

Righteousness

Lesson 1: Introduction

We hope that you have by now obeyed the Gospel of Christ and have become His disciple. If not, we hope that you have at least gained an understanding about the basic message of the Bible and Christianity.

Once you believe in Christ and have been immersed in water for the remission of your sin, the big question is, "now what"? There is much to learn and do; where do we start?

The New Testament tells us that in order to grow in our faith, we must learn what is good and what is evil, and how to do what is good while avoiding what is evil (Hebrews 5:14, Romans 12:9). The first priority of a new Christian, therefore, must be to learn about what is good and evil: righteousness and sin. In this course, we will consider righteousness.

What is Righteousness?

Righteousness is extremely important for the Christian. Jesus died so that we might "die to sin" and "live to righteousness" (*1 Peter 2:24*). Righteousness, therefore, must become the new standard by which we will live.

When people think of "righteousness," they often first think about "doing the right things." While doing the right things is important, there is much more to righteousness. In Matthew 7:17-20 (and, in the negative, Mark 7:18-23), Jesus teaches us that the deeds of a man are really a reflection on what is in his heart and mind: if his heart and mind are good, his actions will be good; if his heart and mind are evil, his actions will be evil.

"Righteousness," therefore, is more than just "doing the right things." It also requires us to think the right thoughts and to have the right attitudes. This is why Paul tells us to think on all those things that are positive and right and good (Philippians 4:8), and to capture every thought captive in Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:5). Righteousness also requires us to have the proper attitudes toward God, ourselves, and our fellow man (Romans 12:3, 13:8-9, 1 John 4:10-21).

Righteousness requires us to change our minds, hearts, and deeds to be like the mind, heart, and deeds of Christ (Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 2:20). When we focus on righteousness, we become more like Christ, just as we ought (1 Corinthians 11:1, 1 John 2:6)!

Growing in Righteousness

Jesus Christ was entirely righteous (Acts 3:14, 7:32). The rest of us will not attain perfect righteousness in this life (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8). The pursuit of righteousness is a constant in the life of a Christian.

The process of growing in righteousness is often called "sanctification," or the process of becoming set apart, or holy (cf. Romans 6:19). God is holy, and we ought to be holy like Him (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Holiness or righteousness does not come easily or automatically. Instead, they come as a result of devoting ourselves fully to God and His purposes, through learning more about what they mean, and through our attempts to practice them in our daily lives (Ephesians 2:1-10, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 5:14). In order to become holy and righteous, we must decide to devote ourselves to holiness and righteousness!

We will fail many times. We will often fail to do what is right in a given situation (James 4:17). We will also do what is unrighteous on occasion (1 John 1:8). We will experience times of encouragement and discouragement, of spiritual strength and weakness. Throughout all these things we must never give up: we must get up when we stumble, dust ourselves off, and continue to press upward (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philippians 3:14-15, Hebrews 12:1-2, 1 John 1:9). We must learn from our experiences, both for good and for ill, and strive to do better the next time.

While it is possible (and advisable) for the Christian to reach a level of maturity in the faith while in the flesh (Hebrews 5:14), the Christian will never attain perfect righteousness. There will always be unrighteousness to root out of our thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and there will always be more good that we can show toward God and our fellow man (Romans 3:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 9). We should not lose heart, for God will not burden us beyond what we can bear, and He wants us to grow and be more like Jesus (Romans 8:31-33, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Peter 3:18). That is the entire point of righteousness! Righteousness is that which God defines as right and good, not man (Proverbs 14:12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17). In future lessons, we will investigate the Scriptures to discover what God considers to be righteous and how we might accomplish it!

Questions for Lesson 1

1. Righteousness refers only to "doing the right things."
True or False
2. If we would be righteous, what must we do?
 - a. Have proper attitudes toward God, self, and others.
 - b. Become more like Jesus.
 - c. Focus on ourselves.
 - d. Think on what is right and good.
3. We will never attain perfect righteousness in this life.
True or False
4. How do we grow in righteousness?
 - a. By devoting ourselves to living righteous lives.
 - b. We cannot grow in righteousness.
 - c. By having good intentions.
 - d. It comes automatically.
5. What do you think are some ways that we can be righteous in thought, attitude, and action?

