reduced to rubble. Stones and dust are the statement of a judgment that has come devastatingly upon Israel so as to leave its cities in ruins and the Land desolate. It is a judgment that is deserved. And it is a judgment in exact proportion to Her sins, which sins are mounting.

When the entire world will be gloating and delighting in Israel's soon-coming misfortune, the scriptures suggest that there will be a small segment of *servants* that are identified with Israel by their *mercy* upon her dust and *compassion* upon Her stones. This is more than standing aside at a distance. It is identifying with their misfortune as if you yourself are deserving of it. You are joining Israel in Her sin. When God sees that in His servant people, the set time to favor Zion has come. Then the Deliverer comes out of Zion and saves Israel from her transgressions, restores her, and restores the cities that are devastated and laid waste. As I have said many times, the issue of Israel is not Israel, but the church. It is the church that has come into the call of servanthood, and is doing in the Last Days what Jesus did at the first.

This is the first act of Jesus, and therefore critically important. His public ministry had not yet begun. It waited on His attestation from the Father that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. In Scripture, the beginning is a statement of the end. The way Jesus began is the way we are to end. We

become fully “en-Christened” when we will do what He did, which is to say, when we will enter the baptism of the sufferings of Israel for her sin as if we ourselves are sinners with them. This means we do not hold ourselves aloof and at a distance lest our spirituality be jeopardized by this identification and merging. We **enter** the waters.

Who can enter those waters without holding their skirts up thinking that their own righteousness might be subverted, or that their spirituality might be put under question? Jesus had a supreme confidence in His knowledge of God and the knowledge of Himself **in** God. It did not negate His spirituality, but rather it was the statement of it—and so too with us.

Going into those waters was entering into the full identification with Israel at her worst time—in her most flagrant sinful condition. That is what Jesus did in His baptism at the Jordan. Israel was in a despicable condition. Its High Priest, its priesthood, and its temple worship were totally corrupt. The Pharisees were instrumental in His own crucifixion, and even said that He got His power from Beelzebub. Wherever you looked, the whole of Israel was corrupt. It was Israel in her worst apostasy. And at that point Jesus identified Himself with Israel in that condition, for righteousness sake, “Allow this because it fulfills all righteousness.”

Jesus is righteous because He acted for the benefit of others by identifying **with** the others, with Israel in their sin^{3/4} in baptism. He did not seek His own will, but that of the Father. Therefore His judgment was righteous. There was no unrighteousness in Jesus because He sought not His glory, but the glory of the One who sent Him. God’s righteous acts are acts of mercy independent of the worth of the individual recipient, and so must ours be. What makes it righteous is that the mercy of God expressed by Jesus in His identification had nothing to do with the merit of the people to whom the mercy was being extended. They had no merit; they had no qualification. It was just the purest act of God, independent of, and contrary to, those to whom the mercy is being extended. That is what makes it the righteousness of God. It is the purest righteousness because it has nothing to do with the qualifications or deservedness of those to whom the mercy is extended. It is simply God being God. And what Jesus did in the Jordan was to show God to Israel, “This is what God is; He is with you in your sin. And because I am joining you in this, I will also be the instrument for your benefit to bring you out of it. And My sinlessness is not going to be compromised by this identification.” Righteousness is an act. It is not a

theoretical position, or a mental attitude, or even a moral disposition. It is an act that communicates what God is—and God is merciful.

Those who extend mercy to the undeserving, and give them clothing, food, water, when all the rest of the world is either ignoring them, or heaping abuse and scorn upon them, are called *righteous* by God. They “inherit the kingdom prepared for them.” The gift of righteousness is called the gift of eternal life. But eternal life is also the gift of the Kingdom, because the Kingdom itself is not provisional, or temporal, but eternal. So when you are given the gift of life, you are given the gift of the Kingdom. It is one and the same. The Kingdom is only reserved for the righteous. In Matthew chapter 25, those who demonstrate that righteousness are those who come to Israel in her final debilitation. Here are people who extend themselves in a complete identification. And that qualifies them for the Kingdom. The only other alternative to the righteousness of God is the pharisaic righteousness. Their righteousness, which is ***their*** righteousness, does not require an identification with the sinner, but an aloofness and a distance. They hold themselves up as lofty exemplars of moral virtue. But the righteousness of God is an ‘immersion into.’ It is the complete opposite, because the motive for the Pharisee is his own elevation, whereas the motive of Jesus is the glorification of the Father.

Side-by-side, we see these two forms of righteousness—the one always persecuting the other. Jesus’ crucifixion was made inevitable right from His very first act in the Jordan, because it set in motion something completely antithetical to the righteousness of the Pharisees. Either the Pharisees had to repent of their form of righteousness and adopt His, or, blot out and remove from their sight this One whose example and presence offered an alternative to what they were about. Men will kill to maintain self-righteousness. It is amazing. Either by word or by deed, there is something so powerful in the necessity to establish ourselves in our own righteousness. And we will sanctify and justify the murder of Jesus on the basis of self-righteousness—“*for the nation’s sake.*” These two forms of righteousness are continually in conflict. Do we, as the church, recognize the difference? To what extent are we suffering persecution, in one form or another, for the sake of the righteousness of God?

