

CHAPTER IV: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

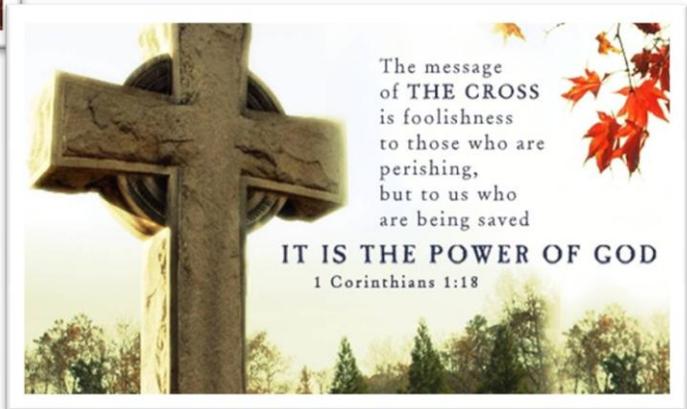
Calvin called justification by faith the principle ground upon which religion must be supported. It was the foundation upon which Luther built not only his theology but also his personal faith and trust in Jesus. It was the truth Augustine defended against Pelagius, it was the revelation that caused Wesley and Whitefield to shake the world with their preaching and it was the major doctrinal theme of the apostle Paul, the one nearest to his heart and the one he rebuked, Peter. In short, justification by faith *is* the very doctrine of salvation, the doctrine that separates believers from heretics. It is salvation, it is being born again, and it is the very passing from death to life eternal. Without justification, we have no salvation. Without justification, Christ's death on the cross would not benefit us at all, for justification is how the work of Christ



is applied to our lives. Without justification, we could not have the Holy Ghost for we would still be in our sins.

Justification is how God makes a sinner into a Christian; how Christ and all his benefits are communicated to us. We say a

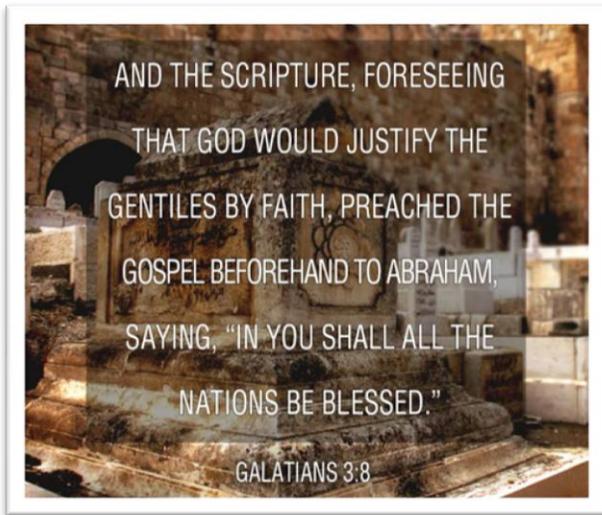
person is saved when they become a Christian and in this we say right for even the apostle Paul referred to himself and all Christians as saved (1 Corinthians 1:18). But this was not the most commonly used term to express a person's salvation. The most commonly used term in the Bible to describe a Christian's spiritual status before God is the word righteous. This was very much a legal designation denoting the Christian's legal standing in the eyes of God for after a person is justified or becomes a Christian (the two expressions mean the same thing) they are acquitted and declared not guilty in a very real and binding sense.



DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION

To be justified means to be declared just. Notice the obvious relation to the word justice. Justification means to have fully satisfied the demands of God's perfect justice. As sin is to transgress God's law and by doing so offend against justice, so to be justified means to be just, not guilty, or innocent in the eyes of the law. As it is written in Galatians 3:8 "*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would JUSTIFY the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.*"

