

How to live a righteous life in a fallen and unrighteous world

Waiting biblically in humility and hope

T. Leg, MCF 06.05.2018

Introduction

Job 1:1 NIV In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

Job was a righteous man. And, when **God tested Job**, when he allowed Satan to take everything he had, his riches and his family, ...:

Job 1:20-22 NIV ..., Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship (21) and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (22) In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Job understood that life, and all happiness in life, is not ours by right, it is a gift from God. Wouldn't you agree that the best we have in life is never what we have grabbed ourselves, or the things we have worked for – it is a gift from God. Someone has said that 80 % of life just happens to us. If that is true, why does the whole world pretend that it all depends on us, why does man boast of his achievements all the time? Not a mention of God! When the Bible speaks of the way of the wicked or the unrighteous, it simply means the choices of those who have no place for God in their lives. They do not fear God and shun evil like Job.

A major part of our lives is spent waiting. We wait in queues and in traffic jams. We wait to be released from hospital. We wait to pass our next exam, we wait for a job, our next place to live. We wait for our asylum application to go through. We wait for a wayward child to come to his or her senses. Childless couples wait for a child, single persons wait for marriage or whatever else is next, the chronically ill wait for health or death; the emotionally scarred wait for peace, we wait for our loneliness to finally come to an end. **Let me ask you. What are you waiting for right now? And how are you doing while you are waiting?**

As Christians, we wait for God's deliverance no matter which stage of life we are in; we wait for God to fulfil his promises. Come Lord Jesus, come!

In the meantime, waiting can be a long, hard and painful process! But waiting is made easier when we realize that **God has a purpose in our waiting: He is teaching us dependence on himself and he is making us into the people he wants us to be.** Life is hard enough as it is. Adding complications to our lives

through neglect of God's revealed will or wilful sin will make our lives harder than is necessary. Job knew that, and in his wrestlings with God he did not charge God with wrongdoing. Job was a righteous man.

Living righteous lives in an unrighteous world

Today, I want to talk about the **righteous life and how we can live righteous lives in this world?** Why should we choose to walk in the narrow way, which only a few take, and refuse to walk in the broad highway of the wicked or unrighteous who have now place for God in their lives. I want to talk about God's great and precious promises, and how learning to wait biblically on his promises can help us to live righteous lives.

I already mentioned that as Christians we wait for Christ's Second Coming, the day when all of God's creation will finally be delivered from its terrible groaning. But what kind of lives are we to live while we are waiting. What is this...

1.) The righteous life which God desires for us

1Ti 2:1-4 NIV I urge, then, first of all, that **requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—** (2) for kings and all those in authority, **that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.** (3) This is good, and pleases **God our Savior,** (4) **who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.**

In these verses, **Christians are described as people who have come to a saving knowledge of God's truth.** Having come to a knowledge of the truth, the truth about God, themselves, the world and Satan, the prince of this world, they have found peace with God. They finally belong, they know where they come from and where they are going. They know who they are: children of God, members of God's family. Secure in God's love, they affectionately address God as Abba, Daddy, Papa! And they present all kinds of requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings to their father in heaven, for everyone, and especially so for kings, governments and all those in authority over them. Why? Because they desire to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

This is God's will for us you and me as a believer. But since God wants all men to come to a saving knowledge of the truth and to live peaceful and quiet, holy and godly lives, it is clear that **this is not only God's will for Christian believers, it is his will for all men, boys, women and girls on this planet. What we see in these verses is God's perfect will, his utmost desire, first and foremost for believers but also for the whole of mankind.**

By God's perfect will, I mean the following: if God were the only variable in the equation, life on earth would be paradise. But we all know that life on earth is far from being a paradise this side of heaven, because God has taken man into the equation, too. It was a great risk which cost him his one and only son. But were sin abounded through the first Adam, God sent the second Adam, Jesus Christ, so that grace would abound all the more. In the new birth, he takes my heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh; he defuses my rebellion and lawlessness and enables me to trust and obey him from a heart which delights to do his will because his perfect law is engraved on it. External, mechanic obedience rendered out of fear or any other lesser motive is no real obedience at all! It doesn't please our Father in Heaven any more than it pleases us as fathers or mothers here on earth.

Many of the difficulties we face in trying to live a righteous life in this world come from a failure to clearly distinguish between God's perfect will and his permissive will. Let me explain.

