

RIGHTEOUSNESS SERIES

STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Lets turn to Rom. 5:17, For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

It says here that those who have received an abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in this life through our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, if you understand the keys of grace and righteousness there will be nothing in this life that will not come under your subjection and authority and dominion. There will be no circumstances, no problems, no situations that will not come under your rule and your reign. The bible did say in the book of Revelation chapter one that we are kings and priests in our Lord Jesus Christ. And on this planet earth, we all have authority over sicknesses, diseases, demons and over the natural world, so that this natural world will not affect you. But rather, you would affect the world around us.

But it seems to be a conditional promise that it is for those who understand what it means to receive an abundance of grace. And the other thing is the gift of righteousness. So, as we look at this series on righteousness we want to consider righteousness in its various ways and various forms. In this message, we will just introduce the subject of righteousness and show the importance of walking in righteousness. Now we realize that Paul mentions the gift of righteousness. But before we can look at the gift of righteousness that we have from Jesus Christ we need to understand what righteousness is and what it involves in order for us to appreciate the gift of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

It concerns me in my observations and in these years of ministry how important righteousness is. Righteousness involves many things. It involves being consistent with the principles and the beliefs that we have in our life. One of the problems that I have noticed in many lives is what I call inconsistency. We believe something but act differently. We believe in something but practice a different thing. The other form of inconsistency is being some person in public and being another person in private. I believe in consistency. Whether in public or private we are the same person. Whether we are in front of people in a crowd or whether we are all alone in a room or with one person or two persons, we would remain the same person that God has made us to be. We would be as righteous and as holy as if we are in the presence of God and in the presence of multitude of people. I believe that it is inconsistency that afflicts many Christians' lives and prevent them from ruling and reigning in Jesus Christ. And that is why I felt and I prayed that we understand this concept of righteousness.

Part of being righteous and understanding what righteousness is has to do with living according to our conscience. Lets turn to the book of Acts 23 in a statement made by the apostle Paul. This took place somewhere in the middle and latter part of his ministry. He has completed three missionary journeys. The Roman soldiers have arrested him. When there was a riot, he tends to make his stand known. Paul stands after ten years of conversion and several years of first missionary journey plus several years of second year of second missionary journey plus completion of a successful ministry in the city of Ephesus, which affected the whole of Asia Minor. Now he has come to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey and he had done some Jewish custom that they were told to do. In the midst of that, he was arrested.

Now as the crowd cried against him to the Roman soldiers who has just arrested him, Paul stood up and made this statement in Acts 23:1 *Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.* All those years that he had lived in God, he has strived to walk according to the dictates of his conscience. What a powerful statement. We would expect a powerful statement to be something like a person sharing about the power over devils, power over sickness and disease. But I believe it's as powerful to live a consistent life.

Although living according to one's conscience is something private and quiet but there are a lot of things that are quiet and steady and yet are very powerful too. The things that are powerful may not be noisy. Sometimes people could be noisy and loud in their personality, but they have no consistency. I believe in being quiet, steady and consistent. No nonsense, no side track, no back tracking, but being consistent day in day our week after week months after months, year by year holding on to the principles that God will speaks to us, holding on to what is righteousness and what is right in our conscience. Consistency is an important principle in righteousness. Righteousness is not just doing something right once. Righteousness involves a consistent application of the principles of God in private and public. Righteousness has more to do than just obeying the Ten Commandments. It has to do with accuracy in the application of our conscience. Our conscience will tell us things that are outside God's will. There will always be small little gray areas that we have to deal with. There are always little decisions that we must be consistent with. There are probably thousands of situations in our lives where we are tempted to compromise with our conscience and our principles that we hold fast to. During times that we do not compromise, it is because we know it is the righteous thing to do.

There are many times when there are small little decisions to make. And many times when the rubber hits the road, I always make my decision by asking, "What is the righteous thing to do? What is the right thing to do at this time that will be consistent with my conscience and consistent with the principle that I believe?" And that will always be the factor of how I make my decisions in life, regardless of whether it brings persecution or misunderstanding or favor or applause. The most important thing in life is to stay true to our conscience and true to our principles. These are very powerful things. They may be quiet. They may be in the secret places of life, in the very private areas of life, but they will be the nuclear bombs that will change the world.

