***For Skeptics and Those Who Love Them***

**June 13, 2021 June 13, 2021**

***What shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness,
have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;
but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.
Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.
They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.”*Romans 9:30-32**

**Life is a knowing adventure**

7 *I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord*

*Jeremiah 24*

3 *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

*John 17*

Nearly all the wisdom which we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern.

John Calvin in the opening of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Be Known

George Fox University

To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*

 The shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living; the relation of the knower to the known becomes the relation of the living self to the larger world.

Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*

**The “stumbling block”**

30 *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. 32 Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” 33 As it is written:*

*“See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble*

 *and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

Romans 9 (see 1 Peter 2:4-8 for a clearer picture of the rock who is a “him”)

 1) The “stumbling stone” is the scandal of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 2) What causes people to stumble is . . . .

 in the first century in the 21st century

 3) Modernism’s “defect” is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 4) Covenant Epistemology is transformative: requiring love, pledge, invitation, indwelling
 (the first four chapters of *A Little Manual for Knowing*)

 three examples:

 -- riding a bike

 -- grief

 -- creation

**Thoughts for skeptics**

 1) Reality is seeking us

 2) Desire is a gift from God

 3) The church is not the gospel

**Three thoughts for those who love a skeptic**

 1) Delight is a powerful tool

 2) Learn to trust in God’s providence (and those wonderful IFMs!)

 3) Pray – this is a job for the God of reality

**Resources for further studies in knowing**

Spurgeon has a sermon on this text at [*http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2214.htm*](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/2214.htm)

Deffinbaugh’s messages on this text are available at [*https://bible.org/series/romans-righteousness-god*](https://bible.org/series/romans-righteousness-god%20)

Tim Keller deals with this in *The Meaning of Marriage* (Penguin Books, 2011) and has a wonderful sermon at [*http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/How\_Can\_I\_Know\_God-Keller.pdf*](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/How_Can_I_Know_God-Keller.pdf)

I have really appreciated Esther Meek’s work and teaching:
*Longing to Know* (Brazos Press, 2003)
*A Little Manual for Knowing* (Cascade Books, 2014)
*Loving to Know* (Cascade Books, 2011)
Doug’s Covenant Epistemology class syllabus has an extensive knowing venture bibliography.

**HOW CAN I KNOW GOD?**

June, 1991

**TIM KELLER at** [*http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/How\_Can\_I\_Know\_God-Keller.pdf*](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/How_Can_I_Know_God-Keller.pdf)

What is Christianity? Some say it is a philosophy, others say it is an ethical stance, while still others claim it is actually an experience. None of these things really gets to the heart of the matter, however. Each is something a Christian has, but not one of them serves as a definition of what a Christian is. Christianity has at its core a transaction between a person and God. A person who becomes a Christian moves from knowing about God distantly to knowing about him directly and intimately. Christianity is knowing God.

*“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus*

*Christ, whom you have sent.” --John 17:3*

**Why do I need to know God?**

Our desire for personal knowledge of God is strong, but we usually fail to recognize that

desire for what it is. When we first fall in love, when we first marry, when we finally break into our chosen field, when we at last get that weekend house—these breakthroughs arouse in us anticipation of something which, as it turns out, never occurs. We eventually discover that our desire for that precious something is a longing no lover or career or achievement, even the best possible ones, can ever satisfy. The satisfaction fades even as we close our fingers around our goal. Nothing delivers the joy it seemed to

promise. Many of us avoid the yawning emptiness through busyness or denial, but at best there is just a postponement. “Nothing tastes,” said Marie Antoinette.

There are several ways to respond to this:

**By blaming the things themselves –** by finding fault in everyone and everything around you. You believe that a better spouse, a better career, a better boss or salary would finally yield the elusive joy. Many of the most successful people of the world are like this – bored, discontented, running from new thing to new thing, often changing counselors, mates, partners, or settings.

**By blaming yourself –** by trying harder to live up to standards. Many people believe they have made poor choices or have failed to measure up to challenges and to achieve the things that would give them joy and satisfaction. Such people are wracked with selfdoubts and tend to burn themselves out. They think, “If only I could reach my goals, then this emptiness would be gone.” But it is not so.

**By blaming the universe itself –** by giving up seeking fulfillment at all. This is the person who says, “Yes, when I was young I was idealistic, but at my age I have stopped howling after the moon.” This makes you become cynical, you decide to repress that part of yourself that once wanted fulfillment and joy. But you become hard, and you can feel yourself losing your humanity, compassion, and joy.

**By blaming and recognizing your separation from God –** by seeing that the emptiness comes from your separation from God, and by establishing a personal relationship with him.