2.) Difficulties we face in living the way God desires us to live

2a) Failure to distinguish between God's perfect will and his permissive will

Christians sometimes appear just as confused as those around them because we fail to distinguish between God's perfect will and his permissive will!

There seems to be a mismatch between what happens in our lives and the world and God's perfect will. We struggle to explain the problem of suffering not just to those around us but also to ourselves. We try to reason our way through life instead of humbly acknowledging that life in all its complexity is a mystery. Instead of mourning with those who mourn and rejoicing with those who rejoice, we grow bitter and disillusioned with the god we have fashioned in our own image. Sometimes we make shipwreck of our faith: we feel like hypocrites and fail to hold on to our faith with a sincere conscience. Everybody around us is running, and since we don't want to be left behind; we, too, start running instead of learning to be still, still so that we may once again know that He is God! He is the Shepherd, and we are the sheep of his pasture. By taking our lives into our own hands we sometimes add complications through sin. When we don't understand the harder facts or mysteries of life, we struggle to believe that suffering or waiting can really be part of God's perfect will for our lives. We begin to doubt God.

2b) We are being conditioned by the world around us

We begin to doubt because we are being conditioned by the world rather than by God's word.

Rom 12:2 NIV Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and **perfect will**.

The **Enlightenment** and scientific advances have conditioned us to believe that what we see is the only reality there is. **Darwin** has taught us that in the real world only the strongest and fittest will survive. **Marx and Engels** have taught us that religion is the opiate of the people. **Biblical criticism** has robbed Jesus of his miracles and has made him into a good man, but no more than that. **Philosophers** like Nietzsche have made us believe that God is dead. **The two World Wars** have taught us to stand in fear of ourselves and our own scientific achievements. **Tsunamis and starvation** have sown doubt as to God's loving purposes for his creatures while **modern-day economics** teaches us that corporate growth is the supreme good. **Sin and Satan** are concepts that have been relegated to the middle ages and are laughed at in our so-called modern age. **And here we find ourselves in this world as Christians.** Piously, we keep trying hard to be obedient to God's Word as best we can, but the mismatch between what we see in ourselves and around us feeds **our doubts as to whether God's will really is perfect**, whether God really is sovereign over all, whether God's promises are really true and whether he really cares for us. We want to believe, and often we do, but then again we struggle. Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief. When things are really bad, we cry with Job and the psalmist: "How long O Lord".

3.) Biblical principles for a righteous, God-pleasing life

3a.) Clearly distinguishing between God's perfect and permissible will

When we arrive at such a point, we must clearly distinguish between God's perfect will and his permissive will. In doing so, we will guard the doctrine of God's perfect will in our hearts, and like Job, we will not charge God with any wrongdoing in our suffering and waiting. And once we are clear that God's will for our lives is perfect, and that he works together **all things** for good for those who love him, we must choose to view life through his eyes. We must learn to trust God even in our wilderness experiences:

3b.) Learning to trust God in the wilderness by learning to live by his word

Deu 8:2-5 NIV Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert

these forty years, **to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.** (3) He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, **to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.** (4) Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. (5) **Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.**

In the rest of this passage, God promises to lead them into the land of milk and honey, but he also warns them not to forget him - it is a description of Israel, and a description of modern-day man!!! God tests us so that we may learn what is in our hearts, and rather than relying on our hearts - which are deceitful above all things - we must learn to live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Whenever we fail a test which God sends our way, God teaches us humility. He sends trials and temptations our way to teach us that his grace is sufficient in our wilderness experiences. He teaches us that we are not the self-made, self-reliant creatures we pretend to be. In all things, we are dependent on our father in heaven as the giver of all good things. He always wants our best. Not only that, he also wants the best for the land we live in. But the best is never achieved by man's power or might but when God's Spirit is set to work, when God's children express their dependence on him in childlike prayer.

2Ch 7:14 NIV if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Prayer is a mystery. It is a mystery that through prayer the Almighty God involves us in his purposes for the world. But just as or even more importantly, as we wait on God in patient and expectant prayer, he fashions us into the people he wants us to be.

Today, religion in the West is pretty much powerless. As Christians we find ourselves on the defensive, in the wilderness. Maybe, we have become too self-dependent, proud, prayerless, and pretty much indistinguishable from the world. We have everything materially, but are impoverished spiritually. Fewer and fewer Christians know God's promises, and having lost sight of his great and precious promises, we have forgotten to wait boldly on him in patient and expectant prayer. Please don't be offended, I am describing myself here.