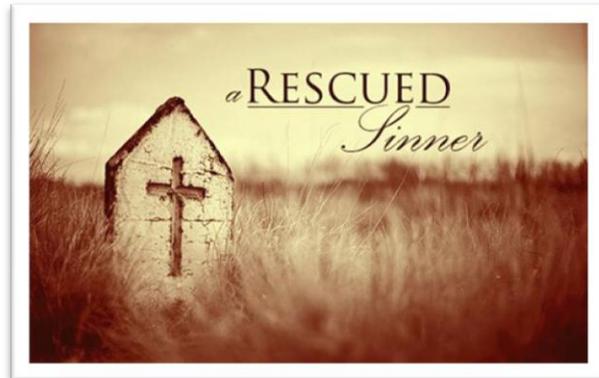
This means of course that in Abraham's descendant, the messiah Jesus, all nations, not just the



Jews, would find salvation. However, notice that; through faith, that is, faith in Christ, God would justify the heathen (non-Jews). In other words, guilty sinners would come to the messiah and have their sins forgiven or be justified, through faith in Jesus. Forgiveness is the part of the definition stressed in Luke 18:13-14 "*And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you this man went down to his house **justified** rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*"

Obviously, the publican was forgiven,

showing that justification and forgiveness are the same. When God forgives a sinner he justifies him. This is shown even more clearly in Acts 13:38-39



*"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: **And by him all that believe are justified** from all things,*

from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses."

How much plainer could it be said that justification means to be received into God's favor and forgiven of your sins? Having established that justification is forgiveness let us also see that it has another meaning. The word translated as justification, is translated as both justification and righteousness, it means the exact same thing. So then, to justify means to make righteous and to be a righteous person simply means that God has justified you or made you just. Even before the New Testament, the Bible declares that "*.**righteousness delivereth from death.***" (Proverbs 10:2) And again "*Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but **righteousness delivereth from death.***" (Proverbs 11:4)

Meaning of course that the man who doesn't have God's righteousness on the Day of Judgment will suffer God's wrath against sin. Again, "*In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is **no death.***"

This reminds us of Paul's exultation over the enemy of all mankind in 1 Corinthians 15:55

"O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How does he give us the victory? Through faith in Him, all are justified (made righteous) from all things by which we could not be justified through trying to keep the law. This is the promise of eternal life for the righteous. In short, the whole Bible teaches that the only people who end up in heaven are the righteous, and the only ones who end up in hell are the unrighteous. If you have salvation, it is because you have been declared righteous and if you do not have salvation, it is because you have not been declared righteous.

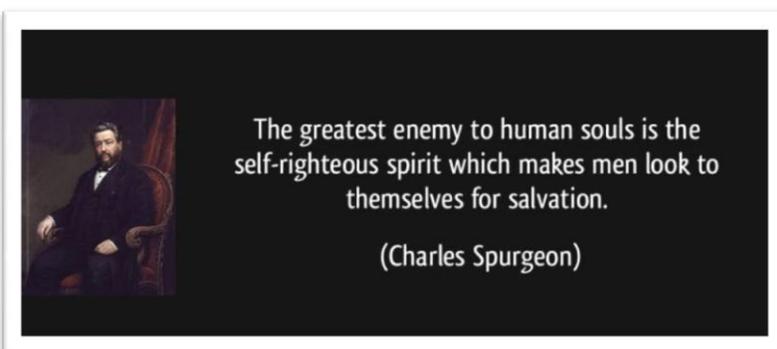
All of scripture divides all of humanity into two classes-the righteous and the unrighteous. In the Bible, there are many different ways of saying the same thing. We could also say, the godly and the ungodly, saints and sinners, light and darkness, the children of God and the children of the Devil, the church and the world, etc. etc. Paul knew this and as an Old Testament scholar he had a much more difficult time than the other apostles (who were not former rabbis or Pharisees) in believing that he was forgiven of all his sins and accepted by God.

This was because he knew from the scriptures that only by being righteous could he be accepted by God. This was the teaching of the whole Old Testament and yet he not only was accepted and forgiven of all his sins, but also called to be an apostle and preach Jesus the Messiah. Therefore, he knew God accepted him and yet he still struggled with sin, and was far from being what he considered righteous.