Let me point to someone whom you and I will be familiar with - the Lord Jesus Christ. Lets turn to the book of Matt. 3 just to prove to you that righteousness includes more than the Ten Commandments. It includes many little areas that we need to make a decision on principles and always ask what is the right thing to do.

What is right in our conscience? What are the principles to hold to? It's not a question of whether people will come under it or not. It's not a question of whether people will clap and give applause for that. Or whether you will gain more favor or be in disfavor. The most important thing is to live true to our conscience and principles that God has revealed to you.

Everyone has different levels of revelations. Everyone has a different degree of development in our conscience. But we all need to live true to our conscience and true to our principles. Here is Jesus Christ at the end of thirty years of private life. But for thirty years He hasn't start His ministry yet. He hasn't healed anyone. He hasn't preached a single sermon. This period of time was known as the silent years of Jesus. It was not quite completely silent because we know something was recorded when He was twelve years old. When you think about Jesus, you think about His signs, His wonders, His great preaching, and all these wonderful things. But I want to bring across a very important point. It was the consistency of His life for thirty years that resulted in the three years of powerful ministry. If He were not successful in His thirty years, you would never see the last three years. But His first thirty years were lived behind the scenes.

Sometimes we have the impression that what we project in front of people is more important because we are used to what I call a Hollywood kind of culture. We are used to a culture where even Christian conferences, televangelists, churches and ministries employ slick Madison Avenue type of professional advertising. We assume that a Christian product must be good if it gets into the limelight and hyped up by the media. We are in a society where there are a lot of great pretenders. In a culture where acting is highly esteemed some of the world richest people are actors and actresses. This is the twentieth century society. It is so empty, so false, so plastic, and what they act is not what they are in their true life. True Christianity is consistency. We need to be true to the principles that God teaches us. Whether we receive applause and recognition or not has to do with righteousness.

For thirty years, Jesus lived a consistently righteous life behind the scene that pleases God. All the little decisions that He made He chooses the right thing to please God. The bible did say in the book of Hebrew that Jesus was tempted like you and I was but yet without sin. Now don't ever have the impression that the

temptations only took place in His first three years of ministry. We know that after He was anointed by God He was tempted for forty days and then after that in His ministry the devil tempted Him from time to time. But it's not those kinds of temptations that count so much. It's the kind of temptations that take place when you are alone.

Jesus stood before the Father at the age of thirty years and in the prime of His manhood as He was about to be baptized in water. In Matt. 3:13-15 *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.* Now was He talking about the Ten Commandments? No. He was talking about doing the right thing at that time. John's baptism according to the bible is called the baptism of repentance from sin. Jesus had no sin legally.

Now let's talk about legalism. Some people are so legalistic they forgot that there are principles that are beyond legalism. You can be so legalistic that you ignore the principles. The Jews, the Pharisees were so legalistic that they forgot the purpose of the Sabbath. Their Sabbath laws made people suffer rather than rejoice. They forgot that the Sabbath was made for people to rejoice. They made the Sabbath so miserable. You could be so legalistic to the point you forgot the purpose behind the law. And that's not righteousness. Being righteous is not being legalistic. Being righteous is to follow the conscience and the principles behind all the laws. That's what righteousness means. It has nothing to do with the letter of the law. It is more than that.

And Jesus said it is fitting to do it now. Let's look at the legal sense. Did Jesus legally need to be baptized by John? No. 1 He had a greater ministry than John. He was the Son of God and the Son of man whereas John was only a prophet. In position, legally He did not need John the Baptist to baptize Him since the one who baptizes is usually above the one who is being baptized. Legally He doesn't need to do it. A lot of us are caught in a legal situation and say, "Legally I don't have to do it so I am free." Let me tell you sometimes legally you are not required to do it but morally you are. You have a moral obligation even though you may not

have a legal obligation. In position, legally He doesn't have to be baptized by John. In the form or type, the baptism that's being given the whole purpose of John the Baptist's baptism was repentance from sin. Jesus was sinless. He absolutely has no sin. Nor has He committed a single sin. Legally based on the actual baptism He does not have to be baptized. The whole baptism was meaningless if you understand what I mean. It represents repentance from sin. It's meaningless because He had no sin. There was no meaning to do it. But Jesus said it is a right thing to do.

