

Universal Righteousness

Acts X: 35:

Breach: March 21: 1751

N^o 1751

Phm 17 - For y^e
light & lov^e & lig^{ht}

Nov: 13 1767 -

But in every Nation, he that feareth him, &
worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him

It is the distinguishing glory of the
Christian Religion, that it is not only enjoined by
the Authority of God, but is suited to the Nature
and Circumstances of Man, and in a Respect a
most reasonable Service.

What can be more agreeable to the Character
of Rational Creatures, than to meditate upon
the Perfections of the Great Author of our Being
— to join in the general Consort of the whole
Creation in celebrating the Praises of his goodness
— & devote our whole Man, to the Honor of
him, upon whose Bounty we entirely depend.

What can be more suitable to the Circum-
stances of Apostate Sinners, — than humbly to
Acknowledge our aggravated Guilt, penitently
to bewail our Iniquities & Folly — earnestly
to implore forgiveness of the offended Majesty
of

Heaven, - & trust in the Merits of his Dear Son
to whom he has appointed the common Saviour
of Mankind.

And since the Blessed God, hath favoured
us with the Revelation of his Will, what can
be more Reasonable, than that we make his
Revelation, the Rule of our Faith, & the Stand-
ard of our Practice, and daily endeavour to
perfect Holiness in the Fear of God. This is
the Nature of Religion - these the Duties
which are Prescrib'd in the Sacred Volumes
of Scripture.

There are but few, so entirely corrupted,
as not to Acknowledge, that these Things
are just and Reasonable: But what Multitudes
satisfy themselves with a faint Approbation,
and never feel the transforming Influence
of divine Truth upon their Hearts, nor
conform their Lives to the righteous Precepts
of the Gospel. And yet without this, all
our Religion is but a vain Pretence, and our
Hope of Happiness, no better than a delu-
sory Dream. God indeed is the universal
Father of Mankind, & without Respect of Persons,
admits

admit into his favour, all of every Man
that worship him in spirit and in truth.

But what is the distinguishing Character, of his
peculiar People, who are they that belong to this
happy Number? The Apostle tells us — They that
fear God, & work Righteousness. In my present
Discourse I shall (A.D.)

First Enquire, what this Righteousness is that
is required of us.

Secondly, in what Manner, & to what Extent
this Righteousness is Practised by all that fear God.

Third I am to Enquire, what this Righteous-
ness is that is required of us.

The Word Righteousness, is sometimes taken
in a Restrained Sense, for that particular Vertue,
which inclineth us to good every one their due.

But in the Language of Scripture it more
generally intends, an universal Rectitude of
Heart and Life. It is comprehensive of our
entire Duty, and includeth Piety to God, Justice
and Charity to men.

Now this Righteousness consisteth in a Conformity
to the Will of God, the unalterable Standard of
Truth.

As the governing Rule of Duty. [This will
be the Measure of Perfection, so that Nothing will
be accepted by God, that is not agreeable to it - Every
thing which exceeds this Rule must fall under
the Character of Superstition - Every thing that falls
short of it, must necessarily be imperfect and
defective.

Therefore the Great Author of our Religion
lays it down as a standing Maxim, always to
be observed in his Church. In vani do they look for
and, teaching for Doctrine the Commandments
of Man. The Great Doctor of the Gentiles, excludes
from the Practice of Christians, all Will-Worship, has
plausible appearance sover it may make
of Wisdom and Humility.

In Vani do Mon ^{and pompous} ~~imagine~~ ^{imagine} a Train of
uninstituted Ceremonies, advance the Honor of
God, & assist us in his Service - They may, indeed
gratify the Curiosity, of the contriving Vulgar,
& captivate weak and sensual Minds: But they
cannot strengthen the Faith, nor quicken the Devotion
of spiritual Persons. God is a Spirit, and requires
to be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. Nor can

We

we expect to serve him, in an acceptable
but according to the Pattern in the Mount, the
Method of his own Appointment.