3c.) We must once again learn how to wait biblically on God's promises

In Romans 1:17, God tells us that the righteous shall live by faith.

The righteous shall live differently from the unrighteous, who live entirely by sight. Those who believe in God shall live differently from the wicked or unrighteous, i.e., those who have no place for God in their lives! The righteous shall live by faith in the truth of God's Word and the truthfulness of his great and precious promises. God's promises are truthful because God is truthful. He cannot lie. Every one of God's promises in his Word has either been fulfilled in the past, it is being fulfilled right now, or it will be fulfilled in the future!

2Pe 1:4 tells us that by faith in God's great and precious promises we participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires .

This passage tells us that the righteous see the world with different eyes.

They see the world through the eyes of faith. By faith, they see through the glitz and glitter of this fleeting and dying world, which is being corrupted by evil desires. From God's Word they have learnt that the heart of man is deceitful above all things, and they would rather live by faith in God's great and precious promises than by wanting instant gratification through the empty promises of this world.

We live in a world which tells us that we can serve both God and man and that we must have everything instantly. This is bad advice in the world, but it is even worse advice in the kingdom of God, it runs counter to everything that the Word of God tells us. The way of the righteous leads through the narrow gate onto the narrow path which leads to life. There are no instant shortcuts to the righteous life in all holiness and godliness. If we will not serve God, we will serve man and ourselves, and we will eventually have no place for God in our lives.

The righteous do have God's great and precious promises, but waiting on God's promises has become hard for those who are not training themselves to see the world as God sees it::

2Pe 3:7-9+13 NIV By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. **(8) But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (9) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ... (13)** But in keeping with

his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

God is not slow in keeping his promises. He will fulfil them in his perfect time. One at a time, every time! While we wait on him to fulfil his promises, he waits on us patiently to come to him in repentance. Why does God allow suffering in the world, why does he keep us waiting? I don't know. The best, most satisfying answer I have ever found is here in this verse and the verse we read at the beginning from 1 Timothy. He is patient with us and wants everyone to come to repentance and a saving knowledge of the truth.

Biblical repentance is a way of life rather than a one-time decision. It implies that we humbly accept that we are not the masters of our own fate but the creatures of God's hand, his handiwork. He is our Creator and we are his creatures. He is our Shepherd and we are his Sheep. He is the Potter and we are the clay. He is the goldsmith and we are that the gold that is being purified in his purifying fire. He is our loving heavenly Father who chastens us at times. If we have never been chastened by God, we are not God's children but bastards, the Bible tells us. When God chastens us, he does so for our own lasting good.

We must learn to wait biblically on God's promises again, for God is not slow in keeping them but he wants everybody to come to repentance and a saving knowledge of the truth.

In Greek grammar, there is a third voice besides the active voice and the passive voice. It is called the **middle voice**, and this middle voice expresses very well what true biblical waiting is all about: Biblical waiting implies that at least as important as the things we wait for is the work God wants to do in us as we wait. In the midst of our waiting, we fix our eyes on God's promises and brace ourselves for what God will do, patiently, expectantly. And whatever God does, it will always exceed our expectations if we manage to trust him in our waiting. In Psalm 40, the psalmist says, I waited **patiently** on the Lord. This could also be translated as "I waited **expectantly** on the Lord".

Biblical waiting is neither passive nor active. It acknowledges that the LORD God is sovereign. He is the primary cause of everything. Biblical waiting acknowledges what theologians call God's "prevenient grace". In any and every situation God has already been at work before we ever enter the picture. Remember: 80 % of life just happens to us, he lets it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous; God's grace is at work all around us and makes life bearable and even wonderful at times. Life without God's grace literally is hell, it is unbearable. And because God has been graciously at work before we ever entered into the

picture, we can confidently work alongside him, as he works in us and around us. In the ups and downs of life, we are fixing our eyes expectantly on God and on Christ Jesus, in whom all God's promises are Yes and Amen. In biblical waiting, we are joining our mind, heart and will with God's mind, heart and will as they are revealed in his holy Word. We are learning to humbly place ourselves under God's word as the ultimate authority in our lives.

