

# GOD HELPS US LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY



**W**e live in a world where many believe that the end justifies the means. They say it is acceptable to compromise God's standards to get ahead. But the fact is we always lose when we violate God's standards of righteousness.

On the other hand, it is not always easy to do what is right.

I think of a situation in which we found ourselves as a ministry when we moved our headquarters from San Bernardino, California, to Orlando, Florida. We had been unable to lease or sell some of our property in San Bernardino. The buildings remained empty, yet every month we still had to make our mortgage payments.

I was counseled by some successful Christian businessmen to default the payments and allow the bank to repossess the property. After all, many businesses had done this during the economic downturn. Financially, we would be far better off, but that would be wrong since we had signed a contract with the bank. We purposed to trust God to help us pay the bills and sell the property in a way that would bring honor and glory to Him. Some would say, "Boy that's stupid." But we had given our word. Five years passed

before we finally sold the property.

Although making those payments was a financial hardship, God has greatly blessed the ministry of Campus Crusade. Contributions have dramatically increased year after year. I believe God has blessed us because we run Campus Crusade for Christ in His way. We depend on Him to help us pay our bills.

As Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., once said, “It is never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right.” In other words, if we had defaulted on our agreement, we could have saved a lot of money every year. Think of all that the ministry could have done with that money—but we would have violated our word and our contract. That would not have honored God. Living righteously means making sacrifices and saying no to desires. We cannot live this way in our own strength.

Let us look at a few action points that will help us do what is right no matter what.

### DEPEND ON GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS RATHER THAN OUR EFFORTS

We are so fortunate that “the LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.”<sup>1</sup> Otherwise we would be doomed by our lack of righteousness. Our righteousness does not depend on what we do, but on whom we place our faith. Paul explains:

We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet now God in His gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed His blood, sacrificing His life for us.<sup>2</sup>

There was not anything we could do to earn this gift of grace. We accepted it by faith. Now God no longer sees our sinfulness, but only the righteousness of Christ which covers us.

When we put our faith in Christ, we received a new nature—one of holiness and righteousness. Christ wants us to display His righteousness in our new life. We are commanded: “Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness—righteous, holy, and true.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet we are all tempted to achieve righteousness under our own power. That never works. We cannot live righteously without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and His power is released through our faith. For example, if a person has a problem with swearing, he could try his hardest to quit using foul language. For the most part, he would be able to control his tongue, but when someone cuts him off on the freeway or breaks in front of him in a line, his mouth curses before he even realizes what he is saying. All his efforts to control this reaction come to nothing.

The secret to changing bad habits like cursing is to turn the problem over to God. By faith, admit that you are helpless to change your bad habit. By faith ask His Spirit to give you righteous language to replace the filthy language. As you walk in the Spirit moment by moment, your heart is prepared to act righteously the next time someone angers you. When this happens, take a deep breath and start praising God for something good in the situation. Trust God to take over and work out the problem. This will make the difference in your reaction and the results of the problem.

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### SEEK GOD FIRST AND TURN AWAY FROM WORLDLY ATTACHMENTS

The only way we can live a life of faith is by submitting our will to the Holy Spirit moment by moment and depending on Him

to empower us. When doing this, Jesus instructs us to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, we will enjoy the rewards of righteous living and agree with David, “Surely, O LORD, You bless the righteous; You surround them with Your favor as with a shield.”<sup>5</sup>

A friend of mine lived in a palatial home in El Paso, Texas. He was a very successful manufacturer who had accumulated considerable wealth. Following his retirement he ministered weekly to the poor people across the border in Juarez, Mexico.

However, one woman greatly ministered to him. She lived in a little hut with a dirt floor. Her earthly possessions were a small stove, a pot, a pan, a plate, a knife, fork and spoon, and one change of clothes. Every time she saw him she would tell him, “God is so good to me, He is so wonderful and faithful to me.” This successful businessman loved God, but this godly woman was far happier than he was. Through her, he discovered that joy and fulfillment are not found in material possessions, but in a relationship with God and in obedience to His commands.