Whatever bears the Stamp of his Sovereign
Authority, we are to receive with sacred Reverence
— What ever is forbid by infinite Wisdom, we are
to avoid with the greatest Diligence. This is that
Duty which the Perfection of his Nature necessa-
rily requires, & that Righteousness, which the
Word of God, indispensably obliges us to perform.

But then you will doubtless say — Who are
these Righteous Persons? Who is the Man that
is entirely conform'd to the Will of God? Do
not the Conscience of every Child of Adam, bear
Testimony against him, that on numberless
Instances, he has violated the Law of Heaven,
and acted contrary to the Will of his Maker
and Sovereign? Are not the best of Men, daily
humbled, under a Sense of their Infirmitis, do
they not with united Voices adopt the Language
of the Royal Psalmist. Enter not into Judgement
with

As my Servant O Lord! for in thy Sight shall
no flesh living be justified.

I know, my Brethren, that all Men are
sinners, the most eminent Saints must
confess, that all their Righteousness is but as filthy
Rags. Their most perfect Duties are mixed
with Infirmitie, their purer Gold has an Alloy
of Dross, from which they cant expect, to be
entirely free, while they reside in those Melan-
cholly Abodes of Guilt and Misery. This brings
me then

Secondly, To Enquire, in what Manner, and
to what Extent, this Righteousness is practiced
by those that Fear God? — I Answer, Sincerely,
without prevailing Hypocrisy — Unfeignedly, without
any allowed exception — Perseveringly, to the
End of their Lives.

I They that Fear God, practice Righteousness,
Sincerely, without prevailing Hypocrisy.

By Hypocrisy I intend an Appearance
of Religion, which do not proceed from the
inward Approbation of our Minds, and an un-
feigned Love to Virtue. — This is a Vice pecu-

liarly

liably odious in the Sight of God, against
he has denounced the severest Threatnings.

The Precepts of the Gospel are design'd, to regu-
late, not only our outward Conversation, but the
secret Passions and Affections of the Soul. The
Service of God consists, not only in the external
Performance of Divine Worship, but in an holy,
Disposition of Heart, - pure and Sanctified Desires -
without which the most pompous Pretences to
Piety, are but a loathsome Carcase, or at best
but an insignificant Ceremony.

The common Duties of Moral Vertue
are to be perform'd in Obedience to the Commands
of God, with a sincere Desire to please and glorify
him - Otherwise they may indeed evidence us to
be useful Members of civil Society; but not
sincere Disciples of the Holy Jesus. We are requir'd
not only to abstain from gross Acts of Sin, but to suppress the
first risings of Lust, and immediately to fly
from every tempting Evil. Or else we shall appear
in the unerring Judgement of Heaven, no better
than perished Sepulchres, which make a
beautiful Figure, but within are fill'd with stench
and Corruption.

The Hypocritical Pretension to Righteousness
aim no higher, than to adjust their outward
Behavior, if that be free from blemish, they
are satisfied. They denounce the defiling
Pollutions of the wicked World, because they are
disgraceful to their Character, destructive to
their Health, injurious to their temporal Interest
and terrify them with the apprehensions of
future Vengeance. . . They attend the Public
Service of God, in Compliance with the Principles
of their Education, in Conformity to the Customs
of their Country, that they may appear to be
sober and virtuous Persons; or ~~to~~ at best
because they hope by their superficial
Performances, to recommend themselves to
the Favor of Heaven, & obtain the Reward of
Life Eternal.

But the true Christian, & anima-
ted with a better Spirit, and act from nobler
Motives; He abstains from Sin because it is
an unjust Rebellion against his Rightful Lord;
an ungrateful Abuse of his excellent Goodness;
a contempt of the riches of redeeming Love

A

a Contradiction to the Design of his Creation
Destructive to the Purity of his immortal Soul
He devotes himself to the Service of the most
High, because he is worthy to be honoured and
obeyed by all his Creatures, his Service is perfect
Freedom, and all the Melodies of his Government
and Grace, are holy, just, and good. He loves
the Blessed God with all his Heart, approaches
his Presence, with Desire and Delight, & obeys
his Laws with Vigor and Cheerfulness. When
his Heart closes in a Union with the Nature
and Designs of God, & his Will moulded into
a chosen Conformity to the Will of his heavenly
Father, -- He chooses it as Heaven begun, the
Dawning of eternal Glory -- He rejoices in
his happy State, looks down on Crises and
Scepters with sacred Pity and Disdain -- His
holy and reverential Regard for God, his unfeigned
Approval of the Excellency of his Laws,
engages them
II To Obey him universally, without allowed Exception
or Reserve. The