Lets see what does He mean by the right thing. No. 1 although He was sinless He would like to do it on our behalf. He was going to be the Lamb that takes away our sin and the sin of the world. It is a prophetic picture of what He is doing for us. Secondly it is an example for all of us to know that some times you can be bigger than somebody else in position and social status or in any area, legally you don't have to do something but morally you have and it may be the right thing to do. Jesus was the greatest of all but He washed the disciples' feet. There are some things that are beyond the law. If all we have is the law, we are miserable. The law was made for man and not man for the law. All the laws of God were made for man and for our joy and for our happiness. They were not made for our destruction and condemnation. If we understand the purpose and the principles behind the laws, we would be able to fulfill them with joy.

Jesus said it is fitting to fulfill all righteousness. As we analyze it, it was the right thing for Jesus to do. Now there is rightness to some things. There is rightness in the way we correct somebody. There is rightness in the way we deliver a prophecy. There is rightness to the way we worship God. There is rightness in the way we pastor people. There is rightness in the way we counsel people. There is rightness to everything. And we need to seek after that rightness. And then that is called righteousness.

How do we define that rightness? That's where we say the minimum requirement for righteousness is living according to our conscience. What is our conscience? Our conscience is a part of us that makes us feel right and wrong. There is a sense of what is right and a sense of what is wrong that we need to be aware of. Our conscience must be thoroughly developed if we want to walk in righteousness.

Let me assure you the higher developed you are to this sense of righteousness you will walk before kings and Prime Ministers and great ones on this earth. But if you don't walk correct in that you will never rise up in life. Those who walk in righteousness walk with the royalty and will rule and reign as kings in life.

There is a rightness that we need to understand. The law did not compel Jesus to be baptized in water. But righteousness does. Let me give a few more examples so that you understand this part of following our conscience that gives us the feeling of rightness. There is a right way for you to approach people. There is a right way for you to apply for something. All these are the sense of righteousness that we must develop.

In the book of I Cor. 8 let me show the rightness and the wrongness. It has to do with the conscience and righteousness. First, we state the problem. The problem is over the eating of food offered to idols. Some people believe that they can eat it and some people believe that they can't eat it. And both groups are quarrelling. And Paul has to settle the matter. He says here, first he points to what is theological view. Now righteousness goes beyond the theological view. First of all, we saw in Matt. 3 that rightness goes beyond the law. Sometimes we could be legally right but morally wrong.

Lets say for example, you are a soldier and you are serving under Hitler or under Stalin. You were told to shoot a believer. Lets say you came across a group of Christians and you are believer. You were told to arrest and shoot. What would you do? By the law of the land, you are to obey the command. But morally you know it is wrong. What would you do? I would rather die than kill that person. I would rather be killed than kill that person. But there will be some people who would justify and say, "God will forgive me," and kill the other person. All these have to do with sense of rightness. To me it is too wrong to do. It is also wrong that I would disobey a command if I were a soldier under my commanding officer. I would rather pay the price for my disobedience than to shoot an innocent person.

There was a trial conducted after the Berlin wall fell down. The Berlin wall

separates the communist sector from the democratic sector in the city of Berlin, Germany. Many people ran from the communist sector and crawled to no man's land to seek freedom. A lot of them died as they tried to go through the wall. The strange thing that happened after the Berlin wall came down was that some of the soldiers who were responsible for shooting people who escaped were put on trial. That case interests me because it has to do with a conflict between legalism and morality. The poor soldier was obeying orders to shoot to kill. But the civilians were not escaping from lawlessness. They were not escaping from their crime. They were not escaping from a wrong thing. They were running for freedom. And the soldiers were ordered to shoot to kill. Some of the soldiers carried out their orders perfectly and killed the escapees. Now the war tribunal judges were not even Christians. And when the Berlin wall came down some of these soldiers were brought on trial. And the trial looked at the rightness and wrongness of their killing. The soldiers' argument was that they were under orders and command. But the moral argument was, is it right to kill people who hasn't stolen, murdered, raped or done any evil things. All they wanted was to live a life free from this oppressive system. And in the end, the soldiers were pronounced guilty and sentenced to prison. The only thing that I felt wrong about that is the war tribunal should have hauled in the commanding officers too. I mean those soldiers were mere puppets. They were the scapegoats of somebody else's wrong command.