How can a person be perfectly righteous (for that is what the law requires) and at the same time not perfect but sinning? At this stage, Paul still did not understand what righteousness was. In Paul's early years as a Christian, there was no New Testament: (indeed Paul himself would write the bulk of that, so he sought the answer in the scriptures available: the Old Testament, and found his answer in Isaiah 51:1-2, "*Hearken unto me, ye that follow after righteousness...look unto Abraham.*"

LOOK UNTO ABRAHAM

Moreover, this is exactly what the apostle Paul did. How much better it is sometimes to just take the Bible literally and do what it says. What compounded Paul's spiritual dilemma was that the Bible recognizes two types of righteousness: the righteousness of man and the righteousness of God.



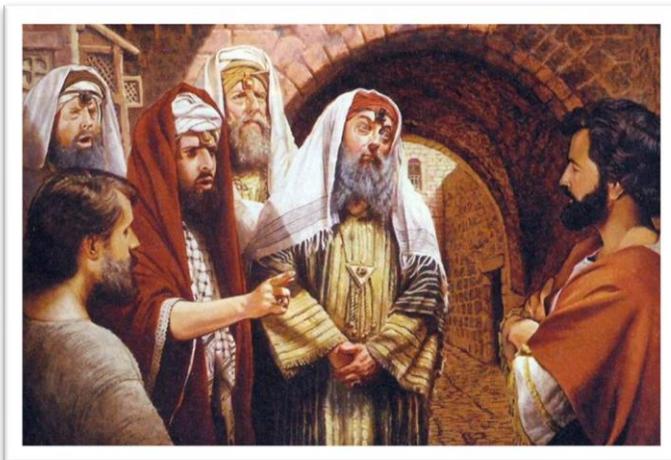
To be brief, the righteousness of man is how the Bible describes religious works and the religious life, which includes: praying, fasting, charities, church attendance, sacrifices both financial and other, pilgrimages, and all good works that man does in all religions everywhere. This is sometimes referred to in

scripture as the righteousness of the law because such good works are all those who try to earn God's favor by keeping the law can do. This term, righteousness of the law, is always in contrast to the righteousness of faith, as Paul makes clear in Philippians 3:9

"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Not having my own righteousness, which is of the law; meaning that of all Paul's works-righteousness was the main part of his religion when he was a Pharisee, he now gladly forsakes and no longer trusts in. Instead he will take the free gift of righteousness which God gives to all who trust in Jesus to take away their sins, and which he calls the righteousness which is of God by faith.

The Pharisees had the righteousness of the law (as do many of our churches today!) They prayed often and publicly, they fasted twice a week, they tithed right down to the last leaf in their gardens and like all others who do such fine religious works they were very proud about it. The same religion is practiced by legalists throughout the ages and continues to this day. This is nothing more than the religion of the monks; praying and fasting and living a very devout life, especially in public. And not only Pharisees and monks but Jehovah's Witnesses and holiness Pentecostals and all who trust in their own works to save them in all religions. In opposition to this stands the scripture, *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..."* (Isaiah 64:6)



Notice it says all our righteousnesses, not all our sins; all our righteousnesses are as a filthy rag. That means all our prayers and fasts and religious works that are done apart from faith. Anyone can mortify the flesh; a Buddhist or a Muslim can pray, fast, and mortify the flesh. That was the religion of the Pharisees, too. However, what does Jesus say?

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall EXCEED the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20)

Except your righteousness exceed; go beyond or be more than the Pharisees. Of course, the legalist will say, that means if the Pharisees fasted twice a week I must fast three times; if the Pharisees paid ten percent then I must go beyond that and pay twenty, but that isn't what Jesus is teaching at all.