The greatest Part of Mankind, are obliged by the
injunctions of Conscience, to make a Profession of
Religion, and do something to satisfy their guilty
and disquieted Minds. Even Persons of the most
dissolute Character, hope they have some good
Dispositions, that will defend them from the
Punishment of divine Justice, & recommend them
to the Favor of God. They pretend a mighty
Zeal for the Observation of some Parts of the Law,
& trust that this will make amends for their
other Neglects.

Men of benevolent Minds, will cheerfully
disperse their Charity to the Poor, if they may
have a Licence still to continue in the Practice
of Intemperance and Lust. Sordid Misers, are
willing to satisfy their bodily Appetites, if they
may follow their unlawful Gains, and sacrifice
their time and affection in the Acquisition of Riches.

Those whom we generally stile your good sort
of Men, take Pleasure to be kind & benificent
to their Friends; but Anger lives in their Bosoms
and they prosecute their Enemies with implacable
Reformation. The Polite World will attend upon
the Admonitions of Divine Worship, when they
have

Leisure, but spend the rest of their Time, in
Faction and Divisions, which are directly opposite
to the Spirit and Design of the Gospel.

Thus every one is forming a System of Religion
according to their own Inclinations, and would
vainly reconcile the Indulgence of their darling
Passions, to the Character and Expectations of true
Christians — But this is a vain & impossible
Attempt — You may as well reconcile Light
and Darkness, as the allowed Practice of Vice
with the Spirit of real Religion. St James tells
us that he that keepeth the whole Law and
offendeth in one Point (i.e. wilfully and imperi-
tently) is guilty of all. For they are all enjoined
by the Authority of the Great God, and equally
oblige the Conscience of Man.

You deceive yourselves Men & My Brethren!
if you suppose the Ark and Dragon, can be
worshipped in one Temple, that the Love of Virtue
and Vice can maintain its Empire in the same
Heart, that ~~Christ~~ the Servants of Christ can
remain the Slaves of their own criminal Passions.
You may be grave in your Behavior, just as
your

He challenges, extensive in your Charity, &
attached to all the external Duties of Piety: But
if you are under the predominant Power of
any beloved Delusion, — all your Religion is an
Hypocritical Pretence, destitute of Truth and
Reality.

They that indeed Fear God and work Righteousness
Love that which is good in Sincerity, & practice
it with Diligence; they choose the Pleasures of
Religion, before all the unsatisfying Delights of
Sin; they prefer the Salvation of their Souls
before all the Material Interests of this Life; they
are upright in their Words, humble in their
Sentiments, moderate in their Desires, temperate
in their Refreshments, Zealous in the Service
of God, & benignant to their fellow-Creatures —
In kind holy in all manner of Conversation.

They are indeed but Men, liable to err, &
sometimes fall into Sin: but it is thro' some
sudden Surprize, & the Violence of an unexpected
Temptation, & is contrary to the settled
Design and Design of their Lives. — When they
fall, they rise again by Repentance. The Weakness
of the Flesh, excites them more strongly to depend
on

the strength of divine grace, their past Men
engage them to redouble their Caution and
Diligence for the Time to come. It remains
that I add

- III They persevere in this Righteousness to the End of
their Lives.

This is that, which distinguishes a Regenerate
Christian, from the ungodly, & nominal Professor.
That Obedience which flows from the servile
Fear of Wrath, will be inconstant: but that
which proceeds from a Principle of Love will
be pleasant and abiding. [A Slave may be
compell'd to perform his appointed Task, for fear
of Punishment, while he earnestly desires to be
freed from the ungrateful Burden. but a Servant
that loves his Master, will persevere in his Service
with Diligence and Delight — A Soldier that
is press'd into the War, will embrace the first
Opportunity to Desert his Colours: but a Volunteer
that is animated with a Love to his King and
Country, will despise the greatest Danger, and
be faithful unto the Death.]