**In order to form a personal relationship with God, you must know**

**three things:**

**1) Who we are:**

***God’s creation.*** God created us and built us for a relationship with him. We belong to him, and we owe him gratitude for every breath, every moment, everything. Because humans were built to live for him (to worship), we will always try to worship something – if not God, we will choose some other object of ultimate devotion to give our lives meaning.

***Sinners.*** We have all chosen (and re-affirm daily) to reject God and to make our own joy and happiness our highest priority. We do not want to worship God and surrender ourself as master, yet we are built to worship, so we cling to idols, centering our lives on things that promise to give us meaning: success, relationships, influence, love, comfort, and so on.

***In spiritual bondage.*** To live for anything else but God leads to breakdown and decay. When a fish leaves the water, which he was built for, he is not free, but dead. Worshiping other things besides God leads to a loss of meaning. If we achieve these things, they cannot deliver satisfaction, because they were never meant to be “gods.” They were never meant to replace God. Worshiping other things besides God also leads to self- image problems. We end up defining ourselves in terms of our achievement in these things. We must have them or all is lost; so they drive us to work too hard, or they fill us with terror if they are jeopardized.

**2) Who God is:**

***Love and justice.*** His active concern is for our joy and well-being. Most people love those who love them, yet God loves and seeks the good even of people who are his enemies. But because God is good and loving, he cannot tolerate evil. The opposite of love is not anger, but indifference. “The more you love your son, the more you hate in him the liar, the drunkard, the traitor,” (E. Gifford). To imagine God’s situation, imagine a judge who also is a father, who sits at the trial of his guilty son. A judge knows he

cannot let his son go, for without justice no society can survive. How much less can a loving God merely

ignore or suspend justice for us—who are loved, yet guilty of rebellion against his loving authority?

***Jesus Christ.*** Jesus is God himself come to Earth. He first lived a perfect life, loving God with all his heart, soul, and mind, fulfilling all human obligation to God. He lived the life you owed—a perfect record. Then, instead of receiving his deserved reward (eternal life), Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins, taking the punishment and death each of us owed. When we believe in him: 1) our sins are paid for by his death, and 2) his perfect life record is transferred to our account. So God accepts and regards us as if we have done all Christ has done.

**3) What you must do:**

***Repent.*** There first must be an admission that you have been living as your own master, worshipping the wrong things, violating God’s loving laws. “Repentance” means you ask forgiveness and turn from that stance with a willingness to live for and center on him.

***Believe.*** Faith is transferring your trust from your own efforts to the efforts of Christ. You were relying on other things to make you acceptable, but now you consciously begin relying on what Jesus did for your acceptance with God. All you need is nothing. If you think, “God owes me something for all my efforts,” you are still on the outside.

***Pray after this fashion:*** “I see I am more flawed and sinful than I ever dared believe, but that I am even more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I turn from my old life of living for myself. I have nothing in my record to merit your approval, but I now rest in what Jesus did and ask to be accepted into God’s family for his sake.” When you make this transaction, two things happen at once: 1) your accounts are cleared, your sins are wiped out permanently, you are adopted legally into God’s family and 2)

the Holy Spirit enters your heart and begins to change you into the character of Jesus.

***Follow through.*** Tell a Christian friend about your commitment. Get yourself training in the basic Christian disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians.

**Why should I seek God?**

On one hand, you may feel that you “need” him. Even though you may recognize that you have needs only God can meet, you must not try to use him to achieve your own ends. It is not possible to bargain with God. (I’ll do this if you will do that.”) That is not Christianity at all, but a form of magic or paganism in which you “appease” the cranky deity in exchange for a favor. Are you getting into Christianity to serve God, or to get God to serve you? Those are two opposite motives and they result in two different

religions. You must come to God because 1) you owe it to him to give him your life (because he is your creator) and 2) you are deeply grateful to him for sacrificing his son (because he is your redeemer.)

On the other hand, you may feel no need or interest to know God at all. This does not mean you should stay uncommitted. If you were created by God, then you owe him your life, whether you feel like it or not. You are obligated to seek him and ask him to soften your heart, open your eyes, and enlighten you. If you say, “I have no faith,” that is no excuse either. You need only doubt your doubts. No one can doubt everything at once— you must believe in something to doubt something else. For example, do you believe you are competent to run your own life? Where is the evidence of that? Why doubt everything but your doubts about God and your faith in yourself? Is that fair? You owe it to God to seek him. Do so.

**What if I’m not ready to proceed?**

Make a list of the issues that you perceive to be barriers to your crossing the line into faith. Here is a possible set of headings:

*Content issues.* Do you understand the basics of the Christian message—sin, Jesus as God, sacrifice, faith?

*Coherence issues.* Are there intellectual problems you have with Christianity? Are there objections to the Christian faith that you cannot resolve in your own mind?