But in life, we have a lot of these situations where we have to determine what is right and what is wrong and make choices accordingly. And if you choose righteousness, you will live and reign as a king. If you choose otherwise, you may never rise up in life at all. The power to break the gravitational pull is the law of righteousness. In Matt. 3, it was a struggle between the law and righteousness.

Now in chapter 8 of First Corinthians, it is a struggle between theology and rightness. You could be legally right but morally wrong. And here you could be theologically right and morally wrong. You say I thought everyone who is theologically correct would be morally correct.

Let me tell you a few stories on church history. During the Reformation period, a lot of people believed in pre-destination. Some others developed a theology of what is holiness and what is not holiness. Although they may justify it,

they ended up killing a lot of innocent people who didn't agree with them theologically. In fact, some of the most famous reformers like John Calvin, who taught the doctrine of pre-destination, was a dictator in his actual life and anyone who disagreed with him would be arrested. John Calvin went around with groups of people and arrested those who didn't keep the Sabbath or did something wrong. That was the way they conducted Christianity. The theology may have a certain truth but the way they do it is wrong.

In the early days, church services became so dull that people became religious without knowing why. They invented a way to keep people awake. They came out with batons that were made from velvet but it's hard enough to knock somebody and soft enough not to cause permanent damage. So, the ushers would carry batons and walk up and down the aisles. If anyone were asleep, they would approach from the back and that give that unfortunate fellow a knock on the head. That would be an interesting way to keep people awake in church. If you don't want to be knocked, you keep your eyes open. When you look at it, their intentions were good but their actions were wrong. I don't think that is a righteous thing to do.

Then the way they collect the offering – they would put the offering bag attached to a long stick and if the people didn't give any money, the ushers would put the bag nearer to them in a threateningly manner. I don't think this would be cheerful giving. We can be theologically correct and yet wrong in our action.

So on one side, we have the conflict of legality versus morality and on the other side, a conflict of theory versus praxis. The ideal and the reality don't agree.

So lets look at this problem of eating of idol food. Paul was trying to resolve a problem. To resolve a problem you must determine what is right and what is wrong first. I don't believe that you should remain in the gray area when you know what is right and wrong. I don't believe that you should be evasive about being right and wrong. For example, if I teach the Second Coming I would tell you what I believe. I can teach the different theological views as proposed by

different schools of thoughts but I will have to be honest with you and tell you what I believe. In those matters, I don't believe in taking a neutral stand. We need to have a stand. Paul brings out the theological avenue first. First, he must tell you what is theologically right and wrong. Notice what is theologically right and wrong is different when you come to the application of what is right and wrong.

So he tells them in I Cor. 8:4-6 *Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*

Paul tells us that food offered to idols shouldn't affect us at all since these idols are nothing in the world. If you eat the food offered to idols, it doesn't affect you. Theologically Paul makes a stand. So, as far as the idol food is concerned, it shouldn't affect you at all because we believe in the one true God the power of the blood of Jesus is more than enough for you.

Paul makes the theology clear. However, his application was different. He says although this is a theological view but the right thing to do he says here is in verse 10 and 11 *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weaker brother perish. Although theologically it's O.K. but practically it's not O.K. because some people whose conscience is weak will be stumbled by your actions.*

These people whose conscience is weak do not understand the nothingness of idols yet. Many of these new believers had come from a pagan background where they had accepted and believed in the presence of their former "gods" or demons as they know them now in the statues or idols. They have not yet truly come to a greater understanding of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His triumphant victory over Satan and his cohorts. They have not understood that demons have

been vanquished by Christ's death and resurrection. They do not have Paul's understanding that "we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one." Maybe in time to come they will understand and then their conscience will not condemn them when they eat those things offered to idols. But for the present moment, when their understanding is still rudimentary or infantile, Paul exhorts the stronger ones to refrain from eating food offered to idols for the sake of the weaker brothers and sisters in the Lord. Doctrinally and theological, it is right to eat these foods offered to idols but it is unrighteous to do so if you cause others to stumble by your actions.