This is the Character of a Christian, who
is enrolled under the Banner of Christ by his own
voluntary

Antony Consent, and takes the Oath of Al-
ligance to the King of Glory, from a full Consci-
ence that he is his only Rightful Lord and Sovereign;
He cheerfully submits to his Government, firmly
persuaded, that all his Laws are calculated for
the highest good of his Subjects. He is not affrighted
at the greatest Danger, knowing that the Master
whom he serves, will support him, with the
omnipotent Arms of his Grace, and finally
crown his Fidelity with an abundant reward.

This Perseverance, is the inseparable Property
of the Righteous, and finall Apology, an indis-
putable evidence, that those Persons never
truly belonged to the People of God. He
that endures unto the End shall be saved,
& if any Man draw back, the Soul of the
Lord shall have no Pleasure in him. And
that this awful Truth may make a deep
impression upon us, the melancholly Consequen-
ces of Apostasy, are set before us in a Variety
of Instances, & Recorded in the Sacred Scriptures.
— The fallen Angels, were once the favorites
of God; but because they kept not their first
Estad, were banished from the shining
Couch of Heaven, & plung'd into the dismal
Abyss.

Abys of Hell — The Gadites, departed out
House of Bondage
Egypt under the distinguishing Cloud of the
Depart
I was supported on the ~~threshold~~ by a train
of surprising Miracles: but because they rebelled
against God, and desired to return to the
Gallie & Omion of Egypt, their Carcases fell
in the wilderness, & they never entered into
the promised Canaan. — The Wife of Lot
was delivered from the Flames of Sodom by
the Ministry of Angels, and for advanced
to the appointed Place of safety; but because
she looked back to the detested City, she was
changed into a Pillar of Salt, — a perpetual
Monument of the Danger of Apostasy.

These things were written for our
Instruction and Admonition, that we may,
not think it sufficient, to enter upon the way
of Religion, but persevere thence to the End
of our days. That we may lay aside every
Weight and the Sin, which doth so heavily
beset us, & run with Patience the Race
that is set before us; that our Path
may be met of the just, which is
as the Morning Light, which shineth
brighter unto the Perfect Day.

A
I proceed now to the Improvement of my
Discourse

I What we have heard teaches us, how impossible
it is to be justified & saved, by our own personal
Righteousness

The Law of God, requires perfect Obedience,
without Blemish or Defect, without Interruption
and without End. It attests its terrible Curse
against every one that continueth not, in all
things, written in the Book of the Law, to do
them. According to the Tenor of the Law, there
is concerning not one just Man, upon Earth,
is not one. — For we have observed, that the
best Righteousness of men, is always imperfect
& defective, attended with many debiling
Blemishes. The flesh lieth against the Spirit
while we are in this State of Mortality, & Weakness
— By the Deeds of the Law then, can no flesh
be justified.

Some will doubtless be apt to say, I
don't expect to be justified according to the Rigor
of the Law, by perfect and unswerving Obedience;
but may I not be justified, by Repentance and
New Obedience, according to the Grace and In-
dulgence of the Gospel — I answer no —
f

What upon a double Account. — In the first
Our sorrow for Sin cannot make Satisfaction
to divine Justice, nor will our present Meditations
make Atonement for past Offences. In human
Establishments, Criminally and every day executed
notwithstanding their Repentance and Tears —
Further, the Love of God, necessarily requires
that our Repentance be perfect, our Sincerity
without Plein or Defect — But how shame-
fully do we fail in the Practice of these Evange-
lical Duties.