Seeking God first will lead to a new perspective on life. Old, worldly attachments will seem insignificant and God’s blessings will be apparent in righteous living. I challenge you to rearrange your priorities, schedule, and finances to put God first and follow His “right” plan for your life.

### ADJUST YOUR LIFE TO GOD’S STANDARDS

Some years ago, a Christian man from a Middle Eastern nation attended a Campus Crusade conference in another country. While there, he felt God calling him to join our staff. That decision meant much more sacrifice to him than it does to someone who joins our staff in the United States. Because of Muslim persecution in his country, his decision to follow the Lord in ministry could result in harm to him and even death—and the same consequences for his family. But he felt sure that God wanted him to tell his countrymen about the love of God as revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord.

After the conference ended, he went home and told his wife what God was leading him to do. Her reaction was amazing. She said, “If God wants you to join Campus Crusade for Christ, then I agree with your decision. I am willing to follow your decision.”

She realized the ramifications that this change meant for her and her family. In fact, today she and her husband are exiles from their homeland because of their witness for Christ. But she adjusted her plans to fit into God’s plans for their lives—and she and her husband saw tremendous fruit in their country before their exile. God continues to use them mightily in their new assignment.

We have discussed confessing sin when our lives take a turn from God’s perfect standard, but God wants us to do more than that. Henry Blackaby and Claude King explain in their book *Experiencing God*, “God wants you to have no hindrances to a love relationship with Him in your life. Once God has spoken to you through His Word, how you respond is crucial. You must adjust your life to the truth.”<sup>6</sup>

This means adjusting your life in areas in which you have been disobeying Him. If you are not sharing your faith, you begin witnessing to others. If you read questionable—even pornographic—books or magazines, or watch such videos, get rid of the objectionable materials at once. Start spending more time reading God’s Word or other materials that edify your spirit, instead. If you are not spending enough time with your family, readjust your schedule.

Adjusting your standards also may mean making changes in your life that fit God’s leading. If God directs you to change careers, you take the necessary steps to do what He asks. If you feel the Holy Spirit guiding you to help with the preschoolers in Sunday school, you willingly give up that Sunday morning class that you enjoy. If a need arises for someone to work with boys at church one night a week, you must stop working late that night. If He leads you to share His good news in other countries and cultures, you must step out in faith and respond. Knowing God’s truth and holiness always leads to righteous action. But the rewards, friends, for you and those you serve are exciting and fulfilling.

## BE AN ADVOCATE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS WHERE YOU LIVE

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are to live righteous lives. But how does righteousness impact the course of a nation? The Bible declares, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”<sup>7</sup>

In the Book of Deuteronomy, God promised to bless the nation of Israel for obedience, but He also warned of judgment upon His people if His laws were disregarded. Second Chronicles 7:14 gives this wonderful promise: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land.”

America has a unique heritage—one rooted in a dependence on God and His biblical principles. The scriptural principles for a godly nation were well understood by the Pilgrims. Their purpose, as stated in the Mayflower Compact, was to plant colonies “for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith.”<sup>8</sup> Ninety-nine percent of the colonial population professed to be Christians and most of our founding fathers were true followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Early in the 19th century, the French philosopher and historian Alexis de Tocqueville did a study of democracy in our country and came to this conclusion:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors and her ample rivers, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her rich mines and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her public school system and her institutions of learning, and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.<sup>9</sup>

For many decades after our country's founding, American leaders advocated God's righteousness in government.

- George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."<sup>10</sup>
- John Adams, the second president and co-drafter of the Declaration of Independence said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people, it is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."<sup>11</sup>
- Noah Webster believed, "The Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government, ought to be instructed."<sup>12</sup>
- Nearly all of the first 119 colleges and universities of our nation, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, William and Mary, and Columbia, were founded primarily to train young scholars in the knowledge of God and the Bible.
- Abraham Lincoln said, "But for the Bible we would not know right from wrong."<sup>13</sup>
- The first U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."<sup>14</sup>
- In 1892, the U.S. Supreme Court made the following ruling, "No purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people ... This is a Christian nation."<sup>15</sup> That court ruling cited 87 different historical precedents.