Righteousness Lesson 2: Love

Any discussion about righteousness must begin with love. Love is the ultimate virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13), and God is love (1 John 4:8). Yet society tends to have its own definitions of what "love" is. What is this "godly" love about which we read in the New Testament?

What is Love?

The English word "love" is a very flexible word, referring to anything from sexual desire to selfless devotion to another. The Greek word for love as seen in 1 Corinthians 13:13 and 1 John 4:9 is *agape*, and its definition is much more specific. Paul defines this *agape* love for us in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a:

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.

John describes how God showed His love for mankind in 1 John 4:9-10:

Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Godly *agape* love, therefore, is selfless and sacrificial. It does not seek its own desire or benefit, but seeks the best interest of the one who is loved. This is the goal to which we all should aspire: to love God and our fellow man just as God loved us.

Loving God

Jesus declared that the "great and first commandment" of the Law of Moses was to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind" (*Matthew 22:37-38*). As Christians, we must share in that deep love for God (James 2:5, 1 John 5:2).

Our love for God must begin with our minds and our attitudes. We must begin to devote ourselves to God by mentally deciding to trust in God and to do what He says to do: this is what the Bible calls repentance (*Matthew 4:17, Acts 2:38*). We must open up our hearts toward God and allow ourselves to be directed by what He has said, and not to stubbornly cling to our own ways (*Hebrews 3:12-19*).

When we incline our minds and hearts toward God, we allow ourselves to die to self and to live to God (1 Peter 4:2). Our goal is to selflessly serve God according to all that He has established (*Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:5-11*). We demonstrate that we love God when we no longer want to live for ourselves and what we want; instead, we want to do what God wants us to do and to be His faithful servants.

This is not an easy process. It takes time and maturity. But if we constantly devote our minds and hearts to seek after God and His love, we will grow in our love for Him!

Loving Our Fellow Man

We cannot truly love God if we do not love our fellow man; so John tells us in 1 John 4:20-21. Paul also commands believers to love their neighbors as themselves (Romans 13:8-10).

Many seek to know: who is our neighbor? As Jesus indicates in the parable of the Good Samaritan, we are to consider everyone our neighbor (Luke 10:29-37). We are charged to seek the best interest of everyone with whom we come into contact.

This is a challenging commandment. We understand that everyone loves those who love them, but God calls upon us to love even those people who hate us and who would do evil to us (Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:27-36). Just as God loved us even though we were sinful and against Him (Romans 5:5-11), we must love others even if they do not like us!

It should be noted that this love is commanded: it does not come naturally. We must first come to terms with our minds and attitudes: we must stop judging and condemning our fellow man, and instead find opportunities to encourage them and to do good for them (Matthew 7:1-5, Romans 12:17-21). We must mentally decide that no matter what they may say and do, we will be favorably disposed to them and to seek their best interest regardless. If we arm ourselves with this mindset and attitude, our actions will follow.

This love is not just for our enemies. We should devote ourselves to the best interest of our spouses and families, if we have them (Ephesians 5:21-6:4). We must love fellow Christians as fellow members of the body of Christ and seek their best interest and encouragement (1 Corinthians 12:12-28). We must attempt to show the love of God to everyone whom we may meet!

We seek the best interests of others by doing good to them (Galatians 6:10). That may include providing financial assistance, spending time with them, helping them out with various tasks, praying for them, providing them with food, and so on and so forth. Above all, we must seek the best interest of their souls, and make sure that we tell them about the good news of Jesus Christ, both through our words and through our lives (Matthew 5:13-16, Romans 1:16). How would we feel if someone we loved ends up being condemned because we did not want to offend them by telling them the message of the Gospel, or because we were afraid of being rejected? Let us have the courage to tell everyone about Jesus!

Love is the most critical component of our walk with God and with righteousness. Nevertheless, there are many other elements of righteousness that go along with love. To these we now turn in future lessons.

Questions for Lesson 2

1. To what kind of "love" does the Greek word agape refer?
 - a. Romantic love.
 - b. Sacrificial love.
 - c. Sexual love.
 - d. Friendly love.

2. Loving God only refers to what we do for Him.
True or False

3. God tells us to "love our neighbor as ourselves" (Romans 13:9). Who are our neighbors?
 - a. People who like me.
 - b. Everyone.
 - c. People who are just like us.
 - d. The people who live next door to us.