One constant source of conflict in the Body of Christ is when some members have made important biblical and theological discoveries in the Word and the others are still lagging behind or slow in accepting these new discoveries or revelations. One of the greatest struggles in real life ministry is when theology is ahead of the universal acceptance since it takes time for people to accept the theological revelation. We need to understand the right timing to apply something. Theologically a revelation may be correct but whether something is right in timing is the question. That's where righteousness comes in.

Paul says although theologically it's all right to eat foods offered to idols since it won't harm you but practically speaking, you should not eat it because it stumbles the weaker ones who don't have the understanding. You see that is where righteousness comes in. What is right and what is wrong is determined by what happens to your fellow Christian when you eat that food. Look at verse 12 he says, *But when you thus sin against the brethren.* Why is he now calling it sin? Something that is theologically correct now becomes sin. How can it be? He is measuring the rightness and the wrongness of an action against the good or evil that is done to a brother or sister in Christ. It is not the doings that are judged but the fruits of the doings. The act is right but the result of the act in causing another Christian to stumble makes it a sin. You have to understand the law of stumbling is involved.

I realize that sometimes you just can't help it. You have to choose between suffering unnecessarily or suffering some misunderstanding. What do I mean by suffering unnecessarily? You see there are times when we have to make a stand in order for us not to suffer lack and need. For example, we registered our ministry as

a company under the laws of the country. Now it was a new way of organizing a ministry and we had people running us down for doing so. I may stumble people but in the end, I have to think that I have a family. I need money to pay expenses. I don't receive any salary from anybody. I do not ask the church to pay for me and my family upkeep or anything else. I need to get organized. If I sell my books and tapes and it generates some income, I have to account for it to the Government. I have to pay my taxes where taxes are due. If I say, "Well, I don't want to stumble anybody so I better don't register my ministry as a company. I will just live by faith." Ten years down the road, the Income Tax department may come after me and the same people who run me down for registering my ministry are going to laugh at me. I am going to suffer unnecessarily because I was afraid to take a stand. As far as my conscience is concerned, I will make a stand as long as I know that is right. But where the stand will cause suffering to people I will withhold myself. But if the action would not cause others to suffer but rather would cause me to suffer unnecessarily, then I would make the stand accordingly. For example, if I don't organize my ministry properly I may not be able to have the finances come in. And if the finances do not come in my family may not have enough food to eat. I may not be able to pay my bills. And I will be suffering unnecessarily. So I have to be practical and organize my ministry properly in the way God showed me. This is the way we can organize it so that we can grow in our ministry. Sometimes when you do that, some people may misunderstand your intentions and are stumbled by this. I am sharing that part to show that sometimes whatever you do, people are still stumbled.

Even in my present life at the moment, people give me things that are valuable. People want to give me Bally shoes and a ten thousand dollars Rolex watch. I said, "No I don't want all those things." And yet, when I choose simple shoes that are comfortable, some people can still deride me for doing so. "Hey, pastor, you teach on faith. How come you are still wearing cheap local shoes?" I mean we could exercise our faith for branded and expensive shoes but that would stumble some people who associate worldliness with luxury items. Sometimes we have a gathering of church members in our house and the place is just too small for the meeting. We could exercise and stretch our faith for a bigger place. Let me tell you I have faith to believe God for a bungalow but I don't want to because I don't want to stumble people. Don't even say a bungalow, when you exercise faith for a double-storey terrace house yet some people will still be stumbled. I don't know what people expect you to live. Some people expect pastors to live in bungalow,

which I disagree. Some people expect pastors to live under the coconut tree. Even that, some people will stumble. Whatever you do, you will stumble some people. I don't wear rings on every of my fingers. Some ministers do that. I do have an expensive watch given to me by a Singaporean. At the most, the value is a thousand dollars. Sometime back, I remember I had another watch that I gave to one of the bible students publicly. I mean whatever you chooses, in the end we want to live according to what our conscience tells us is right. And when you do what is right some people may still not agree with you and may be stumbled.

Of course, most people will be stumbled if we make choices. I choose not to drive an expensive car. However, whatever you drive, some people will still stumble. They will only be satisfied when you live in a manger and riding on an ox. But thank God, the majority understands.

