

LEAD A RIGHTEOUS LIFE, AND RECEIVE THE BLESSING

Introduction

It is the consistent teaching of Scripture that the Christian has been saved for righteousness; we have been saved so that *“the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us”* (Rom. 8:4.)

By the prophet Isaiah, the LORD promises that there shall surely be a reward for the righteous: *“Tell the righteous that it will be well for them, they shall enjoy the fruit of their deeds”* (Isa. 3:10.)

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs focuses our attention upon the subject of righteousness. Let us begin by considering the theme: Lead a Righteous Life and Receive the Blessing.

I. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of Joyful Freedom (Proverbs 29:6)

An evil man is snared by his own transgression; but a righteous man can sing and rejoice. (Prov. 29:6)

The man who chooses to commit a sin is portrayed as an animal that goes for the bait, only to be snared by the trap. By way of illustration, it is like an insect flying into the spider’s web. The point is that you cannot control sin; on the contrary, it controls you. Note the teaching of the Lord Jesus, *“Jesus answered them, ‘I tell you the truth, Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin’”* (Jn. 8:34.) Consider, also, the teaching of the Apostle James:

... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. (Jam. 1:14-16)

The righteous man, on the other hand, is pictured as being as free as a songbird. He is free from guilt and free from condemnation: *“the kingdom of God consists ... of righteousness and peace and joy by the Holy Spirit”* (Rom. 14:17.)

II. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of God’s Favor (Proverbs 14:9; Proverbs 15:29; Proverbs 15:8)

Fools make a mockery of a trespass offering; but for the upright there is favor [with God]. (Prov. 14:9)

Fools think that the presentation of a sacrifice to God will not only atone for sin but will allow them to continue their practice of sin. The fool's reasoning is as follows: "I can continue to live in my sins because Jesus died for my sins." The fool views Christ's sacrifice as a shield that protects him from punishment and as a license that allows him to practice sin in safety.

As this proverb indicates, "*Fools make a mockery of a trespass offering.*" When the fool approaches God with this state of heart and mind, he is making a mockery of Christ's sacred sacrifice. He in turn shall find himself being mocked and scorned by God—the fool's trespass offering will be rejected, the fool's perverse view of Christ's atoning sacrifice will be despised by God and resound to the fool's own condemnation.

"But for the upright there is favor [with God]." Listen to God's commendation of the one truly righteous man, His own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17.) Again, note the testimony of the writer of Hebrews concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: *"You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy"* (Heb. 1:9.) As we walk with Christ in His righteousness, and as our lives are transformed into the likeness of Christ our Savior, we experience the favor and acceptance of God: *"Jesus responded to him by saying, 'If a man loves me, he will obey my teaching; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and live with him'"* (Jn. 14:23.)

Jehovah is far from the wicked, but he is attentive to the prayer of the righteous. (Prov. 15:29)

Because a wicked man has removed himself from God, he will find the LORD to be far from him:

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. ²He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. Jehovah is with you as long as you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." (2 Chron. 15:1-2)

Note, too, the Psalmist's testimony: *"If I cherish iniquity in my heart, Jehovah will not listen [to me]"* (Psl. 66:18.)

But if we walk with the LORD our God, He will be near to us and will stand ready to hear our prayer: *"We know that God does not listen to sinners; but if anyone worships God and does his will, God listens to him"* (Jn. 9:31.)

The sacrifice offered by the wicked is detestable to Jehovah; but the prayer of the upright is his delight. (Prov. 15:8)

The LORD not only listens to the prayers of His people as they endeavor to live lives that are pleasing to Him, He "*delights*" in their prayers; those prayers are precious to Him. In the Old Testament tabernacle the altar of incense (representing the prayers of God's people) was the article of furniture nearest to the immediate presence of God, it was placed squarely before the ark of the covenant, with only the curtain separating the two, thereby showing that the prayers of His people are exceedingly precious to the LORD. We often tend to view prayer as a duty to be performed; but may the LORD help us to also view prayer as a time of communion with the LORD, a time that is desirable and precious to the Him.

III. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of God's Protective Care (Proverbs 12:21; Proverbs 10:3)

No harm shall befall the righteous, but the wicked will be filled with calamity. (Prov. 12:21)

The Scriptures make clear that the way of righteousness will not be left unopposed by the forces of evil present in this world, note 2 Timothy 3:12, "*everyone who would live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" Consider Proverbs 29:27, "*An unjust man is detestable to the righteous, and he who is upright in the way is detestable to the wicked.*" Because he has come to "*share in the divine nature*" (2 Pet. 1:4,) the righteous man finds unrighteousness to be reprehensible; together with the Psalmist he declares, "*Depart from me, you evildoers, so that I may keep the commandments of my God!*" (Psl. 119:115.) Conversely, the unconverted sinner finds righteousness to be reprehensible. He does so because he is at enmity against God, as the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 8:7, "*the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*" Furthermore, he is convicted by the presence of God's righteousness: "*Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed*" (Jn. 3:20.) According to Proverbs 29:10, "*The bloodthirsty hate him who is blameless—and as for the upright, they seek his life.*" There is the desire on the part of the unconverted sinner, sometimes even expressed in action, to eliminate the righteous.

Yet Proverbs 12:21 assures us, "*no harm shall befall the righteous.*" This does not mean that the righteous man will be free from the attacks of the devil and evil men; Psalm 34:19a informs us, "*the afflictions of the righteous are many.*" What it means is that no wicked attack shall prevail against the righteous so as to destroy him: "*a righteous man falls seven times, but rises again*" (Prov. 24:16a.) For the righteous man (the man who is in Christ and is being transformed into the likeness of Christ,) there is no such thing as a tragedy (an event that has a final and irreversibly disastrous conclusion.) Note the apostle Paul's testimony concerning the trials he encountered at the hands of evil men:

I know that, through your prayers and the help provided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the result of all this will be my deliverance. ²⁰This is in keeping with my heart-felt expectation and hope that in no circumstance will I be put to shame; on the contrary, I have all confidence that as always, so now also, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1:19-20)

The righteous, even though exposed to the attacks of evil, are preserved by the LORD and finally delivered by Him: *"The afflictions of the righteous are many, but Jehovah delivers him out of them all"* (Psl. 34:19.) Such is also the confident testimony of the Apostle Paul: *"The LORD will deliver me out of every evil work and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen"* (2 Tim. 4:18.)

Jehovah will not allow the righteous to be famished, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. (Prov. 10:3)

When you make the LORD your portion, He will see to it that there is a portion for you. Consider the case of Elijah; during the famine he was first fed by the ravens and then by a Gentile widow as she was miraculously provided for by God:

Then the word of Jehovah came to Elijah: ³ "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the ravine of Kerith, east of the Jordan River. ⁴You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." ... ⁸Then the word of Jehovah came to him: ⁹ "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." (1 Kgs. 17:2-4,8-9)

The same LORD who faithfully provides for the righteous, violently thrusts away the desire of the wicked; namely, their desire for self-gratification and self-glorification in independence of God our Creator. The LORD foils their efforts and desires many times in this present life, and He shall surely do so in eternity:

God will give to each person according to what he has done. ⁷To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹There will be trouble and distress for every man who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Rom. 2:6-10)

IV. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of Final Triumph (Proverbs 24:15-16; Proverbs 29:16)

O wicked man, do not lie in wait against the house of the righteous, and do not destroy his resting place, ¹⁶for a righteous man may fall seven times, but rises again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. (Prov. 24:15-16)

The picture is that of the wicked, like a ravenous wolf, seeking to devour the righteous man who is viewed as a sheep. The righteous appears to be defenseless, weak, naïve; though he is a torment to the wicked man's conscience, he appears to be an easy prey.