4. We must love our enemies and those who would do us evil since God loved us even when we were still against Him.
True or False

5. Please read 1 John 4:7-21. Why is love so important? Why does love have to cost us so much?

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Lesson 3: Humility

It might strike you as odd to talk about humility when discussing righteousness, but as we will see, humility is absolutely necessary if we will live holy and righteous lives.

Humility

Humans have a tendency to move toward one of two extremes: they either think extremely highly of themselves or they believe that they have no value. It is very easy for people to consider themselves as better than other people. They may feel superior to others because of their income, social status, education, culture, even religion. Some, however, feel the exact opposite: they are worthless, inferior to other people, and do not have anything to bring to the table.

Humility represents the "middle way" between arrogance and self-deprecation. If we are humble, we have a proper lowly estimation of ourselves as sinners before God, yet realize that we have great worth in the sight of God and ought to act accordingly (Romans 12:3-8).

The Humble Servant

Man has tried to make himself seem more important beyond what was proper ever since the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). Throughout human history, the spoils have gone to those who have a high estimation of themselves. Rulers who gain authority lord it over others (cf. Matthew 20:25). Those with wealth expect special privileges (cf. James 2:1-7). The world pays lip service to humility but really honors pride.

Yet it must not be this way with those who follow Jesus Christ. We must remember what He experienced: He humbled Himself by taking on the form of a man, coming to serve and not to be served, and to give up His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28, Philippians 2:5-11). In Jesus' Kingdom, those who humble themselves are exalted, and the greatest among the disciples is the one who serves (Matthew 20:28, 23:12). Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, a task normally given to the slave who was the lowest on the totem pole, so as to demonstrate this principle (John 13:1-20). If we would become like Christ, we must humble ourselves and serve others like Christ did!

Humility begins when we realize that we are but dust, and sinful dust at that, requiring God's love and mercy in order to be saved (Genesis 3:19, Ephesians 2:1-10). We must then realize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory, and therefore, there is not one person who is any better or worse than any other (Romans 3:23). This means that we have no right to feel superior or inferior to anyone else for any reason.

Humility, like love, must flow from the inside: it cannot be forced, and it cannot be only skin deep. Humility begins in our minds and attitudes. We must have the same mindset as Jesus did (Philippians 2:5-11): I am here to serve God and my fellow man, and if I do so, I will gain the eternal glory. We must come to terms mentally with the fact that we are no better than anyone else even when the world would tell us otherwise for its own sinister purposes. We must cast off the judgmental and

condemnatory attitudes that we had before we believed in God (Titus 3:3), realizing that we were and are just as worthy of being judged and condemned (Matthew 7:1-5). Instead, we must strive to give our fellow man the benefit of the doubt and be tenderhearted toward him (Ephesians 4:32). As opposed to condemning our fellow man for his faults, we must recognize that it is by God's grace that we are not in the same fault, and we must try to find ways to sympathize with him and encourage him to turn away from his sins (Galatians 6:1-2).

Humility will lead to proper service (Luke 17:7-10). Our service will not be done for our own glory, but for God's glory (Matthew 6:1-4, 1 Peter 1:7). We must make sure that we do not attempt to become proud in our humility, but in all things give God the praise and honor!

Developing and maintaining humility is a life-long process. We must actively work at remembering who we are as disciples and servants of Christ and act accordingly. While humility may come more easily in some ways as a Christian matures, new temptations develop. It is too easy for a more mature Christian to forget where he came from, focus on his own developed holiness and righteousness, and begin acting like a Pharisee, looking down on others who are "still in their sins" (cf. Luke 18:10-14, John 9:34). We never have the right to do this, because no matter how well we develop in holiness and righteousness, God's grace is the reason that we can be saved (Ephesians 2:8-10). Disciples of Christ must constantly pursue and develop humility in order to be more like their Master, and without humility, one cannot develop the righteousness that leads to salvation (James 4:6, 10)!

Questions for Lesson 3

1. Humility means that we consider ourselves to be worthless.
True or False
2. How did Jesus demonstrate His humility?
 - a. He was not humble.
 - b. He served as opposed to being served.
 - c. He took on the form of a man and dwelt among us.
 - d. He died to be a ransom for many.
3. Humility requires me to realize that I am no better than anyone else, even if I have grown and developed in holiness and righteousness.
True or False
4. If we strive to be humble servants, what will our attitude be toward other people?
 - a. Compassionate and sympathetic.
 - b. Judgmental.
 - c. Ambivalent.
 - d. Condemnatory.
5. How would you define humility? How do you think humility is demonstrated? What makes it hard to be humble?