RIGHTEOUSNESS of FAITH

He is not saying that those who do religious works aren't doing enough of them, he's saying that religious works can never be trusted in to make anyone right with God. You can't come to God by the righteousness of man or the law or the Pharisees but must find a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and all the other holiness sects and cults and this righteousness is what Paul called the righteousness of faith. Paul tried the Pharisee's religion and found it gave no peace to the conscience or salvation to the soul. Then the blow that shattered his world came on the road to Damascus when the savior appeared, asking him "why persecutest thou me?" After knocking him down Jesus raised him up a new man. Suddenly he found forgiveness of his sins and peace in his tortured conscience that all his previous works could never have given.

Paul found peace with God but was still troubled by a lack of understanding. How could God accept him as righteous when he knew perfectly well that he still sinned and fell short in numberless ways all the time?

How could he be legally righteous while at the same time a sinner in practice? These scriptures illustrate the righteousness of man or the law, which is not enough to get you to heaven, but when Jesus goes on to say in Matthew 6:33 *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ..."*

He is not talking about the righteousness of man, he's talking about the righteousness of God himself. The righteousness of God; perfect righteousness, is what the law demands and what God requires man to have in order to be saved. *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."*(James 2:10)

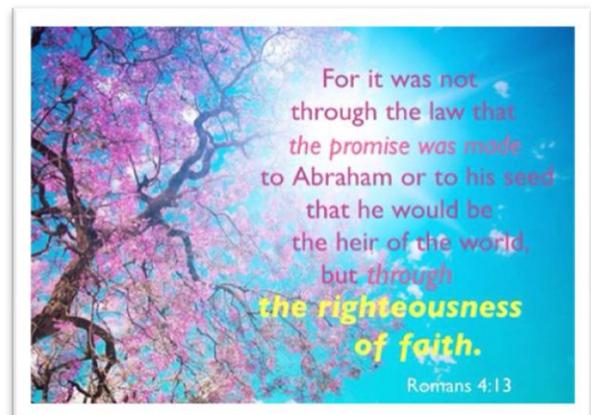
So when the apostle Paul wrote Romans it was as a result of looking to Abraham just as Isaiah 51:1-2 told him to do. He looked to Abraham to find out how to be righteous and he came up with something that overthrew all previous religious thought on the subject. He records his discovery in Romans 3:21-22

"But now (that the Messiah Jesus has come) the righteousness of God apart from the law (that is, apart from trying to keep the commandments in order to be righteous) is manifested, being witnessed (backed up and supported by) the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe (trust Him to take away their sins).



So, to restate all this as simply and as briefly as possible-What we normally think of as righteousness is something we do ourselves; praying, fasting, living a pure and holy life and all sorts of good works. However, this is not enough. These things are simply the righteousness of the law or of man such as the Pharisees had and Jesus said that unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5: 20). You need more than the filthy rags of your own righteousness (Isaiah 51: 1-2) to get to heaven.

He then goes on to explain that all have sinned and fallen short of God's ideal, but now God declares us not guilty of offending him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in his kindness freely takes away our sins. (Romans 3: 23-24 Living Bible) What happens is this: when we repent of our sins and trust Jesus to take away our sins then all of our sins, past, present, and future, are transferred to Christ on the cross, and all of the very righteousness of God is imputed to us personally. That makes you righteous in God's sight.



However God still requires man to be righteous so if we can't be righteous through our own efforts, how do we meet the requirements of God's law, that is, the requirement that we be righteous? The dilemma is that God demands something of us that he knows perfectly well we can't fulfill. If I keep repeating myself it's because this must be made perfectly clear-God's law and the ten commandments show what God demands of man – perfect righteousness. Even though this is what God requires we *cannot* by any means meet this requirement because of our sinful nature. Therefore, when God forgives a sinner it is not because he violates his own justice and accepts an unrighteous man just because he loves him, though he does love unrighteous sinners.