But the proverb counsels the wicked: Do not waste your time or your effort; those wicked efforts are ultimately futile, because the righteous are indestructible. Even if the righteous falls "*seven times*" (the number for completeness and totality, i.e., even if the righteous succumbs to death,) he shall rise again:

As it is written: For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. ³⁷... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom. 8:36-37)

When the wicked increase in number, transgression increases, but the righteous shall see their downfall. (Prov. 29:16)

When wicked men increase in number and influence and power, there is an increase in transgression; they promote evil and suppress righteousness.

But the LORD has appointed a day in which He will overthrow the wicked, and the righteous shall have the satisfaction of seeing that day and sharing in that triumph. The Psalmist admonishes us, "*Wait for Jehovah and keep his way. He will exalt you to possess the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it*" (Psl. 37:34.)

V. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of Honor (Proverbs 10:7; Proverbs 14:19)

The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot. (Prov. 10:7)

"The name of the wicked shall rot." Either his name shall be forgotten—just as his corpse decomposes in the grave, so, too, does his name "decompose" into oblivion; or, his name is remembered only with the utmost disgust: the mention of his name elicits the same response as if one were to come across a decomposing corpse.

But, *“the memory of the righteous is blessed.”* Whenever men remember the life of a righteous man they bless him, they bless God for him, and they count themselves blessed to have known him.

Not only is a righteous man the recipient of blessing during his lifetime, note Proverbs 10:6a, *“Blessings are bestowed upon the head of the righteous,”* but he continues to be the object of blessing even after his death.

The evil will bow down in the presence of the good; and the wicked will bow down at the gates of the righteous. (Prov. 14:19)

This proverb is speaking of an honor that sometimes comes in this life, but shall surely be bestowed in eternity. The picture is the conquest of the wicked by the LORD and their subjection before the righteous. Note the LORD’s promise to His people through the prophet Isaiah,

The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all those who despised you will bow down at the soles of your feet. They will call you, “The City of Jehovah, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” (Isa. 60:14)

VI. Lead a Righteous Life, and Receive the Blessing of a Comfortable Death (Proverbs 14:32; Proverbs 10:24)

The wicked man is thrown down by his calamity, but the righteous man has a refuge in his death. (Prov. 14:32)

There is a refuge for the righteous in the hour of his death. Death may be portrayed here as a rising flood water: as the wicked struggle to survive its onslaught they are thrust under its current and swallowed up; but for the righteous a refuge is provided to convey him safely through those deep flood waters. That Refuge is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior in whom the righteous trust. Note the assurance the LORD gives to His people through the prophet Isaiah:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze—³because I am Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isa. 43:2-3a)

Indeed, death itself is a type of refuge for the righteous, because it removes him from the presence of evil and ushers him into the immediate presence of Christ:

The righteous man perishes, but no one takes it to heart; devout men are removed, but no one understands that the righteous are removed in order that they may be spared from the coming calamity. ²The righteous enters into

peace; they rest in their death beds, each one who walked in the way of righteousness. (Isa. 57:1-2)

What the wicked fears shall come upon him; and the desire of the righteous shall be granted. (Prov. 10:24)

What is the thing that the wicked most dreads? It is a face to face encounter with the living God, note Revelation 6:16, *"They say to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.'"*

What is the greatest desire of the righteous? It is the desire to meet the LORD his God face to face, note Psalm 42:2, *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?"*

The greatest fear of the wicked shall come to pass, and the greatest desire of the righteous shall be granted.

Conclusion

This is a profound truth of Scripture: God did not save us in order to make us happy, He saved us in order to make us holy; and it is in that condition that we experience true happiness: *"the kingdom of God consists ... of righteousness, peace and joy by the Holy Spirit"* (Rom. 14:17.)

Let us lead a righteous life, and thereby receive the blessings God reserves for such a life; let us do so in reliance upon Christ our Savior and His Holy Spirit:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. The branch cannot bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine; so neither can you bear fruit, unless you remain in me ... ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. (Jn. 15:4,10-11)