3d.) Humbly accepting the word of God implanted in us

Jas 1:19-22 NIV My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, (20) for **man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.** (21) Therefore, **get rid of** all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and **humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.** (22) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**

By learning to wait biblically on God's promises, we learn to humbly accept the word planted (or engrafted) in us, because we realize that this word can save us in the long run. And of course, this word is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. And notice, this word has been planted in us (we are in the passive voice, God does the planting), but we now humbly accept its authority in our lives (we are in the active voice), that we may be saved by it (we agree with God that his Word can save us and so we are saved by accepting its authority). Also notice that the Gospel is here described as a seed planted in us, and as we submit to its authority in our lives, as we patiently and expectantly wait for it to grow in us, it will accomplish its purposes in our lives: we will grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are being transformed into his likeness, and we are being saved in and from many difficult situations in life, which would otherwise cause havoc and disaster. All this is hard to explain. It is a mystery, it is **the mystery of godliness, the mystery of how we can live righteous lives in an unrighteous world.**

3e.) Understanding the difference between faith and hope

But waiting biblically also fulfils another purpose in our lives. It helps us to understand that we cannot have in the here and now what God has reserved for the future. **In a world of instant gratification, waiting biblically will restore the future dimension of our faith. It will restore true biblical hope to our lives.**

Heb 11:1-2 NIV Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

To believe in the here and now means that by faith we see that which we can never see physically. We see the living Jesus seated at the right hand of the father in a position of ultimate authority, we see him interceding for us as our high priest and friend, we see him pleading for us with the father on the merit of his broken life and shed blood rather than our dead works, we see him as our advocate before the father whenever Satan accuses us, and we see him preparing a home for us in the father's house. We have this hope and the spirit of Christ in us gives us the assurance that our hope is well founded.

3f. All of God's promises to his children are Yes and Amen in Christ Jesus.

2Co 1:20 NIV For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Christ in us, the hope of glory. At the best of times, we believe that all of God's great and precious promises are ours in Christ Jesus. But often we are prone to wander because the Christian life is not a playground but a battleground. It is, a good fight against Satan, self and the world.

3g. Fighting the good fight by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith

Heb 12:2 NIV Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace reduces the good fight of faith to one single discipline, the discipline of beholding the glory of Christ.

In his book "Newton on the Christian Life" puts it like this: This discipline of beholding the glory of Christ is also very difficult. Every step along the path of life is a battle for the Christian to keep two eyes on Christ. The Christian life is Christ ... the Christian must daily reorient his life to Christ. "Christ is our all, and in all" (Col. 3:11), our calling is to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). Whatever life throws our way, we must keep Christ in view—

in afflictions, imperfections, temptations, and desertions; ... always!; **which can only be practiced by those who see and keep in mind that they are complete in Christ; that he is all in all to them;** their Righteousness,

Wisdom and Strength; their Sun and Shield; their Friend and Representative before the throne; their Shepherd and their Husband.

And then Newton writes, "If I may speak my own experience, I find that to keep my eye simply upon Christ, as my peace, and my life, is by far the hardest part of my calling."

Conclusion

In conclusion I want to briefly summarize what we have said so far. I hope you will find it helpful in living the life that God has prepared for you in Christ Jesus:

We have defined the righteous life as a life that is a gift from God. It is lived in simple faith and prayerful dependence on our father in heaven, the giver of all God things. It is lived as a member of Christ's body, the church, of which Christ is the head. Meditating daily on God's great and precious promises will help us to live holy and godly lives in a dying world. It will help us to fear God and shun evil like Job did. It will help us to approve God's good, pleasing and perfect will. Humbly accepting the word planted in us as the ultimate authority in our lives, the Gospel of our salvation, will help us to escape the corruption that is in the world through evil desires; it will save us from havoc and disaster. God is not slow in keeping his promises. In our waitings, God, too is waiting: He waits for everybody to come to repentance and a saving knowledge of the truth. He always desires our best and the best of the land we live in. His will is perfect, and we must understand the difference between God's perfect will and his permissive will. If we do, we will learn to trust him even in our wilderness experiences. In the wilderness he teaches us to rely on his grace, which is a foretaste of the glory he has prepared for us. In our waitings he teaches us humility and hope. He teaches us to wait biblically, joining our hearts, minds and wills with his perfect will. He teaches us to see world through his eyes, the eyes of faith. The righteous shall live by faith, and they are patiently and expectantly looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, in which God will wipe away all tears. Hallelujah!

1Jn 5:13 NIV I write these things to you who believe (i.e. live by faith) in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Amen.