

FILTHY RAGS 7-10-05

By David Keeling

www.earlychurchtruth.com

keelingdavid@hotmail.com

Greetings in Jesus' Name. I want to thank Him for all he's done for us – given us the privilege to become the sons of God. The Bible says as many as received Him to them gives he the power to become the sons of God. Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us that we might be called the sons of God. What a privilege and a blessing to be a son of the holy, righteous God/Father.

I've been contemplating all week about some things that are common teachings in the professing Christian world. Because of a verse or two taken here or there, there are things that have just become established creeds or established doctrines that the Christian world just blanketly accepts, and yet there is scripture after scripture that would prove those doctrines otherwise. I just thought about them as myths in the Christian world today. It's so bewildering; so many people naming the name and Christ and yet refusing to allow Christ to be the Lord of their life.

One of the things that has really been on my heart this morning and I'm sure it's a very common phrase or common verse and I'm sure many of you can quote at least part of it. It's found in Isaiah 64 – I'll begin by reading that and then I want to look at the rest of the scriptures to see if the doctrine that is built on this verse lines up with the rest of the scriptures.

One of the things I've learned in studying the Bible is that there are difficult passages – there are things that we just do not understand. There are some things that DO seem to contradict each other when they are compared together. And I've also learned that the most important thing that I can do to understand those things is simply obey and follow that which is clearly taught, and God will give light later to those things that are a little hard to understand. We will look at one of these things this morning – it sounds very simple, but the whole foundation of modern Christianity basically stands on this one verse; well, it's one of the verses. When we look at modern Christianity and see how far they are from following Jesus and truly being His disciple, we see that something might be wrong with the foundation – and this is one of those verses we want to look at and then see what the rest of the scripture says.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; ...

Have you heard that verse before? I'm sure you have. It is taught that this is God saying that all of our righteousness is as filthy rags in his eyes. In other words, no matter what we do is just a bunch of trash. In fact the word filthy rags is a very filthy rag – a dirty rag that we would avoid and despise. And this verse is used to say that there is no righteousness in us and we are not capable of being righteous and that any attempt we would have at righteousness would be counted as worse than nothing and something that would be despised by God. But if you read the whole context of this verse in this chapter, you will see that this is not God talking here. It is the prophet Isaiah bemoaning the sinfulness of the nation of Israel and many times in the Bible when someone has sinned grievously, they over-estimate their sinfulness or use words to degrade themselves – so that they are exalting God and humbling themselves. And when Isaiah is crying out and praying to the Lord he said, "Lord we are all as an unclean thing and anything that we could do cannot obtain to your righteousness". This is a repentant prayer – the man that prayed and smote upon his breast and he dared not even lift up his eyes and he said, "I am a sinner" – he was humbling himself; but this verse is taken that this is like a commandment or a voice from God that is saying: "You cannot be acceptable by anything that you do; your righteousness is of no value to me" and that is not what this verse is saying. This verse is saying, whenever we've sinned we want to humble ourselves and bow ourselves to God and exalt him and his holiness and let him see/reveal how sinful we truly can be. But it does not imply that we can't get up! The Bible says a just man falleth seven times and rises up again. Today the teaching that is implied by this verse teaches us that there is no use in even trying to be right with God. There's no use in being holy. They use this verse to imply that it is only by another's righteousness imputed in heaven that we can ever please God. We'll look and see what the Scriptures say about that.

The teaching today has people living like ambassadors from hell saying that somehow, because they have a belief in God, that God does not see anymore how they live – no matter how vile or wicked they live – God just looks upon them as holy because Jesus died for them. That is a lie that worldly Christianity is propagating. It is a myth. And we'll see that here in just a few minutes with the scriptures we will go to.

First of all, let's turn to Romans 10:3 – sometimes we get some of these thoughts or teachings in our mind and they are explained and drilled to us in such a way that it is pretty hard for us to overcome. We talk about it here often how many of us were taught and brought up; whenever we began to truly look and see God's will for our lives to see what the Bible says, we had to unlearn some things. It's much more difficult to unlearn things than it is to start with fresh ground. It's been a blessing to see people coming from

sinful situations that haven't been through church after church after church for years – to be starting on fresh ground and just take what the Bible says and go. What a blessing it is that they do not have to wrestle and get out of the rut that their brains have been programmed to believe just because of a few statements out of the Bible.