It remains then, that we have no other
Resource but the Mercy of God, thro' the Merits
and Righteousness of Jesus Christ. If ever we are
justified at the Tribunal of God, & healed of
Righteous Persons; we must be united to the Son
of God, & be found in him, not having on our
own Righteousness which is of the Law, but that
which is by Faith in Christ. And then the
Blessed God, will look upon us, not as we are
in our selves, but considered as in Union with
his Dear Son, and treat us not according to
the

of his Justice, but the Riches of his Grace.
From hence we may further infer the Necessity,
not only of an imputed, but ^{an} inherent Right-
eousness, if we would be found among the Num-
ber of the People of God.

We are esteemed as Righteous before God,
only on the Account of the Righteousness of Jesus
Christ our Mediator and Saviour: but this Justifica-
tion of our Persons, is always accompanied with
the Sanctification of our Natures: He delivers us
out of the hands of our Enemies, not that we
should walk according to our corrupt Appetites
and Inclinations, but that we should love him,
in Righteousness and Holiness all our Days.

Be not deceived O Man! None are absolved
from Guilt by the Blood of Jesus, but those who are
also transformed, into his sacred Image by
the sanctifying Influence of the Spirit. The
Imputation of his Righteousness, is always attended
with an Imitation of his Example. — This then
entirely destroys the Hope of those, who expect to
be saved by merit, while they remain the voluntary
servants of Sin — And what Multitudes of these
are to be found in the Profane world; they desire
to be saved by the Merit of the Cross, but are unwilling
to bow to the Terms of Christ. Speak to them of the
Promises

Princies of Grace, they are charmed with the
soft Sound, but circulate the Necessity of Obedience
to the Law of Heaven, they are chagrined and
offended.

And yet My Brethren! without Purity of Heart
and Righteousness of life, you cannot partake of
the Privileges of the People of God. The Gates of Heaven
will be open only to a Righteous Nation, Nothing
that is un holy, & unclean can enter, that Sanctuary
of Immortality and glory — What flagrant Abus-
dition are Mankind guilty of: They would die the
Death of the Righteous, but live the Lives of the sensual
and ungodly: They would obtain the Happiness of
Heaven, but despise and pervert that Holiness, ~~which~~
which is the Natural Preparation for that Blessed State.

If I propose this Caution to every one of you —
Do you desire to be saved? — Will you not with
united Voice Answer, this is what I desire above
all things — God forbid that I should not obtain —
If after this I should ask you — do you fear God?
do you hate Sin? do you love Righteousness? do you
delight in the Exercises of Devotion? How profound
how awful a Silence would there be in this numerous
Assembly! And you among the Number of the Righteous
who wallow in the Pollutions of Lust, to the Dishonour
of both Soul and Body! — You who give the reins to
your disorderly Appetites, to the disgrace of human Nature
and the scandal of the Church of Christ. — You who are

So actually engaged in the Business and Pleasures of the
World, that you have no heart, no time to prepare for
the heavenly state! — You who suffer the Interests of a
mortal Body so fully to engross your Mind, that you fatally
Neglect the vast Concerns of your immortal Soul. — No my
Brethren, there are not the Characters of the Righteous
but the black Marks of the Wicked. — Cry then earnestly
to God that he would convince you of your Guilt, discover
your Danger, & exert his Almighty Power, to create you
anew in Christ Jesus, unto good Works.

III Let those who are among the Number of the Righteous, be
persuaded to make Progress in the Works and Ways of God.
Rest not in your present Attainments, but aim at higher
Degrees of Perfection. Forget the things that are behind
press towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God
in Jesus Christ. I have fought the good Fight, I have
kept the Faith, and finished my Course, was the triumphant
Language of St. Paul, when the time of his Departure was
at Hand. And we should imitate his Noble Example if
we expect with him to receive a Crown of Righteousness.
Not intimidated by the frowns of an enraged World, nor
allured by the gay Prospects of temporal Advantages,
we should persevere in the Steady Discharge of our Duty
unto the End of Life.

Happy are they that pass the time of their Sojournings
here in the Fear of God, and the Practice of serious and
universal Righteousness. The great God will acknowledge
them as his Children, look down upon them thro' his dear
Son with Approbation and Delight. As a kind and merciful
Father he will forgive their Sins, pity their Weakness,
accept their imperfect Services, and reward them with
eternal Happiness To which &c.

Amen