*Cost issues.* Do you perceive that a move into full Christian faith will cost you dearly? What fears do you have about commitment?

Now talk to a Christian friend until these issues are resolved. Consider reading: *Mere Christianity,* by C.S. Lewis (MacMillan) and *Basic Christianity,* by John Stott (IVP)

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# Barriers Broken DownA Sermon [(No. 2214)](http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/c37.htm)Intended for Reading on Lord's-Day, July 26th, 1891,Delivered by C. H. SPURGEON, at the [Metropolitan Tabernacle,](http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/index.html) Newington

"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."—Romans 10:3.

OU THAT HAVE YOUR BIBLES OPEN, kindly follow me from the first verse of the chapter. It begins, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." If you really desire that men should be saved, pray for them. It is an empty wish, a mere formality, if you do not turn it into prayer. Every loving desire for any man or woman should, by the believer, be taken before God in prayer. We cannot expect that God will save men unless his people pray for it. There must be travail before the birth, and there must be travail in prayer with God before we can expect that many will be born again into the church of God. Oh, for more prayer! Let us cry to God in secret, and in the family, and in all our assemblies, that God would save the sons of men.
But prayer, if it is sincere, is always attended with effort. Hence the apostle begins to teach as well as to pray. He prays that Israel might be saved, and then he explains the difficulties in the way, and tries to remove them. You pray, dear friend, do you? But you never speak to the individual for whom you pray. Is your prayer sincere? I will not question it. But your prayer has hardly reached that pitch of passionate earnestness which will secure an answer; for if you were in downright earnest, you would go to the person for whom you pray, and explain the way of salvation. You want your boy to be a scholar. Then you send him to school. You want your girl to learn a certain trade. You put her apprentice to it, do you not? In the things of common life, that which you desire you use means to obtain. Oh, that in all our churches we might feel that while effort without prayer is presumption, and prayer without effort is hypocrisy, the holy blending of prayer and labor will produce, for certain, a grand result!
If we labor for souls, we must not be content unless souls are really saved; for the apostle says, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God." Well, does not that satisfy you, Paul? They are zealous for God. They are red-hot. "No," says he, "not unless it is in the right way. They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." We feel very thankful when we see tears stream down the cheek; but, you know, people cry at the theater, and there is not much in it. Pray God it may not end in a shower of tears; but that the heart may bleed as well as the eyes weep. It may happen that we have induced our hearers to give up some outward sins. So far, so good. But it is written, "Ye must be born again;" and if this vital change is not experienced, all outward reformation will land them short of heaven. Beloved, the apostle's love for souls led him to pray, and led him to labor; but it led him to be very concerned that none should stop short of real living faith in Christ, and justification by his blood and righteousness. When we are in the throes of a revival, and we think men are turning to Christ, let us be happy, and let us not throw any cold water upon anybody; but let us see that it is really the work of grace in the hearts of our hearers. Let us take care that the ploughshare goes down deep. Some soil wants even cross-ploughing and scarifying. Let us do the work thoroughly; for it is only those that are really converted that will stand. We do not want a lot of people that will run in at one door of the church, and out at the other; but we want saving work; and our prayer should be, "Lord, quicken the people into diving life, by divine truth, through the divine Spirit!"
Now observe, that the apostle, being thus earnest about souls, endeavors to be specially clear about the doctrine of justification by faith. If we want men to be truly converted, we must set before them the plan of salvation very clearly and distinctly. I meet with hundreds of persons who have had some kind of work upon their hearts, but they tell me that they walk in a mist. They have not quite understood it. They felt that they were on the rock, but they were not quite sure what the rock really was. It is a good thing that our zeal for God should be according to knowledge, that we know what we believe, and why we believe it; and know that we are saved, and how we are saved, and why we are saved; for if there be a mistake here, it may be fatal. Martin Luther, who, as we all know, continually preached the doctrine of justification by faith, said one day, that he felt half inclined to take the Bible, and bang it about the people's heads; for they seemed as if they would not get a hold of the doctrine that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and by that alone. I suspect that knocking people's heads about with the Bible would not effect any very great result; but that was Martin Luther's way of putting it. Keep hammering away on that nail: "Believe, believe, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Well, now, that was the particular battle-ground of Luther's day, so that he said, "The doctrine of justification by faith is the article of a standing or a falling church." If a church holds and preaches that, it is a church of Christ, notwithstanding many blunders. But, whatever it may preach, if it does not preach *that,* it is to be questioned whether it is not a fallen church, a church that has lost its true position.
The fight to-day is the same as in Luther's day. The words have changed, and men make other pretences; but the fight all along the line is still this—Are we saved by our own merits, or by the merits of another? Are we righteous through what we do, or are we righteous through what Christ has done. Is sin put away by tears and repentances, or is sin washed away by the precious blood of Christ, and by that alone? Beloved, I trust that our pulpit will never give an uncertain sound upon this matter.
In our discourse we shall endeavor to show you that, while there are two righteousnesses, our own righteousness and the righteousness of God, there will always be, as there has always been, a conflict between the two. Men will choose their own righteousness, and they will not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.
You that are fellow-workers for Christ will be especially interested in this text; for it sets forth three difficulties in the way of a man's salvation. The first is, *ignorance:* "They being ignorant of God's righteousness." The next is, *self-will:* "And going about to establish their own righteousness." And the third is, *flat rebellion:* "Have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."
I. Well, now, our first difficulty is with IGNORANCE.