Romans 10:3 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.

Righteousness is used 3 times in this verse – he's talking about the men of Israel, who, being ignorant of God's righteousness, began going about to establish their own righteousness and have not submitted themselves yet to the righteousness of God. Whenever Isaiah speaks of "all MY righteousness is as filthy rags" it is like the second mention of righteousness in this verse here (Romans 10:3). Going about to establish our OWN righteousness – our OWN righteousness is truly as filthy rags. The people of Israel began having their own form of righteousness. Many times we used to hear (you don't hardly hear it anymore though) of people that were trying to live holy – often times the world would accuse them of being self-righteous and self-righteous hypocrites whenever they felt condemned of their sins. Today no one dares speak out against sin and so very few people have to say anything like that now because no one is a hypocrite – we are just all sinners and can live however we want to. But when they speak about self-righteousness they are thinking that someone trying to obtain to God's righteousness are somehow trying to be self-righteous. Self-righteousness is when I have my own standard and I try to obtain to it. The Bible called it in the Old Testament 'men doing that which is right in their own eyes.' Israel had added things to the word of God until they had become ignorant of God's righteousness and began to establish their own righteousness. That is filthy rags to God. Today in the world, men lower His righteousness and they establish their own – "I don't have to do those things, I don't have to obey God, I don't have to seek after His righteousness. I'm righteous because Jesus is just going to make me righteous in the ledgers of heaven. It does not matter how I live – I'm going to be righteous because He was righteous." They are going about to establish their own righteousness, and that is self-righteousness.

We think of the term "self-righteousness" to mean someone is trying to be higher than everyone else. But today, self-righteousness is actually turned to being lower than God's righteousness but still calling that good enough. It's still the righteousness that we think we need to have in our own eyes. But they have failed to submit themselves to God's righteousness. There's many different righteousnesses in the world today.

In Matthew 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. *9* But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

This paints a picture of both sides today – men establishing a higher righteousness of what God establishes and those having a lower righteousness than what God establishes for men. They've gone about to establish their own righteousness, following the commandments of men. This righteousness today that people are using, that they can live however they want and still be righteous with God, teaches men not to even try to live holy but to remain in sin. That's exactly what we see today – the fruit of modern Christianity following and producing just exactly what this kind of teaching produces. Men don't even try to live holy anymore – they don't care because somehow it's just all going to be taken care of. They lose before they even begin.

Let's look at what God says about man's righteousness. We'll basically stay in the New Testament but will include a few from Ezekiel because they are so clear.

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: *32* And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: *33* And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. *34* Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: *35* For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: *36* Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. *37* Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? *38* When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? *39* Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? *40* And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Does this sound like their righteousness was just something written down in the books of heaven that they had nothing to do with? Jesus says to these people – He called some men righteous and it was because of the acts that they were doing. But yet today we are taught that all of our righteousness is as filthy rags and it's useless in God's eyes. That is a direct contradiction to what Jesus just said right here. He said to these righteous: 'because you have done these things unto me, you are righteous.' And he divided men on that account. He didn't say anything about how because there's been a transaction in heaven, all your righteousness is as my righteousness no matter how you act. He said because you have done these things, you are righteous.

Matthew 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: *42* For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: *43* I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. *44* Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? *45* Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. *46* And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

You see how big a contradiction that is with the teachings that are going on in the world today in the name of Christianity? It's no wonder that things are such a mess – we've deceived ourselves into thinking that 'we will be judged according to Christ's righteousness. We are going to receive Christ's reward because he was righteous and anything that I can do is of no value.' That is in opposition to what Jesus is teaching.

Luke 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. *6* And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

They were doing something! They weren't trying to establish their own righteousness, they were walking in the righteousness of God – the Bible calls them righteous.