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Lesson 4: Benevolence

We have seen the need that we have as Christians to practice righteousness, and have seen how love and humility represent the foundation of how we should think, feel, and act. Let us now begin to see how we put love and humility into practice with "benevolence."

"Benevolence" involves seeking and doing good for other people, something which all Christians should do both for fellow believers and for all men (Galatians 2:10, 6:10).

Benevolence in Thought and Attitude

Just as with love and humility, true benevolence must start with the mind and attitude. A benevolent mind and attitude in fact flow from love and humility: when we understand our place before God and others, and seek the best interest of God and others, we will be favorably disposed toward those around us.

Part of benevolence involves compassion (cf. Ephesians 4:32). Compassion is "feeling with" or "suffering with" someone. Jesus often felt compassion for the multitude and for people with whom He came into contact (cf. Matthew 9:36, Luke 7:13).

Compassion is something we must feel. We feel with or for the person in their circumstance for various reasons. Perhaps we can relate because we have shared similar experiences, or have loved ones who have experienced those things. One can feel compassion based on the "Golden Rule" principle of Luke 6:31: you can ask yourself, "if I were that person, how would I want others to treat me?", and then treat that person in that way.

If we are humble servants, loving God and our neighbor, and seek to show compassion to others, benevolent deeds should naturally follow.

Benevolence in Action

A benevolent mindset and attitude are extremely important and fundamental if we are to be righteous, but they have no value if they do not lead to benevolence in action! James 2:15-16 and 1 John 3:17-18 show us that we must do good things to others, not just think about them. After all, as Jesus says in Matthew 7:18-20, people are known by their fruits: the things they do.

Benevolence in action goes by many names. Deeds of love, kindness, mercy, grace, and goodness are all benevolent actions (cf. Galatians 5:22-24). We may show benevolence toward others by providing them with beneficial financial assistance when necessary (1 John 3:17-18). We may provide them with the actual necessities of life: food, drink, shelter, and the like (Matthew 25:31-46, James 2:15-16). We may show benevolence by visiting people, spending time with them, providing them with mental, emotional, and spiritual comfort and encouragement (cf. James 1:27). We may pray for people (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We may overlook a wrong done to us, or repay evil with good (cf. Luke 6:27-36, Romans 12:21).

God provides us with all the information we need to know in the Scriptures to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When we are favorably disposed toward our fellow man and eager to find ways to be a blessing for him, we will show him the types of kindness, mercy, and compassion demonstrated above.

When we are benevolent toward our fellow believers and our fellow man, we demonstrate Christ's love to them, and encourage them or open the door of influence to help them learn more of God (Matthew 5:13-16, Acts 2:42-47).

Benevolence is a major part of living a righteous life, but there are other important aspects to righteousness. To those we turn in future lessons.

Questions for Lesson 4

1. How do we feel compassion?
 - a. Ask how it would feel to be in their position, and wonder how we would like to be treated.
 - b. We can't feel compassion for others.
 - c. By having undergone the same experiences.
 - d. Compassion is for the weak.

2. If we have a benevolent mindset and attitude, we automatically will do benevolent deeds.
True or False

3. Which of the following can represent actions of benevolence?
 - a. Showing mercy and forgiveness.
 - b. Good deeds.
 - c. Deeds of love.
 - d. Deeds showing kindness.

4. The Scriptures equip us for every good work.
True or False

5. Can you think of times when people showed you benevolence? How did it make you feel? How do you think being benevolent toward others can allow us to teach them about Jesus?

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Lesson 5: Patience and Peace

Love, humility, and benevolence are all important aspects of righteousness. There are many other aspects to righteousness, however, including the two to which we now turn: patience and peace.

Patience

Patience (or longsuffering) is a virtue in short supply these days. We live in a "just in time" world that expects everything to be done immediately. People do not want to wait for anything anymore!

Nevertheless, developing patience is quite important for the Christian (cf. Galatians 5:22-24). We demonstrate patience when we restrain and contain our passions, desires, and intentions, and endure for a period of time.

