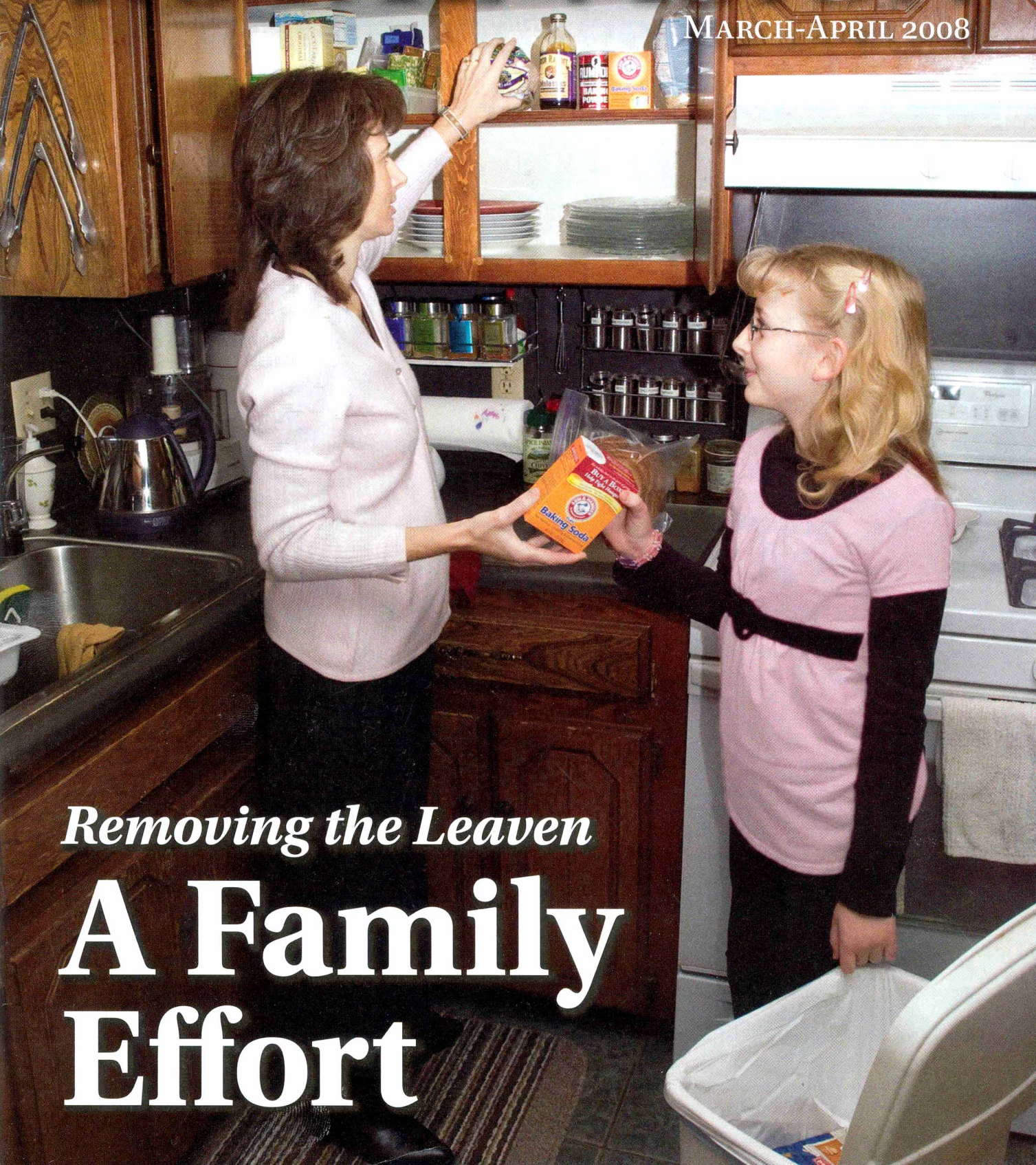


SPRING HOLY DAY ISSUE

ROYAL VISION

MARCH-APRIL 2008



Removing the Leaven

A Family Effort



ROYAL VISION

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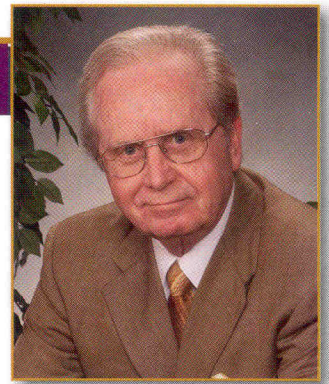
ABOUT OUR COVER Removing the leaven from our homes—a vital way that we prepare for the spring holy days—teaches our children deep, spiritual lessons. (Royal Vision)