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

He offered a more excellent sacrifice than his brother, and he obtained a witness that he was righteous. *His righteousness was because he did what was right in God's eyes* – that's what righteousness is: doing that which is right in God's eyes. If we have our own righteousness, it is doing what's right in our own eyes. If we have God's righteousness we are doing what's right in God's eyes. That's how Abel obtained a witness that he was righteous – because he offered a sacrifice that was acceptable to God ... he walked in God's righteousness. This was done by faith, because he believed God.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. ...

He's telling that to us! Our prayers can avail much if we are a righteous man.

...17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

He was a righteous man. The Bible speaks of Job and Noah that they were perfect men, righteous in all their generations. But yet modern Christianity today tells us that righteousness is nothing ... it is as filthy rags to God. Somebody is wrong. Somebody is building on a wrong foundation. Somebody is teaching people how to avoid responsibility for their actions and justifying their sin. Somebody is wrong.

1 Peter 3:10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: *11* Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. *12* For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. *13* And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? *14* But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

There's a righteousness there that we are choosing to be a part of – not just some mystical dream in heaven that's just going to be accounted to us no matter how we live, but a *reality of how we are living*. That is a fairy tale – a myth. It's deeper than that – it's a lie to entrap men's souls to keep them from obtaining the righteousness of God.

2 Peter 2:6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; *7* And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: *8* (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) ...

By seeing and hearing the wickedness, not even partaking of it, he vexed his righteous soul from day to day seeing their unlawful deeds.

...9The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

1 John 3:7Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous...

Let no man deceive you! The man that does righteousness is righteous! Even as He [Christ] is righteous! Don't be deceived to think you have no responsibility. If you do righteousness, God will account you righteous like He accounts Jesus righteous.

...8He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Destroy the works of the Devil! Whenever we begin to turn from sin and begin to do righteousness because Christ has give us that opportunity in being reconciled to God ... to turn from our sin and do righteousness ... we are destroying the works of the devil. It's something that actually happens, not just a dream we have about how in heaven it will just be taken care of. It is something that God actually is able to do in a man. Praise the Lord!

Matthew 16:27For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Everyone of us are going to be judged by our own works – that's what Jesus said. That's not the implication we get whenever we read Isaiah 64 the way it's commonly taught (or interpreted or presented) today. They are saying we are not going to receive a reward by the works done in our body, but that we are going to receive from the works that someone else has done for us. But that's not what Jesus taught us. Jesus said very plainly that every man will give an account to God for the works that were done. We are taught so many times today that 'works' is just a bad word (almost). But what Jesus just said about it, we will be judged by our works.

Romans 2:5But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; [judging rightly - God is going to judge us rightly!] 6Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

Righteousness to God is giving everyone exactly according to their deeds. Praise God that He is merciful and will forgive sins. That we won't give an account to the sins that are confessed and forsaken because they have been forgiven. Blessed is the man that he has not imputed sin, but after those sins are forgiven, we are going to be judged by our works – by what we have done with our life ... how we responded ... how responsible we were to Him.

2 Cor. 5:9Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad...

We are going to stand before God and give an account to the way we lived – not according to how someone else lived. We will not receive punishment for sins that someone else did, nor will we receive reward for someone else's righteousness. We will receive for our own sins, our own lives, whether it was good or bad.

...11Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

Our lives are made manifest to God WHO we are serving. We are either following Christ and His way and it's being manifested, or we are living in a dream world. Our ways are made manifest – not only to God, but to our own consciences. We can see people who are living righteously. Don't be deceived! He that doeth righteousness is righteous even as He is righteous, and that is made manifest.

1 Peter 1:14As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. 17And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

This doctrine that is commonly taught today makes God a respecter of persons. That somehow because 'I've said a prayer and asked Jesus to forgive me and save me, in heaven the ledgers have been changed and now I have only Christ's righteousness and I live however I like and God is overlooking my deeds because I've said this prayer. That person is a sinner because he does not have this belief that God died for sin.' But the Bible said God is not a respecter of persons. If there's a man living in sin, he will be judged by

his sin – without respect of persons according to every man’s work – we will give an account to God by things we do in the body.