We are to exhibit patience in many areas of our lives. We must have patience with others, enduring their shortcomings and seeking to be an encouragement to them (1 Thessalonians 5:14). We must be patient with God, for God does things in His good time, and He will be faithful in all His promises (James 5:7-8). We even need to be patient with ourselves: our spiritual growth will not happen immediately or overnight, and it takes time to learn and to practice Christianity effectively (Hebrews 5:14)!

When we are tempted to be impatient with ourselves or others, we should remember God's patience toward us. The only reason this world continues to exist is God's patience for people, giving them opportunity to repent and do His will (2 Peter 3:8-9). God has been patient with us throughout our rebellion, conversion, and stumbling afterward. If we are going to be godly, we will work on being patient also!

Peace

A similar virtue to patience is peace. Peace is a desirable attribute, but what is peace, really?

Many consider peace to be the absence of war or hostility. While that may be true, we should not consider peace to be the "default" position, that wherever there is no active war or hostility there is peace. Instead, peace is the result of diligent effort to bring reconciliation between groups that are hostile toward each other.

Consider Ephesians 2:11-18. Jesus is able to preach "peace" to us because He has become our peace. He became our peace because He killed the hostility between fellow men by dying on the cross! Through the blood of Christ, men can be reconciled with God, ending the separation between them (Isaiah 59:1-2, Romans 5:10). Through the blood of Christ, men who were hostile toward each other because of differences in religion, nationality, culture, or other such distinctions are reconciled and made one (Ephesians 2:11-18, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11). Peace, then, is the end of hostility! Through Jesus, our lives should be marked by inner peace and a desire to be at peace with all men (Philippians 4:4-9, Romans 12:18).

The inner peace involves our complete reliance on God. When we trust God that we are His and that we shall obtain eternal life, we are able to give up the anxieties of daily life (Matthew 6:25-34). When we are not plagued by all of those anxieties, and we trust in God, we may have peace in the internal conflict between the desires of the body and the desires of the spirit (Galatians 5:17-24). If we cannot have internal peace thanks to our reconciliation with God in Jesus Christ, we will not be able to fully serve God as we should: we will still suffer from the cares of this world, anxieties, and hostilities that divide us from others and God (Philippians 4:4-9).

When we have inner peace, we can also be peaceable toward others. It is true that we will gain enemies when we stand for the Gospel of Christ (cf. Matthew 10:17-39), but that does not give us the right to act in combative or hostile ways. Our defense for the faith should be done with love and gentleness (1 Peter 3:15-16). When we work with other people, we must work for peace: we must do the best we can to be properly understood and to not inflame contentions and strife (cf. Galatians 5:19-21). The Christian should not be the contentious one, but the Christian should also not "give in" to a contentious person and engage in contentious disputes! When we are people of peace, we seek to end all hostilities through the love of Christ, and should not give into the hostility that marks the Devil and his works (Ephesians 6:12).

Righteousness should also impact our general attitudes and perspectives in a positive way. We shall consider how in the next lesson.

Questions for Lesson 5

1. We demonstrate patience when we restrain and contain our passions, desires, and intentions, and endure for a period of time.
True or False
2. Why should we develop patience?
 - a. It helps to pass the time.
 - b. Reverse psychology.
 - c. We shouldn't develop patience.
 - d. Because God has been patient with us.
3. Peace is merely the absence of active war or hostility.
True or False
4. Which of the following are kinds of peace we should seek?
 - a. Peace among Christians of different ethnic, racial groups.
 - b. Peace based on watering down the Gospel message.
 - c. Inner peace based on reconciliation with God.
 - d. Living peaceably with our fellow man.
5. How can we better show patience and peace? Why is it difficult for people to have patience and peace?

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Lesson 6: Joy, Encouragement, and Edification

We have considered the virtues of love, humility, benevolence, peace, and patience, and how they are to transform our minds, attitudes, and actions. Let us now continue by considering the general disposition of the righteous person and his or her primary work toward others: joy, encouragement, and edification.

Joy

In Philippians 4:4, Paul tells his fellow Christians to rejoice and even repeats himself in the process. He rarely repeats himself; when he does so, it is good for us to stop and take notice.