"Ignorance is the mother of devotion," according to the Church of Rome. "Ignorance is the mother of error," according to the word of God. We love the spread of knowledge, although there is a knowledge which it were better not to know, as there is a philosophy that is nothing but vain deceit, and not true wisdom. What we want our fellow-men to possess, is spiritual knowledge. Especially do we desire that they may have, first and chiefly, knowledge with regard to God's righteousness; for the difficulty is, that *men do not know what that righteousness is which God requires.*
Do you want to be saved by your own righteousness? Do you know what kind of righteousness it must be? To be accepted, it must be perfect. That is to say, if you have committed but one sin, you have stained your character in the sight of God, and your hope of perfect righteousness is gone. God's law requires obedience, from the first moment that the creature understands that law, as long as ever that creature lives. Mark what it requires of you: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Have you done that? "And thy neighbor as thyself." Have you done that? Why, there is not one of us he has done it. If we had kept the law of God completely, from the first command to the last, from the first day until now; even that would not save us; for, if there were to be one sinful word or deed during the rest of life, it would spoil the whole, and God could not accept our righteousness.
When a man commits one sin, he is guilty of disobedience to all the commands of God; for "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." Here is a chain containing twenty links. If I break one of them I have broken the chain. True, there are nineteen perfect links; but if number twenty is snapped, down goes the cage over the mouth of the mine, and the miners are killed. Suppose that I should be required to produce a perfect vase of alabaster, or clear crystal, as a present to the Queen. But my servant-maid has chipped it just a little. What is to be done? I may possibly find somebody to use some patent cement, and fasten the little pieces in their places; but when all is done, it is chipped; it is not perfect; and if it must be perfect before royalty can accept it, I must got another vase, for this one will not do.
Now, dear friend, while I am talking to you about a chip here and a chip there in your life, I am sure you must be saying, "Do not talk so, sir. Why, some of us have not only got chipped, but we are smashed right up. And as to broken links; why, we have fairly melted the chain; there is not a link loft. We have nothing, absolutely nothing, that we can bring before God." I am glad to hear it. If you are lost, you are the very ones Christ came to save; and if you have no righteousness of your own, you have got to the halfway house of salvation. When you strip a man, you are partly on the way to clothing him. When a man is changing his old clothes for better, he must get the old ones off first. Oh, how glad I am to meet with a real sinner! There are many sham sinners about. I saw, one day, in Italy, a fellow sticking out his arm, with an awful sore, and he begged of me. As I suspected that he had manufactured that sore with a little sulphuric acid, or by some such process, I did not feel the least pity for him. We have lots of people who come confessing their sins: "Oh, yes, we are sinners; we are sinners." They do not mean it: they are only sham sinners. A real sinner, one who feels his guilt, is a "sacred thing", as Hart says; "the Holy Ghost has made him so." He is an empty vessel that God is going to fill. He is a broken heart that God is going to make anew. But here is our trouble; that the mass of people are not aware how perfect, how complete, any righteousness must be, before God can accept it.
The next difficulty is, that *men do not know that God has provided a righteousness* for all believers. For every soul of Adam born, who will believe in Christ, there is a perfect righteousness; not ours, but God's. God came here in human form, not bound to be obedient; but "being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient"; obedient to his own law, and fulfilled every jot and tittle of it. He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And his obedience is ours, if we believe. God looks at us as if we had done what his Son has done. Christ died, and rose again; and God regards us as having died in him, and reckons that we are risen with him, and now live in him. Our righteousness is the righteousness of another, even of the Son of God—a perfect righteousness, a divine righteousness, an everlasting righteousness. In the book of Daniel it is written that Messiah, the Prince, should "finish the transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness." He was "made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."
Alas! how many there are who do not know that God justifieth the ungodly; that sinners can be regarded as just, through what Christ has done and suffered; and that, believing in the precious Christ whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, the vilest are fair to look upon in God's esteem, and the far-off ones are made nigh by the blood of Christ! Oh, I wish that men knew it! I have sometimes thought that if they did but know it, if they did but really hear the gospel; they must believe it. You that preach Christ in the streets, go on preaching him. I saw a man preaching, the other day, with no creature but one dog to listen to him, and I really thought that he might as well have gone home. But I met with a story yesterday which I know to be true, and it showed me that I was making a mistake. There was a woman who for years had been in such dreadful despair that she would not even hear the gospel. She came to be very ill, and she said to one that called upon her, "You sent a man to preach under my window three months ago, and I got a blessing." "No," the friend said, "I never sent anybody to preach under your window." "Oh," she said, "I think you did, for he came and preached, and my maid said that there was nobody listening to him. I did not want to hear him; and as he made so much noise, my maid shut the window, and I lay down in bed; but the man shouted so, that I was obliged to hear him; and I thank God I did, for I heard the gospel, and I found Christ. Did you not send him?" "No," said the good man, "I did not." "Well," she said, "then God did. There was nobody in the street listening to him; but I heard the gospel, and I got out of my despair, and I found the Savior, and I am prepared to die." Fire away, brethren! You do not know where your shot will strike; but "there's a billet for every bullet." I believe that there is some soul whom God means to bless whenever we preach the gospel, depending upon his grace. But the mass of mankind are ignorant of the righteousness which God requires, and ignorant of the righteousness which God has provided.
Many *are ignorant as to how they are to receive this righteousness.* If there be such a righteousness, say they, how are we to get it? The current notion is, "I must pray so much; I must weep so much; I must feel so much." Ah! this is the common ignorance, whereas men should know that—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One."