Revelation 22:11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

If we’re unjust when we die, we are going to die unjust. If we are filthy with sin when we die, we are going to die filthy in our sin. But if we die righteous, we are going to be righteous. If we die holy, we’re going to be holy. It’s real. It’s manifest in our lives.

Romans 4:6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, *7* Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. *8* Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Vs. 6 is one of the verses given to try and hold this doctrine up. Our sins have been forgiven; nothing we can do can cause our sins to be forgiven. God is good! And He will forgive us our sins. And if we try to establish, by our own merits or our own righteousness, a way to please God, we are living in ignorance. But if, when we hear God’s voice and begin to follow the Lord, John says, “If we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of his son Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins.” There is nothing we can do to merit this forgiveness – it is there because God has given it. But if you continue in your sin, you will be judged by your sin. Everyone of us are still going to give an account of our lives to God, and those sins that are not under the blood and not forgiven, that are not confessed and forsaken, we will give an account of. But this does not say anywhere that we will obtain a righteousness by anyone else’s merits; nor does it say that we will be faced or charged with sins of someone else. Everyone of us will give an account to God for the things that we have done. But blessed is the man who has seen the sinfulness of his ways and has turned to follow Jesus and have had those sins forgiven. *They wont be imputed to him because they have been forgiven* – because of God’s goodness. You wont go to hell for anyone else’s sin, nor will you go to heaven because of anyone else’s righteousness. We will either choose to do righteous or to do sin, one or the other. Praise God that we can be forgiven and our own sins, if we will own up to them and face them, Christ will cleanse us from them. “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all expectations – Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

Ezekiel 3:17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. *18* When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. *19* Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul...

Here’s a responsibility that God has placed upon the watchmen (us) – if we warn the wicked and they turn from it, God will forgive them. God is good; he forgives sin. It’s no merit of our own that does that, it’s his own goodness that does that. But we have a responsibility to turn from it or we will die in it. But if the man will not turn, he will die in his iniquity but we have delivered our soul.

...20 Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. *21* Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.

The emphasis here is Ezekiel’s responsibility, but we can see clearly that the man was either wicked or righteous; either he heard God and did righteousness or he refused to hear God and continued in his sin. Many times (this is a whole message in itself) we blame death or Adam’s sin – we think we will pay for his sin. We’ve inherited a sinful nature through him, but we will not pay for his sin. Adam will pay for his sin, just like you and I pay for our sins. *We sin because we choose to sin.* Our nature leads us that way, we inherited that nature towards sin from Adam, but we will not pay for his sins. Every man will give an account to God for his own deeds. Adam opened the door for man to fall into sin, and we have inherited his nature and some of the curses that came with that, but we are not going to pay for Adam’s sin nor our father’s sin. In Ezekiel 18 it says the grapes that the father’s ate have set the children’s teeth on edge. And the Bible makes it very clear there that the father will pay for the father’s sin and the children will pay for their own sin. Now, the father has brought hardship on the children and made it more difficult for them to do right, but they will be judged according to their sin. God is righteous!

I want to close with Revelation 22:11 again; it doesn’t get any clearly than this:

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

If we build on a wrong foundation, our building isn’t very strong and until man realizes his responsibility for his own actions, there’s nothing to build on. We are living in a dream world. God is merciful and when we’ve realized we’ve failed or chosen the wrong path,

God is good to allow us to turn around and forgive us for our sins. But if we refuse to turn around and follow Christ and his way and be accepted of him *on his terms*, we are going to be judged for our sins and will be called wicked, and unjust, and filthy. But if we hear his voice and allow him to make us righteous, yielding ourselves to God's righteousness and put that into practice in our lives, he will call us righteous and there wont be a mention of filthy rags about that. And if we submit ourselves to him and allow him to control our lives, he'll call us holy because we have chosen to live that way. God sees reality; God knows we are dust, there's no desire in us to seek after him, but he calls us and we choose which path we are going to take and it is just as real as anything in this world. If we are sinners, God sees us as sinners. If we are righteous, God sees us as righteous.

May the Lord add His blessings.