EDITOR IN CHIEF Gerald Flurry **SENIOR EDITORS** Stephen Flurry, Joel Hilliker
MANAGING EDITOR Ryan Malone **CONTRIBUTING EDITORS** Mark Jenkins,
Gary Rethford, Max Rumler **CONTRIBUTORS** Dennis Leap, Mark Nash
PROOFREADERS Teri Bailey, Donna Grieves
PREPRESS PRODUCTION Michael Dattolo **CIRCULATION MANAGER** Mark Saranga

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What's So Bad About Self-Righteousness?

ONCE THERE WAS A MESSENGER WHO CAME INTO a rich man's house and told him that all his oxen and asses had been taken by robbers and many of his servants killed. Just as he finished talking, there came another messenger who said that fire had come down from heaven and destroyed all his sheep. That messenger had no more finished when another came saying that more robbers had come and taken his camels and killed the remainder of his servants. Another came right on his heels and said, "A tornado has hit your home, and your sons and daughters are all dead."

Job was shocked. What a barrage of trials! He lost all his possessions, lost his own children and was reduced to ashes. All this, because God wanted to teach him about self-righteousness.

Job was the *epitome* of a self-righteous person. But it has been a big problem throughout the history of the Church. It is human, and very natural, to be self-righteous.

HOLIER THAN THOU

Have you ever been around a person who made you feel guilty, or very unrighteous, because you felt this person was doing so many righteous deeds? You didn't want to become close friends with him because he always made you feel so unrighteous. Job had that effect on people.

We need to understand that SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS REPELS, WHILE THE TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD DRAWS PEOPLE to you as it did to Jesus Christ. People liked Christ. He was a nice man to be around because He didn't put people down or make them feel inferior.

Christ condemned the Pharisees for their self-righteousness. "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Christ said plainly that if our righteousness doesn't exceed what these fellows had, we can't even be in the Kingdom of God. It is that serious.

~~When the Pharisees fasted, they wanted the people to see what they were doing. They wanted to be thought of as good. Today we may be a little more~~

sophisticated because we know about Job and about self-righteousness problems. But when we do something good—maybe we are fasting, or we are having many people over to our house—there is an eagerness deep down to tell somebody or let people see that we did something good. That is what the Pharisees were trying to do. God condemned it. They were wearing their righteousness *outwardly*—a big spiritual flaw.

That is why we feel uncomfortable sometimes around people who flaunt their self-righteousness. If we are self-righteous, that will turn people off more quickly than anything—guaranteed. If we want friends, we can't go around feeling superior to them. On the contrary, we should work to make all people feel like royalty.

How do you feel, down deep in your heart, when you are in the presence of an adulterer or somebody who has committed a horrible sin? Do you feel uncomfortable? Jesus Christ sat with people like that all the time. The Pharisees hated Him for doing so.

Of course, Christ knew the Pharisees were just as sinful as those other people because they weren't really repentant. Anciently, God condemned the Jews for this *holier-than-thou* attitude. They would look around at other people and just criticize, because they couldn't see that they personally had any faults. They only saw the faults of others.

The same thing can happen in your life. Self-righteousness makes you a person without much compassion, because you just CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE HAVE SO MANY FAULTS. IF YOU DON'T LOOK DEEP DOWN AND SEE YOUR OWN PROBLEMS, YOU ARE GOING TO BE VERY CRITICAL OF OTHER PEOPLE. You will be a difficult person to get close to, because who wants to be put down all the time?