Joyfulness represents the expected disposition for the Christian. The earliest Christians in Jerusalem shared meals with gladness (Acts 2:46). The Ethiopian eunuch, after having heard the Gospel and obeying it, went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). The Christians to whom Peter writes rejoice in their salvation and their hope for eternity despite persecution and difficulties (1 Peter 1:1-7). Joy is one of the manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

The source of our joy is founded in God's work and promise. God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1), and was willing to suffer the death of His Son in order to reconcile us back to Him (Romans 5:1-11). We enjoy association with God (1 John 1:1-3), all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), and a firm belief in God's presence and strength (Romans 8:31-39). We have the opportunity to look forward to eternity with God and victory in Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:55-58, Revelation 21-22). All of these wonderful blessings and promises, when duly considered, should lead to a thankful and happy spirit.

This joy is not to be fake or contrived, and it can endure and be sustained under any circumstance. God never promises us that our lives will be easy: God does promise that He will be there and that His love will endure, and that should be sufficient (Romans 8:31-39). Whether we are rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, secure or persecuted, we can choose to be happy in Jesus. We can rejoice no matter what may happen to us because we belong to God and He will save us. The choice is ours!

Encouragement and Edification

Throughout our study of righteousness we have considered how righteous mindsets and attitudes are to lead to righteous behavior, especially as it relates to our fellow man. As we have seen, we must love him, respect him as our equal, do good to him as we have opportunity, and be patient with him.

All of these things, in some way or another, can be seen as means by which we encourage and edify our fellow man. These two elements are very important in the life and work of the believer!

Hopefully we can see the "courage" in "encouragement": encouragement involves strengthening people, helping to give them courage. "Edifice" is another word for a building; thus, edification means "to build up."

We have been especially and specifically charged to encourage and edify our fellow believers (1 Corinthians 14:26, Hebrews 10:24-25). God expects much of this encouragement and edification to be accomplished through the regular assemblies of fellow believers: note how Paul is speaking of the assembly in 1 Corinthians 14, and encouragement is tied to coming together in Hebrews 10. All of the acts of the assemblies are designed for this purpose: collective prayers are to be full of thanksgiving and designed to build up the believer (1 Corinthians 14:14-17), singing involves speaking to and teaching one another through the message of the songs (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16), the Lord's Supper is to remind us all of what Jesus did on our behalf and to demonstrate our unity (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), preaching is to encourage believers through the message of the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2), and giving ought to provide benefits for the believers (1 Corinthians 16:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8-9). Nevertheless, believers are to encourage and edify one another beyond the assemblies, building relationships with one another and strengthening one another as opportunities arise (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-28). These responsibilities are important for us to keep in mind since so many today believe that they can be Christians without being part of a local congregation of fellow believers. The New Testament does not envision such a thing; all believers in God seeking to follow His righteousness seek to work with fellow believers to encourage and edify them, and be encouraged and edified in return!

Encouragement and edification does not stop with fellow believers. We are also charged to build up our neighbor for his own good (Romans 15:2). We can strengthen and build up our fellow man through the attributes of righteousness already mentioned: through loving him, respecting him, doing good to him, being patient with him, living with him in peace, and being joyful around him. This strengthening and building up should be done regardless of how our fellow man perceives us: if they are favorable toward us, well and good, but even if they are hostile toward us, we should still strengthen them and build them up (cf. Luke 6:27-28, Romans 12:20).

We are not given the right or the power to coerce or compel anyone to agree with us and to become fellow servants of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all we can do is attempt to persuade through our words and our deeds. If we constantly work to encourage and edify everyone with whom we associate in life, we will be reflecting Jesus accurately toward them, and many may be interested in learning more about that Jesus who has radically changed our lives. Let us strive, therefore, to encourage and edify our fellow man in order to strengthen and build up God's Kingdom!

We have spent many lessons considering attributes of righteousness that impact ourselves and others. As we conclude this study in the next lesson, we shall consider attributes of righteousness that focus on ourselves.

Questions for Lesson 6

1. God expects the Christian to live sorrowfully.
True or False
2. Why should the Christian be joyful?
 - a. God's love is extended despite our distress.
 - b. Because we have been reconciled to God.
 - c. Christians should not be joyful.
 - d. Because we have the hope of the resurrection.
3. Encouragement involves strengthening while edification involves building up.
True or False
4. When should we not encourage and edify people?
 - a. When they do not like us.
 - b. When they try to hurt us.
 - c. Never.
 - d. When they tell us to stop.
5. God established the local church and its assemblies for the encouragement and edification of the believers. Do you think it is important to have other Christians in your life that you can support and who can support you? Why or why not?