So, I have determined in my life to do what my conscience tells me is right. It must be theologically correct. It must be legally correct. It must be biblically correct. And your conscience must be correct. And when you conscientiously feels that something is right to be done but if the timing is wrong, and some people will suffer from that action, then bide your time and wait. The time is not right. But when it is correct and when you don't do anything, you will die or suffer unnecessarily, then you have no choice but to go ahead to do what is right.

This is the same way we used to tell some people who get stumbled over Christians trying to exercise faith for church buildings. I said, "We waited for ten years and now is the time to go ahead with the project." One businessman offered to give free office premises. We can't sit and see the rent go up. We rented our house for ten years and saw the rent going up during that period. If you believe God for the rental, you can believe God for the mortgage payment. When the rental payment goes up to the point where it equals loan repayments, it makes more economic sense to take a bank loan and buy up the house. In that way, what would have gone into paying rentals would now be used to reduce the bank loan. And we get to keep the house. In the same way when we were looking for premises for our church the most important thing is ten years down the road, we would have paid off the bank loan and the church would have some peace of mind without some outstanding loan over its head. But some people don't understand. "Why should

pastor get involved with this? He should concentrate on his spiritual duties." If I do not look into this matter, who would do so? That is my question. I would be most happy if somebody come to me and say, "Pastor you don't have to worry about the new building. We will take care of finding a suitable premise for the church." One person came to me and said, "Pastor the church needs a bus. I want to donate a bus." I looked at him because I know a bus costs between a hundred and a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I looked at him and asked, "Are you talking about a new bus? He said, "Yes." I said, "By next week I would come to you and tell you what model we want." By next week, he was not around. Up till now, there is no bus yet.

Let me tell you there is something in the ministry if you don't act on things, nobody else will do. We thank God that there are people who will help to do the job but we have to search our conscience. And I can assure you in my twenty years in the ministry, we have seen our ministry extending all over the world. There are a lot of times we made sacrifices to accomplish different things. When we moved to our present premises, we had to sell our car to raise money for the down payment. If we don't stretch our faith, we can never move. And that is why sometimes we have to search our conscience to check what is right and what is wrong. I tell this story because it's just a joy to see all the things that God as done. Thank God, things are moving on nicely. Just remember this I have lived my life like Paul following my conscience to do what is right to change this life and to change the world around us. And it's important for us to understand that we need to be sensitive to the rightness of things. And we are sensitive to the rightness of something. Sometimes we waited very long. We wanted to give people the opportunity to do things for God. Some people asked us why did we wait so long? We tell them that we wanted to give people a chance. Then when the time is up and they have not done anything at all, then we will take action ourselves. But we have waited and we did wait for the proper time. At the end of the proper time where no work is done we will step in and initiate action. Too many souls are being lost because of negligence and the work of God has to go on. People change; people can come and go but let me tell you we understand what it means to stay through until everything is completed. We don't believe in a half completed job. When we do something for the Lord, we must build a ministry so that it will last until Jesus comes.

So, in 1 Cor 8 here Paul is saying that even if your understanding is

theologically correct but your action has caused the stumbling of some brethren, then it is a sin. We need to consider the factors of appropriateness and timing. What do we do? We have to wait for its proper time. And its important for us to remember that as long as it doesn't cause people to suffer, as long as it is in proper time, as long as it is theologically correct, then you go for it. And you eliminate stumbling people as much as possible. I don't believe you could eliminate it a hundred percent. Some people will be stumbled anyhow you choose. But you eliminate the unnecessary stumbling of innocent people. But those who are just trying to find fault in anything that you do you can't be bothered. You just got to push the gospel and do the work. This is why I assure those in the ministry I said whatever people say, whatever people think we know what we are doing. We know where we are going. In ten years time we will produce what we have set our goals to produce, that's important. Get your theology and the application part correct.