One way to identify which righteousness we live by is our relationship to Israel. How will it stand when Israel will visibly become a sinful nation and will be suffering judgment for its sins? Many who are currently celebrating

Israel for the wrong reasons do so because they see Israel heroically and romantically. But when that is shot down, will they continue to be identified? Jesus had no fear of being contaminated by sinners. One of the great rebukes against Him by the Jews of His time was His free association with sinners, prostitutes, and tax collectors—as if that was the clearest evidence that He could **not** be the Son of God!

Jesus freely identified with the sinner, and therefore contradicted a false concept of righteousness. But He could do it without loss, because He knew He was from the Father, and that everything He received was of the Father. We, too, are in the righteousness of God when we have a supreme confidence that we are in God and of God, and that there is not going to be a loss suffered by our identification with sin, or with sinners. While we ourselves are scrupulous to avoid sin, we do not avoid sinners. And except that your righteousness **exceeds** the righteousness of the Pharisees you cannot enter the Kingdom. In a certain sense you do not wait to inherit it, you are already in it. It brings its own reward, which is the Kingdom, because what you are exhibiting is something so beyond what is humanly possible. It is the exhibition of the very essence of what God is in Himself, which is righteousness.

There was a wonderful unselfconsciousness about Jesus. He did not have to effect or try to maintain His spirituality. He simply **was**. This was God in the person of the Son of God. He expressed the Father continually. It is a remarkable picture to compare the Pharisees who came to the Jordan to rebuke John and to say to him, "By what authority... Are you the prophet...?" They were sent to investigate, but they never once entered those waters. They never saw themselves as needing a baptism of repentance because they saw themselves as already righteous. And then came the Son of God, who was impeccable *from His birth*, and had never sinned, and immediately goes into those waters and compels John to baptize Him. So we see the contrast between Jesus with the righteousness of God, and the Pharisees and their own righteousness, coming to the brink but not entering, coming to criticize, to rebuke, to hold up for derision, rather than to receive the benefit.

If the Pharisees had entered those waters the whole of the subsequent history of Israel might have been altered. The judgment that came in 70 AD, with the destruction of the temple, and later, the destruction of the city, and the destruction of the nation could conceivably have been altered had

the nation repented. One of the things that Schlatter makes clear is that the Pharisees were not just a religious party, they were the predominant rabbinical influence over the entire nation. So as **they** went, so went the nation. Had they repented, the nation would have followed. But no, it came only to interrogate rather than to avail themselves. That is when John called them vipers, and called them to show forth the fruits of repentance. He really let them have it, with great invective, which was deserved because of what they represented. Seeing the provision of God in baptism, they withheld themselves, and even condemned it.

Schlatter writes (paraphrased):

"The righteous man identifies with community, because he sees righteousness in the whole context of covenant community. The unrighteous man, however, withdraws himself from it...Jesus did not merely speak of love, He had it. He saw people's need as clearly as the Baptist. He saw the necessity of repentance and God's readiness to hear the repentant person's request for forgiveness, and to redeem it with the regal working of His grace...He saw with entire clarity that He acted differently than other people, wherefore they took offense at His behavior. He was slandered for His friendly dealings with sinners, but could not desert them, though He did not find the reproach pleasant to bear, for He had been given rapport with sinners by God."

He makes the issue of identification, the issue of love. Love for the Father, and love for the people, even in that condition. And He identified with them, being fully aware of what was represented in their sin. The Son of God is also the Son of Man. So there is a supreme awareness of His own relationship with the Father, but from the Son of Man's side, it was a supreme realization of His identification with man, and with sin. It is not only a picture of the Lord; it is a picture of us, who are called to be the sons of God. That we are aware of our humanity, but we are aware also, so to speak, of our divinity, or our identification with God. And it is in that tension that our obedience is called for.

Schlatter continues:

"The baptism possessed for Him unconditional, ethical necessity. The term righteousness denotes unconditional endorsement so that a coherent, complete will is demanded of what is called righteous. Jesus, by reckoning His baptism as part of His righteousness, counted it as part of His duty

towards God and the people. Thus He accomplished all righteousness. When He entered the waters, all righteousness was fulfilled, because of that perfect identification of Himself in what was represented in that water with the nation. He would not have done His entire duty toward God and the community, if He had preserved Himself pure, [but] distanced from sinners. Now, however, He did it completely when He united Himself with them and made their need His."