"Why, everybody preaches this," says someone. I know they do, but people do not understand it, although you keep on preaching it; for until God the Holy Ghost makes men to know the meaning of what you say, they will but nod their heads, and pass on. Though I heard the gospel from my childhood, and was brought up upon the very knee of piety, I did not understand what I must do to be saved till I heard that text preached from—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." I do not believe that my ignorance was the fault of the preacher. It was certainly not the fault of my father, or my mother, and not the fault of the Bible, which I had read through again and again; but it was the fault of these dim eyes, that I could not see. Go on! go on! ye preachers of the Word. Spread abroad the knowledge of this great fact, that "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."
The worst of this terrible ignorance is, that the mass of mankind *do not know HIM who is our righteousness.* Who is the Righteousness of God? Who is the Blessed One? God's only-begotten Son; God, the Word made flesh; born at Bethlehem, nurtured in the carpenter's shop, toiling here below, and wearing his life away for the souls of men; extending his arms upon the cross, giving his side to be pierced, his soul to be breathed out, his body to be laid in the tomb, that men might be saved. O Jesu! in thy wounds is our salvation; but men do not know it. O Jesu! thy death is the death of sin, thy life is our life unto God; but men do not know it. Alas! alas! men still go on in their blindness and ignorance; still is the Lord of life despised and rejected of men, and still his servants cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"
You see our great difficulty is human ignorance—ignorance, dear friends, even of the *facts* of the truth. You do not know how near to this place, in the very midst and heart of London, there are tens of thousands who do not know the name of Christ. You think it incredible; but I know that it is so. There are multitudes that have never read a chapter in the Word of God since they went to Sunday-school as children, and they never darken the threshold of God's house. There are streets, in neighbourhoods not far from here, where, if one man goes to a place of worship, he is marked by all his neighbors as a strange character. Let me turn aside for a moment, and ask you how in this city of London are we to get the gospel to the working-men—to a great number of them? How does it get to some of them? How? Oh, little Mary sings it on father's knee on Sunday night. He has not been out to a place of worship; but his little girl has been to the Sunday-school; or his son Jack has been to the mission, and comes home, and tells his father what the preacher said. He will listen to his own children when he will listen to no one else. The way to increase the number of those who are not ignorant, is for us so to see the things of Christ, that others who have never seen them may have from us an intimation of what we have seen. Oh, it must be very painful to a blind man for another to say to him, "Now I am looking over a delightful landscape. Away there I can see a beautiful piece of water, and beyond the hills I see the sea. There is a ship going along." "Oh," the man says, "I wish I had eyes that I could see, too!" The Holy Spirit makes us see, that, as we tell the story, we may set others longing to see also. I think I reminded you once before, that when the prodigal came back, his father said, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his foot." But, you will notice, he never fed him. The father does not say anything about that. He says, "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry." Well, it is the servants and all the rest of the household that are to eat. There is nothing said about killing the fatted calf for the prodigal. No, no; you see he had lost his appetite, and others must begin to eat first; and then, when they began to eat, he was sure to join in with them. There is no surer way of begetting an appetite than seeing other people eating. Let us enjoy the things of Christ so much that poor sinners' mouths will water, and they will begin to ask, "What is thy Beloved more than any other beloved? What is this righteousness whereof you speak. What is this wonderful thing?" We have need to tell out what we know; for ignorance, even of the simple facts of the gospel, is extremely common.
Others are in great ignorance as to the *excellence* of the gospel. They do not know the peace, the joy, the rest it brings.