Now what are the principles behind these applications? As you can see it involves what I call self-sacrifice. Look at the verse there he says all these feel good to eat but for the sake of your weaker brother you don't do it. This is why I have advised many ministers not to drive Mercedes or B.M.W in this country. We are not in an affluent country where such cars are considered affordable. When you drive such cars, you may be losing many innocent souls. Some church members may complain, "I pay my tithes dutifully to the church; I make financial sacrifices for the building project. Now I see my pastor driving around in an expensive car." My advice to many ministers is choose what is moderate. In other words, if you live so poorly, people may look at you and the ministry and say, "If God cannot take care of His servants, can God take care of me? I am not even serving God fulltime." People will laugh at God because of you. At the same time if you live too richly then people will look at you and say, "It looks like this world is your home and heaven is not your real home." We have to live on an average. We have to live where we can still touch the high and the mighty and the rich and the famous but we have to live in such a way that we can touch the very poor. We have to reach in between. Those of you in business are in a different realm. Some pastors preach against Christians driving luxury cars. So if you drive such a car, you would slip into their church with a guilty conscience. No, if you are a businessman, you are there, and you know that by doing those things people are not stumbled. I mean people look at you differently but when ministers of God drive luxury cars, the church members get stumbled. Those of us in the ministry have to be a bit more careful with the way we do things.

So, we would compromise to the level where it doesn't cause the family and children unnecessary suffering. I don't want my children to grow up and ask, "Why must the ministry cause so much lack and hardships?" I want them to have as normal life as anyone who is a professional out there. Then my children will grow understanding that God is a good God. So, the line that is drawn is that it must not cause unnecessary suffering. There is sacrifice involved but it must not cause unnecessary suffering where the children would rebel against the Lord because they saw so much suffering. My wife sometimes goes to a hairdresser. When this hairdresser found out that my wife's husband is a pastor, she cried, "Alas, poor thing." The hairdresser is not a Christian so my wife slowly witnessed to her. The hairdresser's brother had gone into the ministry and her brother's family suffers. Sometimes they do not have enough food to eat. Then this hairdresser sometimes helps the brother out. Obviously that would be unnecessary suffering. Some ministers' children grow up not wanting to have anything to do with their parents' Christianity. Such situations occur because the parents didn't apply the Word and organize their life correctly. Their children grow up and even though some of them had a call of God, they don't want to serve God. I feel sad because the ministry need not be that way.

Some pastors don't understand stewardship and moderation. They go overboard by wearing expensive gold chains, two thousand dollars suit etc. I won't do this sort of things. My conscience will not permit me to do it. We need righteousness. I know some ministers who say, "I have a right to these things. I am redeemed from the curse of the law and from the spirit of poverty." Yes, that is theologically correct but whether it is the righteous thing to indulge in extravagance is a different matter. Righteousness needs to develop in our life.

As we shared it, you can understand it involves all areas of life. It's the theological aspect verses the practical aspect. The legal aspect verses the moral aspect. All these are the struggles of righteousness. If we do what is righteous it's powerful. It changes life. It touches people. As Paul says, "To the Gentile, I am a Gentile. To the Jew I am a Jew." He will reach down to their level in order to preach the gospel. Some of you wear sarong when you are in causal wear at home. But if I am preaching in an area where only sarongs are the accepted form, for example in

tribal areas and in Myanmar, I don't mind wearing a sarong to preach. We have to come to that level. If that is the only thing that they understand then lets come down to that level to preach the gospel. We have to come down to people's level in order to minister Christ to them. Righteousness is the key to reigning and ruling in this life.

It's obvious to our hearts and minds that righteousness goes beyond keeping the law. I hope that you have erased from your understanding the mistaken notion that righteousness and following the law are the same. The above two examples I have already given showed you go beyond the law. Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisee, Jesus says you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of God. Apparently, He wants us to develop righteousness that is beyond the legalism followed by the Pharisees.

Finally lets look at Romans to see the struggle of righteousness in other areas. In Rom. 14, Paul had a different problem. In verse 5, he says some people eat only vegetables and some people eat anything. He has to give theological solution again but in different area. In verse 2 *For one believer, he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.* He shows us that as far as God is concerned, there is nothing wrong. That is why he calls those who eat only vegetables as those who are weak. Verse 3 *Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord, and he who does not observe the day, to Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks, and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives in himself and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* Verse 21 *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith, for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

In verse 5, we take note of the word *fully convinced*. The other word is in verse 23, *faith*. Now righteousness is not just what you don't do. Righteousness is what you do and you exercise faith on that. What makes it righteous is that your faith and your conscience meet together. Based on I Tim. 1:19 *having faith and a good conscience*. So, what are the ingredients of righteousness? They must be faith and they must be in line with the conscience. The question that arises is, "Is it possible for the conscience and the faith not to go in line." Yes, because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. But conscience is sensitive to both the Word of God and to the people around us. Conscience is considers the rightness and the timing of an action. Not just the rightness but also the timing. The conscience senses the timing and not just the rightness of the action. So, what is right done in the wrong time is wrong. And only the conscience can sense that. But faith alone doesn't sense that and that's why we need both faith and conscience.