No, God can only accept the righteous man or else he would not be just ; he would be violating his own perfect justice. So since sinful man cannot by anything, he does become righteous, yet God demands that he be righteous, God himself must make an unrighteous man into a righteous one. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. Remember Paul started by seeking righteousness and Isaiah 51: 1-2 told him "*Look unto Abraham...*" so he went to Genesis and read about Abraham and in Romans 4: 3 he reveals what he found there, "*Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*"

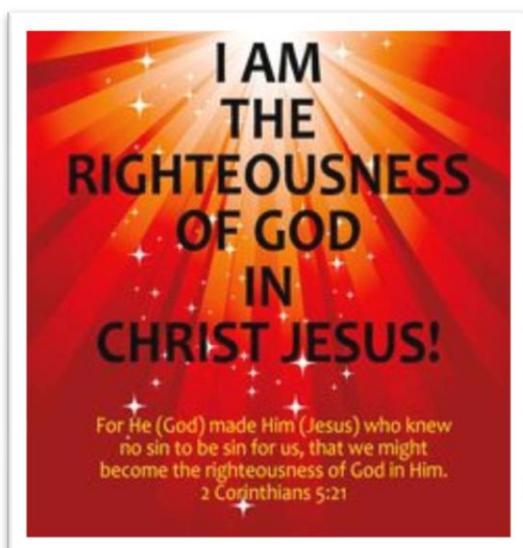
That is to say, his faith, his trust in God's promise was accepted instead of the righteousness God requires and which we can never perform. Romans 4: 5 says that

"...to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, (do you see that he justifies or makes righteous the ungodly?) *His faith is counted for righteousness.*"

Again, in Romans 4: 21 Abraham was fully persuaded of God's promise so "*...it was imputed to him for righteousness.*" this is the difference between the Christian faith and all other religions; religions teach men to try and be righteous when they can't, and Christianity teaches men that since they can't be righteous, God will give them his perfect righteousness simply by trusting Jesus to take away their sins. This is where the distinction between faith and works, which confuses some people, arises. For the carnal mind cannot conceive of God's demand that men be righteous in any way except by working to be righteous. Neither can the carnal mind accept the notion of God commanding something he knows we cannot do. But he did.

HOW RIGHTEOUS?

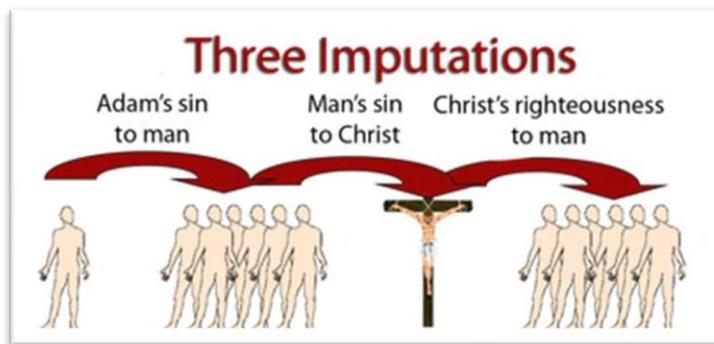
Now that God has given you his righteousness and taken away your sin, the question remains-how righteous are you? If you say righteous, you are correct, for the righteousness you have been



given is nothing less than the very righteousness of God. However, let's follow this to its logical conclusion; would you be bold enough to proclaim that you are as righteous as Jesus Christ? You are, in fact, you are every bit as righteous as Jesus Christ is. God says, I have given you Christ's righteousness and laid on him your sin, and our wicked carnal minds refuse to believe this saying, oh no, I am not as righteous as Christ, God forbid I should think so! Thus, unbelief masquerades as modesty and stubbornly refuses to trust, all the while commending ourselves as humble.

Accepting that you are as righteous as Christ is seems blasphemous to us, the very height of spiritual pride. Therefore, it would be if we said that we by our own effort were as righteous as Christ. In that case, we would be guilty of deluding ourselves and of a very wicked spiritual pride; but remember, we are made righteous by imputation rather than by merit, by faith rather than by works. This doesn't mean that we don't still sin or fall short, it simply means that God will not impute our sins to us because they have already been imputed to Christ on the cross. Christ has paid for all of my sins. It only remains for me to believe and accept it. The blood of Jesus answers for all of my sins. Whenever anyone is shocked by your claiming to be as righteous as Christ it just shows that they still think of righteousness as something we can attain by human effort and this belief must be wiped out before we can go to maturity.