"His worth if all the nations knew,
Sure the whole world would love him too."

But they think that it is all more talk; a something all very well for parsons, and for some few other people, to get a hold of; but nothing for the working-man, nothing for the man of business, nothing for your noble gentleman who has his heaven at Newmarket, and his bliss at Epsom. Ah, dear friends! I would to God they know the pearl of great price, the incomparable value of salvation by blood; for then would they reckon the highest glory of this present world as unworthy to be compared with the least delight of the kingdom of God.
With many this ignorance is *wilful.* Nobody is so blind as the man that does not want to see; nobody so deaf as the man that does not wish to hear. Many are like the hogs in harvest—very deaf when they are told to go out of the corn-field. And so, when sinners run riot in their sins, they are very deaf indeed when they are told to quit them, and fly to Christ for refuge. Some of you, perhaps, do not want to know too much. When you come to that part of the Bible that begins to touch your conscience, you say, "Shut that up." You will go on somewhere else. You do not want to know. Wilful ignorance will bring terrible damnation. If there be salvation, and you do not want to know it, then you deserve to be cast away.
There are some who are ignorant *despairingly;* and I do pity them, poor souls! They sigh and cry, "Oh, I cannot be saved, I am so guilty. My heart is so hard!" the devil tells men, first, that they can be saved any day they like; so they may put it off. Then, immediately afterwards, he says, "Salvation is not for such as you. You never had enough sense of sin. You never will have enough faith. God will never save you." Ah, my dear friend, I wish I could make you understand, that whoever comes to Christ he will in no wise cast out; for he himself hath said, "He that believeth on me hath"—hath now—"everlasting life." He shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck him out of Christ's hands. Some of us will give Christ great glory when we get to heaven. I think that some people will meet us at the gate, and say, "What! and have *you* got here?" I should not wonder if it was some elder brother. That elder brother was a good fellow. He was a real child, and he was always with his father, and all his father had was his. Yet he was surprised to see the prodigal come home after wasting his father's living. Ah, but it is those that cost the Lord so much in whom his infinite grace will be displayed! They will glorify him most. O ye despairing ones, if you must faint, faint away on to the bosom of Christ! Swoon away into the arms of the almighty Savior, and then it will be well to have swooned, and you will find in him your strength.
II. There is another thing that stands in our way that is worse than ignorance, and that is, SELF-WILL. Men, ignorant of God's righteousness, are said to be "going about to establish their own righteousness"; in other words, to set up the *poor idol* of their own righteousness. Man sees God's righteousness, and, instead of accepting it, he says, "I think I could match that. I will set up my own righteousness." There is a treasure of gold, and the man says, "No, I will not have that. I think that I could make a sovereign at home out of a bit of brass." Fool that he is! How shall he mimic God? If I were at heaven's wide-open gate, and a voice should say, "Enter freely," and I replied, "No, I think I prefer the Surrey hills, or a place down by the seaside" what a fool I should be! but, even then, not so great a fool as when forsaking the righteousness of God, I want to set up my own. A human thing at best, how shall that match the diving righteousness? An imperfect thing at best, how shall I compare that with the perfect righteousness of Christ? a fading, floating thing, always apt to be damaged by the next moment's temptation, how can I be so foolish? A ridiculous thing, an ignominious thing, a filthy thing. Paul said that his righteousness, which was of the law, was "blameless"; and yet he counted it dung that he might win Christ—dung, the most filthy thing. Here, scavenger, take it away! Have any of you any righteousness of your own? I do not believe that even the dustman would take it. He would say, "No, the carts are not for carting away man's righteousness; we have no place bad enough to shoot it into." Shoot it into the bottomless pit: nay, even there they have not any righteousness; for they know their true condition. Human righteousness is a great lie: it is filthy rags. Away with it from off the face of the earth!
What do men try to do? In what *vain efforts* are they spending their time and strength? According to the text, they go about "to establish their own righteousness." I think you will better understand it, if I read it, "They go about to set up their own righteousness." You see it is a dead thing. "See here", they say; "we will make it stand." If I had a corpse here—I am glad that I have not—well, I set it up, and it tumbles down. Nevertheless, I will put its legs out a little wider, and see whether it will stand. Down it goes! Now I will prop it up. Surely, I can make this dead thing stand. But, no: it has a tendency to fall, and down it goes! Have I not seen a sinner try to set up the corpse of his own righteousness, and make it stand? At last he has been obliged to say what the fool said in the old classic, "It wants something inside"; and so it does: for until there is life within, it will not stand. Even so, our righteousness has no true vitality, no life within, and it will not stand.