Sometimes a Christian says, "I am believing God for a house." Look at them and you know they don't even have faith to believe God for a room. Something is wrong somewhere. There is something wrong about his faith. Some pastors say, "I am believing God for a Mercedes Benz," and you look over at their congregation, you will find that their church members don't even have faith for a second hand car. Something is wrong. These pastors are not sensing their conscience. We are not saying that they can't have that kind of car, but we are only saying they shouldn't have it now when their church members are still struggling with poverty. A day will come when everybody in the church will prosper. Our society is reasonably prosperous. We need to understand that as society prospers it's different. Lets take for example, if I am in New Zealand and if God blesses me in a New Zealand church and enables me to buy a bungalow in New Zealand, do you know to the New Zealanders it's normal since ninety percent of the houses there are bungalows? But if you have a church in India and the people are so poor then you must look at what is average and make sure it doesn't stumble them. What I am saying here is situational ethics. It is where the rightness and wrongness of something has to be felt with the conscience. You cannot take what is suitable for your local situation and apply the same standards to Christians all over the world. I cannot take what is normal and suitable in our church structure and apply to another culture.

In the book of I Cor., it also applies to marriage, divorce and re-marriage.

In I Cor. 7:10 *Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord. A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord.* Can you see Paul says this is thus says the Lord then he says this is my advice. Now what is this trouble that he is talking about? This is a struggle of righteousness - to do what is right in the situation in their time. You cannot take a divorce in a particular case and apply the same to every case. You cannot say, "Why do you treat this person this way and the other person the other way?" Every case is special. I cannot take a hundred percent of everything that I do in my church and ask you to do exactly the same. The principles may be the same but the situation may be different. On top of that, the Lord may have different purposes for different churches. So your church shouldn't be a carbon copy of my church – you will have to seek God's purposes and plans for your church.

But even those of us parents know that each of our children is different. Some would cry before you cane them. Some would keep mum when you cane them. A wise parent knows that you may have rules and principles but when you apply it, you need to be sensitive to your conscience. Let's say you have two children - one is a tough type and needs three whacks before he repents and cries. But the other is the soft one - all you have to do is look sternly at him and he would cry. Then one day you lose your temper. You take the cane and whack both children. It looks like you are right but you are wrong because you did it in anger. But lets say you were right to be angry but you could still be wrong in your severe disciplining and that night you cannot sleep because the Lord told you, "You should not have been so hard against the soft one." Don't look at me that way – I am not talking about me. It's a cooked up story.

Paul wrote to Timothy and said God has not given a spirit of fear. Some bible teachers say therefore Timothy was a fearful person. Somebody prophesied over you that God is going to bless you and meet every need. The others hearing that prophecy rashly conclude that you must be very poor. What kind of conclusion is that? Let me get back to the story. God told you, "You should not have been so hard on the soft one because it breaks his spirit. And you may have injured the person's soul the rest of his life. This is where the conscience comes in. This is where righteousness comes in.

So today, I just introduce you to the subject so that you understand why we touch on this area. Righteousness is more than just observing the law. Righteousness is more than theology. Righteousness has to do with conscience and timing. It has to do with the sense of righteousness that we develop in our life. The more mature we become the more we can sense what is the right thing to do in a situation. It is important for us to understand the struggle for righteousness is going on in our life. And those who would allow the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness to rule and reign in their life will rise up in life to become a great person in God. Let me talk about greatness as an honor from God. Don't seek honor from man but seek honor from God. God will raise you up as a leader to the human race. God will raise you up as leaders who sit in the company of kings and prime ministers. Many kings, presidents, heads of states, prime ministers and leaders are struggling with right and wrong. The top businessmen in the world, both the good ones and not only the bad ones are struggling over rightness and wrongness. And whoever has the wisdom to know what is right and wrong will become their leader. That is why you will rule and reign if you develop righteousness in your life.