Here is an example of *real* righteousness. "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Corinthians 2:4). The Apostle Paul is talking about a man who was put out of the Church because of incest. This person had repented and come back. Notice the reaction of the Corinthian church. "So that contrariwise ye ought

rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (verse 7). When this man came back, the Corinthians began to criticize and condemn him because of the horrible sin he had committed. Paul had to sit down and write a letter in tears, saying, *Please forgive that poor guy, or you will destroy him spiritually.* Paul saw that this man had repented. He knew that God had wiped away his past sins, and they were all forgiven. Now he was going to become a son of God if he continued in the right direction.

Here is a principle I hope you never forget: TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS NEVER LOOKS DOWN ON OTHERS. No matter who it is or how dirty the sinner is, true righteousness never looks down on the person. It hates the *sin* but LOVES THE SINNER.

PURE RELIGION

It is *awfully difficult*, if you are self-righteous, to see it in anybody else—let alone in yourself. SATAN THE DEVIL COULD NOT EVEN DETECT IT IN JOB. He tried to find problems with Job and couldn't. That's because Satan is self-righteous!

In Job 29, Job uses *I, me* or *my* 52 times in 25 verses—more than two per verse! Job was SELF-oriented, as all self-righteous people are. They have a horrible problem with selfishness.

"The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth" (Job 29:8-10). People stood in awe of Job. The highest people in society believed and said that Job was truly a righteous man. This made Job's self-righteousness worse. (We can do the same thing to others: Telling a self-righteous person of all his great deeds can swell his head and cause him to be more self-righteous.)

We all have a certain amount of self-righteousness in us; that is just the way we are. We have to get rid of it. Humanly it is almost impossible for us to do good deeds and not have a slight self-righteous kickback from it.

"Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy" (verses 12-13). James 1:27 says that pure religion means visiting the fatherless and the widow. Job did that, but his religion wasn't pure. Why not? Why was it not acceptable to God? Because when Job would visit the widow, he would put a notch in his little mental notepad that he had done a good deed. He began to add them up and show others what a terrific guy he was—rather than going to those people

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and trying to show *what a terrific God we serve!* His motive in doing the good deeds was to exalt himself—not God! God didn't like that kind of "religion." Job was fulfilling it in the letter, but certainly not in the spirit. "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem" (Job 29:14). Job just kept boasting of his great, marvelous, magnificent, righteous way of life.

Before he was called by God, Paul was a "righteous" man, as the world viewed it (Philippians 3:4-6). He was one of the top Pharisees in the whole religious structure at that time. But Paul developed *real* righteousness—the kind of righteousness God wants us to have. Paul was an unusually righteous man because he had so little self-righteousness. He knew that we are called for one purpose: to glorify God—not man.

Paul continued: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and DO COUNT THEM BUT DUNG, THAT I MAY WIN CHRIST" (verses 7-8).

Job did all of these righteous things and looked at them and said, *Oh what a righteous person I am.* Paul did all these righteous things, looked at them and said, *What a pile of dung I am.* That's all he was, apart from God, in spite of all the good deeds he did. Sure, Job had a bigger pile of dung than other people, but it was still dung.

Paul was saying that we in this world can be so awed by dung! He had the titles, the degrees, all the education you can imagine, and he said, *It is just so much dung if it doesn't have Christ in it.* God says we shouldn't be awed by such things.

REMAIN TEACHABLE

If a person continues in self-righteousness, it will harden him. Listen to Job: "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live" (Job 27:6). To these men trying to

point out his problems, he said, *I'm going to hang on to my righteousness. I'm not going to admit I'm wrong.*

This hardness develops quickly within self-righteous people. Maybe it is because they really know the Scriptures and begin to think, *Hey, I know a lot on this, and I know what I'm talking about, and I'm not going to let anybody tell me what to do.* Maybe we will become expert in one particular area—we think we are outstanding with the teenagers or something like that. We become so vain in our reasoning that we won't let anybody tell us that we could possibly be wrong in that area.

"So these three men ceased to answer Job, because HE WAS RIGHTEOUS IN HIS OWN EYES. Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the kindred of Ram: against Job was his wrath kindled, because HE JUSTIFIED HIMSELF RATHER THAN GOD" (Job 32:1-2). Job had a severe trial here. He looked at himself and said, *I don't see anything wrong with me. Therefore, God has to be at fault—it isn't me.* That is a dangerous attitude to get into! Nothing these men could say to Job would have made any impression on his hardened mind. JOB HAD GOTTEN TO THE POINT WHERE WORDS COULDN'T REACH HIM.