Or, to use another illustration: it is like a man trying to patch up an old house. You find such in country villages; a place which nobody has ever repaired for fifty years. I do not know if there is any landlord; but if there is, he would like to forgot that he has such property. The main beam is nearly cracked through. The lath and plaster have gone long ago, and the birds go in and out the best parlour whenever they like; and the whole thing is tumbling down. A man buys it, and he says, "Now, you know, it is a pity to pull this house down; I think I will repair it." So he puts in a beam there, just under the roof; and he puts a strut here, and another timber there; and, by the time he has spent as much as would have built a house, he has got a very handsome ruin left, and nothing more. I think it was Charles the First who used to swear, "God mend me." Somebody said it would be an easier job to make a new one of him; and I believe it. When men say, "God mend me," they had better say, "God make me new." So, as to your righteousness; if you have a lot of it, and it is very good; if you have been christened, or baptized, if you like, and confirmed, and have always gone to your place of worship, and are so good that you wonder you can live in such a wicked world as this; if you have all that righteousness, the best thing to do with it is, to get rid of it; for it will ruin your soul. But this is what men do,—they try "to set up" their own righteousness.
And then the text says that they "go about" to do this: "Going about to establish their own righteousness." That is to say, they set about it with great zeal. Some of you that know the Lord can recollect how you thought you would do it. Why, at first, when you started as a young man, you were never going to do any wrong. You were going to have a perfect righteousness of your own. You had an ugly temper, however, and it broke out indeed. "Well," you said, "I shall never do so again." You came down to breakfast, and you were as bad-tempered as ever; so you said, "Never mind, I will set it up now. I shall be a teetotaler. That will be a grand thing." So it was; but, somehow or other, down tumbled your righteousness again! Then you went to a place of worship. You said, "I will always be there." You began to think that you would grow into a saint; but you did not. Down tumbled your righteousness! Ever it went; and you, all the while, tried zealously to set it up. "Going about" implies great earnestness: when a man says, "I am going about a thing", he means that he is going to take his coat off—going to work in his shirt-sleeves. He is going to toil at it for many hours. I recollect how I set to work in my shirt-sleeves to make a righteousness of my own; and I did very nicely indeed while it was dark. But when a little light from the cross broke in, I began to see the filthiness of it. And you, my friend, think yourself very beautiful when you cannot see yourself. But let the looking-glass be held before you, you would begin to see the spots of filth that defile the very best of your righteousness. Ah me! how foul the righteousness of men is; and yet they go about to set up their own righteousness.
To "go about" to establish a righteousness means, in the next place, that men have varied ways of doing it. Shall I tell you what I frequently meet with? I have talked with a person, and said, "Can you trust in your own works?" "Oh, no, sir, I can never do that." "Well, can you come to Christ, and take the righteousness of God?" "Well, sir, no; I do not feel enough my own emptiness." Look! This man is going to bring his own emptiness to help him. He actually thinks that, if he has not any righteousness, his own emptiness is good for something; and, if he can get to feel that, he will come and bring his feelings of emptiness to commend him to Christ. Did you ever hear of such a thing? You go to him, and you say, "My dear man, salvation is not on account of your feelings." Each time you drive him out of his refuge of lies, he hastens back to the old ground again—something of himself. Suppose there is a ship out at sea, and the people on board feel that they are sale. One of them says, "I know that we shall not drift far out of our course." "Why?" "Because we have such a big anchor on board." You say, "Ah! he is a cockney. He must be a fool who believes in an anchor on board." Why, it is no good to anybody! It is when you "let go" the anchor, and lose sight of it, and the anchor gets an unseen grip down below, that it is good for something; but while the anchor is on board, it is only so much dead weight for the ship. You want to have your anchor on board, do you not? You do not like it to "enter into that which is within the veil:" that is too mysterious. You want to feel something, to have something of your own. O pride! O self-will! God will have salvation to be all of grace, and man will have it of debt. God gives the promise of his grace, and man puts his penny down to pay for it. Men's pennies and God's promises do not very well go together to buy heaven. He says, like a king, "You may have it for nothing;" and we say, "Lord, we think we could make up a little something to buy it." Well, then, you will never have it. His terms are free, rich, sovereign grace; a sinner, with nothing, receiving everything from God. He may have it. He may have it now. None can say him nay. But he stands chaffering, trying to pay his penny, as if God kept a shop. Has God come down to stand in your market, and cry to you, "Here, bring your gold and your silver to purchase my favor"? You know not who he is, for all things are his. If he were hungry, he would not tell you, for the cattle on a thousand hills belong to him. Will you have salvation freely? If so, take it freely. But if you will buy it, you and God can never agree.