Then at the turn of the 20th century, a bloodless revolution began to change our nation. Unrighteous philosophies such as relativism and evolution spread throughout mainstream America. Without a single previous precedent, the Supreme Court in 1947 declared the separation of Church and State. This action was widely interpreted as separation of godly principles from public life. In 1962 and 1963, the Supreme Court declared school prayer to be unconstitutional and the Bible was outlawed from our schools.

Within a decade, the Supreme Court made it lawful to kill our unborn children yet unlawful to display the Ten Commandments in public schools. As a result, God's righteous foundation in America is systematically being destroyed. As the foundation crumbles, so does the nation. It is obvious from every social indicator that the secular and humanistic system has failed.

As believers, we dare not continue to be silent. For many years, I have had a deep burden for our country's moral condition. I firmly believe that if Christians will stand firm on the righteous standards of God's law, we can turn our country back to its godly heritage. We must hold fast to the righteous standards set forth by the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe in our own lives and be advocates for His standards in our culture.

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I have seen exciting gains in advocating God's righteousness through the fasting and prayer movement sweeping our country. In Houston, Texas, people joined together from November 22, 1996, to January 1, 1997, every day and evening for intercession, evangelistic messages, corporate repentance, racial reconciliation, and praise and worship. They renamed the large outdoor amphitheater in which they met "Prayer Mountain."

Throughout the forty days, worship was held in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, English, and other languages. Messianic Jewish pastors publicly embraced Arab ministers; Chinese and Japanese leaders prayed for one another; walls between people fell as they worshipped the Lord in unity. People streamed to the altar every night, eager to get right with God.

The fasting and prayer effort resulted in righteous action. Five thousand needy families received groceries, clothes, blankets, food, and toys. Lives were changed in miraculous ways. "I was involved in gangs," a 19-year-old man explained, "and two months ago was released from prison. A friend of mine invited me to

come to Prayer Mountain tonight. Jesus saved me.”

On January 1, Houston symbolically passed the baton to Dallas. On January 3, Dallas believers began forty days of fasting and prayer for their city. In February, believers in both Kansas City, Missouri, and Pasadena, California, started their forty days of city-wide fasting and prayer. Katy, Texas, located just outside Houston, also got involved in the fasting and prayer movement. The “domino effect” of one city’s example produced amazing results!<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of the beliefs and behavior of a nation, ultimately God will hold every person accountable. Whose standards of “right” will you follow? God’s or man’s? What we do in our personal lives and how we serve as an advocate of God’s righteousness to our neighborhoods, cities, states, and country will help change the world for Christ.

Every day I review and meditate on the Ten Commandments. I urge you to keep the Ten Commandments clearly in mind by writing them on a card and displaying them in your car, on your refrigerator, or at your desk.

In the following Life Application, you will find ways you can be an advocate for righteousness. I urge you to begin right now through prayer and witnessing to help others know and apply the righteous standards of our loving God.

# LIFE APPLICATION



**WRITE IT ON YOUR HEART**—Commit the following statement and verses to memory. Then when you are tempted to compromise God’s righteous standards this week, claim them as promises from our God of righteousness.

- Because God is righteous, I can live by His standards.
- Psalm 145:17 (NIV)—“The LORD is righteous in all His ways and loving toward all He has made.”
- 1 Peter 3:12 (NIV)—“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer.”
- 1 John 3:7 (NIV)—“Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

**COUNT ON GOD**—Because God is righteous, He will never do wrong. How simple and wise to place your trust in Someone who cannot wrong you. So far, we have studied a number of God’s attributes. Which one is the most difficult for you to understand or accept? This week, ask God to give you assurance that He uses all His attributes righteously for our good.

**OBEY GOD**—Our world today often calls right wrong and wrong right. We honor the immoral and ridicule the upright. Even the most “moral” programs on mass media today advocate immoral solutions to problems: living together before marriage to see if you are compatible partners; using violence to resolve disputes; using foul language to look “cool.” As you watch television, listen to the radio, or read secular books and magazines, compare the ideas you encounter with standards in God’s Word. Ask God to help you separate the unrighteous morals of our culture and exchange them for God’s righteous rules.