So, what did God do? There was only one thing He could do: Try him and humble him until he listened. It was not God's choice; it was simply the only option Job left Him.

That is exactly what God is going to do to our nations. If God sends out His message and they won't heed it, there is nothing else He can do but let the Tribulation come upon them to make them humble enough to listen to what He says.

Here's another example of how a self-righteous attitude can cut you off from God. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus *with himself*, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:10-11). The Pharisee was just praying with himself. He was absolutely sure that he was not as other men, absolutely certain that he was right. Nobody, not even God, could change that.

Here is why Christ said you must remain childlike: because GOD MAY NEED TO SHOW YOU THAT YOU ARE OFF COURSE, AND YOU MAY NEED TO BE STRAIGHTENED OUT. What are you going to do with a person in this kind of attitude? You can talk for 30,000 years and never convert him; he would never believe you. When a person is self-righteous, he completely pushes God out of the picture. This man prayed *with himself*. It was just a silly game he was playing that had no meaning whatsoever, except that he was going nowhere spiritually. Self-righteous people are not

teachable. A righteous person is. Christ was teachable. He *never once* did anything His Father told Him not to do.

Contrast that Pharisee with the publican, whose attitude was free of self-righteousness. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner" (verse 13). This man came to listen to God. He said, *I am a sinner, please be merciful to me, and I'll listen and do what you say.* God didn't respond to the Pharisee, because He knew it was hopeless at that stage. With the publican, it was different. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and HE THAT HUMBLETH HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED" (verse 14).

That is a promise. God cannot lie. All we have to do is humble ourselves, and God will exalt us throughout eternity.

TALKING BACK TO GOD

Self-righteousness puts a person on dangerous ground with God. Job talked back to God. We may presume that we would never, ever do that. Yet, there is an entire church in this end time that has that same problem.

Let's start with the church that doesn't do that first. "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Revelation 3:7). This church has little strength and realizes it desperately needs more of Christ's righteousness and more of God's power.

But then God addresses another church that doesn't see things so clearly. "And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (verses 14-16). This is the only church out of all seven that talks back to God, just like Job. "Because thou sayest, I AM RICH, AND INCREASED WITH GOODS, AND HAVE NEED OF NOTHING; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (verse 17). They are telling God how rich, how right, they are!

Self-righteousness means "SELF-RIGHT." We are either *self-right* or *Christ-right*. The Laodiceans have a self-right attitude. God tells them they are slothful and lethargic, yet they respond, *Sure God, I am that way, but I have a REASON for being that way.* God says there is *no* reason for being that way. There is only

one way He can reach that church. The Laodiceans won't listen to words, so they must be plunged into the Tribulation so they will quit talking back to God.

We may be a little more subtle in our talking back to God, because we know the Scriptures. Consider this: Sometimes we'll hear a sermon or read an article and be inspired to do something. We start for a week or a month or so and work very hard on what we are going to do, but we don't have enough daily prayer and Bible study and occasional fasting to sustain us. Then we begin to think, *Maybe I just over-reacted; I really didn't need to be that zealous.* In a sense, we begin in a subtle way to talk back to God. But we must be careful to keep that inspiration alive in our lives, because that is what is going to motivate us to seek the Kingdom of God.

THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE

At one point in Job's trial, his friend Elihu asked him, "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?" (Job 35:7). In other words, if you are righteous, what does that contribute to God, or to the Kingdom? What good does it do God? Job felt like everything he was doing was a great service to God. He felt, *God needs me so badly.* He didn't see that the truth is the reverse of that—WE desperately NEED GOD!

We need to realize that our own human righteousness doesn't contribute one thing to the Work of God, or to God's Kingdom, or to the growth of any person spiritually. Only the Spirit of God does those things. Good things only come from what God builds within us, and that is the mind of Jesus Christ.