What a statement! That is exactly what Psalm 102 is speaking about; exactly what Matthew 25 is speaking about, and exactly what Matthew 5 is speaking about, in the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. Righteousness is identification. Think of the Father's response to this act. It is not an act that was compelled. It was an act that came out of the sonship of Jesus, of what He was inwardly and authentically in Himself. Jesus could have had more reason to stand at the banks of the Jordan than the Pharisees, and not enter lest His spirituality be compromised. Because if His spirituality was compromised, how could He then lead Israel, how could He then be their Messiah. He had more reason than the Pharisees did to keep His skirts clean. But He went into those waters and insisted, though John himself was reluctant, that it was *to "fulfill all righteousness."* Then came the voice of the Father, "This is My beloved Son."

There is only one other occasion in the history of the Holy faith where I believe the voice of God has rung out over an individual, and that was at the mount of Transfiguration. So this is an enormously significant thing, because John the Baptist himself had no natural identification by which he could recognize Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. The fact that they were cousins, the fact that he might have heard about the circumstances, both of his own birth and Jesus, was not for him the conclusive proof. "It was necessary that I be baptizing in water, that I might identify the Messiah of Israel."

It had to take place in the water. And the voice ringing out with, "This is My beloved Son," is more than the Father pointing out a fact. He was saying that in this act, this that Jesus has performed, what He has done now in this identification, has really revealed Me in My righteousness. The whole function of the Son is to make the Father known, and fulfill His purposes and glorify Him: first the attestation, and then the enablement to fulfill the call of sonship and messiah-ship through the Holy Spirit coming down and abiding upon Him.

Jesus' baptism began outside the city in the Jordan in the wilderness; it ended outside the city near the dung heap, being crucified between criminals—being made sin. The identification that began at the commencement ends now in the full register of sin, in His own being, to the point where the Father has to forsake Him. This identification is not ceremonial, but an actual immersion. Just as Jesus was immersed in the waters of the Jordan, He was immersed in sin at the Cross. He became it.

I think the church, like Jesus, will have the issue put before them through the crisis coming to Israel. Israel is for the church in the Last Days the issue of its true righteousness. How it relates, how it identifies, how it withholds itself, how it seeks to defend Israel rather than recognize the apparent sinfulness of the nation, has everything to do with itself. The Kingdom will have come when the church replicates the righteousness of Jesus in a baptism of complete identification with Israel in her sin. We will have obtained sonship in that same moment^{3/4}and maybe even a bride adorned for the bridegroom, just like the bridegroom in His own righteousness.

And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil. 3:9).

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

It is clear that any other righteousness than God's is a pharisaic, self-righteousness and falls short of God's glory. And it is, therefore, only a self-serving religious instrumentality. The only righteousness that is righteous is the righteousness of God—and **that** is a gift.

Schlatter continues,

"The Kingdom will have come when the church replicates the righteousness of Jesus in a baptism of complete identification with Israel in her sin. It will have obtained sonship."

In other words, identification is uniting. It is not just acknowledging, it's joining in, it's becoming one with. The point I would like to make is that we are not any more capable of uniting with the sins of man than we are in uniting with God. If we are only identified with God theoretically, or doctrinally, by subscribing to correct doctrines, we will not have any capacity to be united with the sins of man. Uniting with God is the key to uniting with man. Being one with Him in His righteousness enables us to be one

with them in their sin. In his aloofness, the Pharisee is indicating that he is not only alienated from man and his sin, but from God and His righteousness. The issue, in the last analysis, is union with God. That is why Jesus was the Son of God. He was in union with the Father, and acted out of that union.

In Matthew 25, the righteous, on being rewarded with the Kingdom, say, "When did we see You hungry and thirsty?" They didn't even realize that in doing it for them, they were doing it for Him. They were righteous through and through, and could not do otherwise. They were in union with God, and acted *as God*—without any thought of the consequence, or the reward. That is righteousness. The Pharisee will always think in terms of, "What is the consequence for me? How will this affect my spirituality and the way I am perceived by men? True righteousness has no regard or consideration for oneself.

All of Jesus' subsequent ministry, right to the point of His crucifixion, was acted out of the same righteousness by which it commenced. The thing that the Father approved from the beginning was the way that Jesus consistently continued throughout the three and half years. That is why the Spirit of God abided and dwelt upon Him, and never had to leave again. Love, when it seeks to enter into such a communion with sinners, must possess power not to defile itself by the corruption of others, and beyond that, to bring them help and to overcome their evil. He was upheld in communion with the people, right up until the Cross, by the brave assurance that He would conquer, and not be conquered. There was no fear of a loss of spirituality, righteousness, or integrity. How can you lose if you are in communion with the Father? The one who can be like that is not afraid of being corrupted, because he realizes that his spirituality is not the result of his own attainment. If it is only your own attainment, you can lose it as easily as you have gotten it. But if it is something that has come to you by your union with God, it can never be lost—because God Himself is eternal and enduring. That is freedom. Hallelujah. O, for the righteousness of God!

*From different works by [Adolph Schlatter](#), a little known Swiss German theologian, who was a lonely voice for truth amidst the liberal theological world at the turn of the 20th century.

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