The agent of conversion, the thing that actually causes a sinner to come to faith is the word of God. The parable of the sower illustrates this well enough but to make it perfectly clear, look at 1 Peter 1: 23 which tells us that Christians are *"Born again not of corruptible seed (flesh) but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."*



The Greek word for seed is sperma, the same for plants as for humans, a fact which quite naturally suggests the born again metaphor. So as in a normal human birth the man plants the seed (sperma) into the woman to produce a baby, that sperma is corruptible, which is how the Bible describes everything which proceeds from the flesh. That is, it is subject to corruption and eventually death

because of sin.

However, when a person is born of incorruptible seed, the word of God which liveth and abideth forever, the thing born of that seed is also incorruptible. Just as we have come into the world through the corruptible seed of our sinful human fathers, so we attain eternal life through being born a second time through the incorruptible seed of the word of God. The word is the seed which faith believes and so enters into eternal life through God's grace. Hence the well known verse in 2 Corinthians 5:17 *"...if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; all things are become new."*

Now to the new creature in Christ has been imputed the very righteousness of God. On believing, that is, trusting Jesus to take away all of his sins, all of God's perfect righteousness was transferred to him and all of his sins-past, present, and future were transferred to Christ on the cross. It is this last that gives people such a difficult time. They can believe that Christ died for all their sins committed before they became Christians, but what about sins committed after conversion? The best answer I ever heard to that was this-at the time Jesus died almost 2000 years ago, how many sins had you committed? None, obviously because you hadn't even been born yet. So when the Bible says that Jesus died for our sins it means just that; all our sins, past, present, and future.

I know, someone might say, that if I still sin and fall short, how can it be that I am perfectly righteous and without sin in God's sight at those times? My former explanation of how God imputes righteousness to us and sin to Christ is enough but just to go even deeper, let us look at the great paradox of 1 John. In the eighth verse of the first chapter it says, *"If we say that we have (currently, present tense) no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

This is straightforward and answers those who would teach that it is possible for a Christian to reach a state of sinless perfection in this life. We all sin and will continue to do so as long as we are in this body. Now to a verse that seems to contradict this. 1 John 1:9

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."



if we confess our sins
He is *faithful* and *just*
to *forgive our sins*
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
1 John 1:9

Take it literally without reference to the context in which it is used and it means that it is impossible for a Christian to sin; and yet we know the apostle John never taught any such thing. In fact, he just got through saying that Christians sin and that we have an advocate with the Father for when we do sin. So how do we resolve this paradox or apparent contradiction? Just this way-which the apostle is talking about the whole man, flesh and spirit, when he teaches that we all sin, and is only talking only about the new creature in Christ that is

born of incorruptible seed when he teaches that a Christian cannot sin. This is obvious from the reference to his seed in 1 John 3:9, and is exactly the same as the apostle Paul in Romans 7:18-20

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."

No more, I that do it but sin that dwell in my flesh. Not me (the new man) but the old man (the sinful flesh), after salvation the problem of sin is dealt with as a practical matter that affects your earthly walk with God and your life here and now but never again in the legal sense before the judgment seat of God. This is the way the apostles Paul and John both handled the "new creature in Christ," in their writings. That is, they attribute sin to the old sin nature, the flesh, and not to the new creature in Christ. The obvious danger here is that someone will misunderstand and say that "the sins I commit are not my fault or my responsibility because they aren't committed by the real me, the new creature in Christ, but by the old sinful me, therefore I bear no responsibility for them.

However, to this scripture opposes both the doctrine of chastening-that God does chasten his sons and daughters in Christ, and the obvious fact that all sins are your responsibility whether you are born again or not. Never does the Bible teach that Christians should just give in to the sinful tendencies of the flesh. On the contrary since God has given us his spirit and his righteousness we should fight against the flesh all the more since we are assured of ultimate victory, as Acts 14:22 says, *"...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."*