Without this perspective, we get into all sorts of improper reasoning. For example, when we come into the truth of God, we tend to remember what we gave up: *Oh, I had to give up this; I gave up that.* We feel so righteous because we gave up all these things, instead of saying, *Oh wow, look what God gave me! I've been given so many things! And He is letting me be a part of His Family!*

Imagine being a father or mother and having your child tell you, *You know, it is really important that I am in this family; I don't know how it would function without me.* You would probably paddle his little bottom. God feels the same way. He doesn't want you to have an attitude of, *Look at what I am contributing in this Work.* Rather, He wants you to say, *Thanks for working through me and letting me be a part of your Family and for sharing all you have with me.* That is reality—the other view is a fantasy.

Evaluate the approach Jesus had. Do we like to be thought of as good? Christ didn't. Remember the example in Matthew 19:16 when the rich man said to Christ, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that

I may have eternal life?" Before Christ even answered that question, He said, *Don't call me good.* He didn't want people calling Him good. None is good but God. He was a human being. His goodness came from the Father living in Him. That demonstrates Christ's true and perfect righteousness.

Here is the approach that we ought to have. "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psalm 22:6). This is just understanding what you are as a human being without God. It is the attitude Jesus Christ had on the stake.

Christ realized the human condition. We are no different from worms crawling around in the earth, as far as our future life is concerned. We are going to die, just like worms do, and go back to the earth. Unless we have the righteousness of God within us, we won't be resurrected into the Kingdom. Christ, if He had sinned, would have died just like a worm and never come up out of the grave. He knew the attitude and perspective He had to have. IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR THE SPIRITUAL POSTURE YOU NEED TO HAVE, THIS IS IT. We are just worms. There is no future in our lives at all unless we can get the righteousness of God within us so we'll qualify for His Kingdom.

FOCUS ON CHRIST

Romans 10:1 shows us the focus a righteous person always needs. This is the difference between the self-righteous and the righteous person. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Paul said in chapter 9 that he would give his eternal life if he could save his brethren in Israel—those who were cursing him and trying to kill him! Those who weren't even in the Church. That is how much he loved them.

"For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS, have not SUBMITTED themselves unto the righteousness of God" (verses 2-3). They didn't have the Holy Spirit. They were just going about trying to build their own righteousness. They had "not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." These people were hard and unwilling to humble themselves under God's government. You cannot receive God's righteousness unless you are humble, childlike and teachable.

This is why the Laodiceans are deceived today. They "have a zeal of God," but they are rebelling against His righteousness that we teach. They can't believe that God would use anybody but themselves to do His Work. They are not ready to take God's government and rule to the world. All they would teach the world now is how to rebel against God's government.

Verse 4 explains why these people were self-



righteous, and not *truly* righteous. "For Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." "End" is from the word *telos*, from which we get our word telescope. Paul is saying that in living a righteous life, you had better have your spiritual telescope right on Jesus Christ and make sure you're doing it just the way He did, or you are going to get off course. Law-keeping should be making you a Christ-like person instead of producing self-righteous snobbery and superiority as it did in the Pharisees.

We must have Jesus Christ in focus all the time. Paul said in Galatians 2:20 that Christ was living *in* him, performing righteous deeds. Job, when he was doing these righteous things, never was becoming like God. He never aimed at Jesus Christ. He was aiming at exalting himself. What an exercise in futility!

SELF-PITY

There is another growth-stifling attitude that crops up in self-righteous people: self-pity.

"And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). Cain was just wallowing in self-pity. He could have repented, but he never did. Instead he just said, *This punishment is*

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could say to Job
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any impression on
his hardened mind.
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reach him.*

too much—woe is me. He began to complain about his trial.

How does self-pity indicate self-righteousness? If we get into a trial and don't see the need to change, it is easy to get into a self-pitying frame of mind.

Trials are a way God communicates with us. Every trial you ever had served a purpose. God has promised He won't allow a trial you can't handle. He knows what is going on in your life. God is focused on every member of His Family.

Self-pity is like cancer because it wipes out our enthusiasm to fight

back. We just want to wallow in our self-pity when we receive a fiery trial. We endure the trial, but we don't rejoice in it. We don't see it as correction from a loving Father. That attitude won't change anybody.

Paul said we need a positive attitude. *WE CAN* fight our way out of trials. *WE CAN* learn the lessons. *WE CAN* overcome. *Through Jesus Christ*, he said, *I can do all things.* (He was *in jail* when he said that!) Never once in the Scriptures will you find self-pity in Jesus Christ. Why? Because He didn't have one bit of self-righteousness in Him.