Let me just close this point about human will, by saving that the efforts of men for their own salvation are *deadly efforts.* God will save them one way, and they want to be saved another. God says, "There is medicine. Take it; drink it." Man says, "No, I will grow my own drugs in my own garden, and I will compound my own physic;" and he goes and takes his own dose. And can he ever get well in such a way as that? God says, "I will forgive." Man says, "I will try and deserve to be forgiven"; as if that could be possible. I have heard that the Romanists say that venial sins are a kind of sins that deserve to be forgiven. What sort of sin must that be? Yet some men seem to think that, somehow or other, they can deserve to be forgiven. That would not be forgiveness at all. Come, come, ye vilest of the vile, ye lost and utterly undone! Come, come, you that have no righteousness, or the ghost of a shade of a shadow of a pretense of any! Come as you are. There is everything you want in Christ. Come and have him, and you shall not be refused; but reject his terms, and salvation can never be yours.
III. Now, very briefly, I want to speak upon the third difficulty, which is a gross evil, namely, FLAT REBELLION.
Observe my text, dear friend, if you forget everything else. I say, remember what the Lord says: "They have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." This is a *strange word.* "Have not submitted themselves." Do you not wonder that such a word is used? Here is a criminal who will not submit to be pardoned. Here is a sick man who will not submit to be made well. Here is a man with a broken leg who will not submit to have it healed. Here is a poor beggar in the street who will not submit to be made into a gentleman. Why, the word seems quite out of place, does it not? It shows you the monstrous absurdity of self-righteousness, that men will not submit themselves to that which is the greatest blessing that heaven itself can bestow. It is a matter of submission.
While it is a strange word, it is a very *searching word.* Is it so, that, the reason why I am not saved is that I will not submit? Do I stick out? Have I an iron sinew in my neck? Am I such a self-willed fool that I will not submit before my Maker—will not yield even to have salvation for nothing? Am I so proud that I scorn to be a pauper before God? That is just it. That is the reason why many have not peace. If they were bankrupts, if they were cleaned right out, they would have perfect rest of soul; but still they stand out, and, in their self-righteousness, fight against God.
It is a very *true word.* I am sure that there is many a sinner who has not anything to be proud of, and yet he is as proud as Lucifer. Why, there are harlots that are proud of their own righteousness. There are drunkards proud of their own righteousness. I do not know where they get it from; but proud of it they are. I have heard say that a dustman can be as proud as my Lord Mayor. And so the vilest sinner can be proud of his own righteousness. "Why", say you, "he has not any to be proud of." No more have you: I mean you good, moral persons, you who never do anything wrong, as you think. You have not any more righteousness than he has, if it comes really to be measured up, and tested by the Word of God. Still, it is so: the worse the man, the harder he is to bow before the righteousness of God.
It is a very *suggestive word.* "They have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." They will not own that God is King. They quarrel with his sovereignty. How can the rebel be forgiven when he begins to question whether the king is king? When he begins to deny the rights of the magistrate to condemn him, how can he be pardoned? You must yield, my friend. Submit to the fact that God is God, or else you will not submit to God's righteousness. Man thinks that God is hard, austere, demanding too much; and while God puts before him everything for nothing, yet still he says that the price is too high. It is his heart that is too high, his proud looks that want bringing down. Oh, that God would bring them down! The man will not submit to the power of God. He will not yield himself up to God to work with him, and in him, and for him. He wants to do all himself; and then, if he got to heaven, he would throw his cap up, and want to share the glory. But it will not do. It is all of grace from first to last; and the sinner must consent that it shall be so, or else the gate of heaven will never give him admittance.
Lastly, it is a very *cheering word.* "They have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." "And is that all that I have to do—to submit myself? Is that all?" you say. There is a feather in the cap of your pride. Take it out. You have a weapon of rebellion by your side. Throw it down. Just submit yourself there, with folded hands, with the rope around your neck. Say, "Lord, if my soul be sent to hell, I deserve it. I submit, and I plead for mercy. I plead the precious blood. I not only submit to take that plea, but I delight to take it. I am happy to believe that

'Thou hast promised to forgive
All who on thy Son believe.
Lord, I know thou canst not lie:
Give me Christ, or else I die.'"

# Beloved friend, may the Holy Spirit lead you to submit! You have been kicking and struggling; now submit. You have been despairing, and talking about its being presumptuous to believe. Submit. Give all that up. No more of your talk! Come to faith! When a man submits to God, that man has got the victory. When God is King, you are safe. When you take Christ to be everything, and you are nothing, then neither death nor hell shall ever divide you from the heart of God. When you are not your own, you are Christ's; but so long as you are dependent upon self, you do not know the Lord, and you cannot know him.May God bless this simple testimony to each and all, and to his name be praise! Amen.