Righteousness

Lesson 7: Self-Control and Sobriety

Our study of righteousness, so far, has focused on mindsets, attitudes, and actions that impact both ourselves and others. For our final lesson in this study, we now turn even further inward to two attributes regarding our own lives: self-control and sobriety.

Self-Control

While many people may pay lip service to self-control, precious few exhibit it in their lives. Our society exalts excess and self-gratification, and the discipline that self-control requires is far too unpleasant for most to stomach.

Nevertheless, God calls His people to live disciplined lives in self-control (Galatians 5:24, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Peter 4:7, 2 Peter 1:6). Paul speaks of an athlete as a role model of self-control (1 Corinthians 9:24-27): in order to win the race, he or she must be disciplined in all their desires in every aspect of their lives. They must watch what they eat, get good and consistent sleep, exercise properly and consistently, and live in moderation in order to be the best they can be.

So it must be with the Christian: we must live in moderation in all things to win the spiritual race. We must not be given over to excess in any aspect of our lives, be it in food, drink, sleep, recreation, work, or in anything else. We must live in discipline and moderation in order to be the most effective servants of God that we can be!

Self-control may not be as "fun" as self-gratification, yet, as Peter indicates in 2 Peter 1:7-8, self-control leads to steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. We can only effectively exhibit the other aspects of righteousness when we have ourselves under control and not living in excess in any way!

Sobriety

When we normally think of sobriety, we think of it in terms of alcohol or drugs-- a sober person is one who is not drinking or using drugs or does not do so at all. Such is true, but there is much more to sobriety than just not using alcohol or drugs.

Sobriety is the state of not being intoxicated. We certainly should not be intoxicated by alcohol or drugs (Galatians 5:19-21), but there are many other things with which people intoxicate themselves. Many are intoxicated by money and what it can obtain. Others are intoxicated by sex and sexual desires. Other intoxicants include fame, power, recreation, work, oneself, any number of hobbies, and so on and so forth.

We should hasten to note that most of these things are not wrong if kept in their proper context. The difficulty comes when people become obsessed with them. All they can think about is the thing that intoxicates them. They feel as if the only time that they are alive is when they are participating in that which intoxicates them. Their lives soon revolve around the intoxicant.

This is precisely why God charges us to remain sober-minded (1 Peter 4:7). Our minds and our lives must be free of any and every intoxicant! Intoxicants blind us to the spiritual reality around us, and our energies and passions are not directed toward the imperative of God and His Kingdom, but instead to the pursuit of our intoxicant (cf. Matthew 6:33). If we are intoxicated by something, we are more easy prey for the Devil who roams about (1 Peter 5:8). It is only when we are freed from such intoxicants that we can think clearly about the world around us and how we are to relate to it (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).

If we maintain self-control and sobriety in our lives, we will be that much better able to show love, be humble, give benevolently, exhibit patience and peace, and be joyful, encouraging, and edifying. Unfortunately, if we become self-gratifying and intoxicated by various passions, it is easier for us to sink into selfishness, arrogance, immaturity, and distress and discouragement. Let us strive to display self-control and sobriety in our lives!

In future and more advanced lessons we will return to the theme of righteousness and delve more specifically into these and other elements of the proper Christian life. We hope that this introduction to righteousness and the core elements of righteousness has been profitable for you and has encouraged you in your faith.

Questions for Lesson 7

1. God said that we should do whatever feels good to us.
True or False
2. What is involved in self-control?
 - a. Moderation in all things.
 - b. Asceticism.
 - c. Self-flagellation.
 - d. Abstaining from food and drink entirely.
3. Which of the following can intoxicate?
 - a. Any desire.
 - b. Sex.
 - c. Desire for money.
 - d. Alcohol.
4. Being sober in all things allows us to more clearly recognize our environment, our strengths, and our challenges.
True or False
5. Do you see self-control and sobriety as being related to the other aspects of righteousness? Why are self-control and sobriety necessary for us to be righteous people?