If you have children, the best way they learn is from your example. If they see a negative, self-pitying parent, they probably will become that way. It is

important to keep a positive attitude. God said you CAN. He will not let you down.

THE GIFT OF CORRECTION

This is the hardest thing for the self-righteous person to take. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). Correction is something a self-righteous person can hardly cope with because he just can't believe he needs to be corrected.

Look at what Paul says in verse 10: "For they [our human fathers] verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he [our spiritual Father] for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." Every time you get corrected, it is for your profit. That is an absolute promise. The self-righteous person doesn't understand this: that God is preparing sons to be in His Family, and correction is the only way He has of getting us there.

Correction is a SIGN from God that you are His son. He is saying, *You will have to be a special person to be given something so wonderful and beautiful as membership in my Family. You will have to be changed—you must develop the character of my Son—before I will let you in my Family.* Though salvation is a gift we cannot earn, we must fight and overcome our carnal nature to receive that gift.

David had one of the best attitudes toward correction in the Bible. When he got into trouble, he asked God to wash him with hyssop, the strongest cleansing agent there was. He said, *God, wash me, clean me, do whatever is necessary to get me into your Kingdom!*

It is easy for us to look at our problems and become discouraged. Yet, if it weren't for having some problems, we would not be building character and headed for the Kingdom of God! Correction in your life is the GREATEST BLESSING you can receive. It is an act of love designed to get you into God's Family. What a privilege to be tried and tested by God, receiving the education we need to be in His Family.

God lovingly corrects His sons. If we reject His correction, then we are spiritual bastards. We are no longer sons.

The very fact God is correcting us reveals that we are His sons—not bastards! Do we grasp what it means to become God and to live in His Family for all eternity as a son?

SEEING GOD

What happened to Job wasn't bad; it was the greatest thing that ever happened in his life. Job finally realized that God was working with him and preparing him to become a son in His Family (Job 42:1-3). He got his focus on that and said, *That's too wonderful for me! Why should I have self-pity when I am being pre-*

pared for the Kingdom of God? Why should I talk back to God? Why should I refuse to be teachable when God is giving me something so great?

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (verse 5). Here, for the *first* time in his life, Job really SAW God!

So, what is so bad about self-righteousness? IT PUSHES GOD RIGHT OUT OF THE PICTURE. IT BLINDS US TO GOD. WE CAN'T EVEN SEE HIM! God passionately hates that because He is a jealous God who loves you.

If you are a member of God's Church, then you are His begotten Family. His eyes are upon you every minute of every day. He knows every thought in your mind. He is so concerned, He didn't even let Jesus Christ call you. HE PERSONALLY did it. That's nothing to get self-righteous about, because it is all His righteousness.

When we are self-righteous, we are actually BREAKING THE FIRST COMMANDMENT, the most important commandment of all. We are putting SELF ahead of God.

Job concluded, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (verse 6). Now this didn't mean he went around abhorring himself all the time. He just said to God, *I abhor with all my being what I have been before you through this trial. Please help me to change. I repent in dust and ashes.*

Consider the fruits we will bear if we have this attitude. Sometimes we have little problems with other people. In that situation, self-righteousness can produce a *defensive* attitude. We end up thinking, *I try to get closer to people, but this person criticized me*, and it causes us to hold back. But if we really saw what Job saw here, we would abhor ourselves. Then if somebody makes a negative remark about us, so what? It doesn't really matter. We can go on and love them and be friends with them. What difference does it make what people think of you? All that matters is what God thinks.

We all go through trials like this where we ought to abhor ourselves. But if, through these trials, we keep our minds on the fact that God is preparing us for His Family, it will make all the difference in the world!

When Jesus Christ was on Earth, He said He could do nothing of Himself. That is where He started. So He went out and started preaching to others, *Seek God and the Kingdom first, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

If we really understand that of ourselves *we have no righteousness*, we will be motivated to begin to SEEK IT, and to build the righteousness of God within us through His Holy Spirit.

Think about this subject deeply, and root out every little vestige of self-righteousness. You will see a much more wonderful God than you have ever seen before, and you will become a much more righteous son. ■