



BRYAN CHAPELL

HOLINESS BY GRACE

HOLINESS

BY GRACE

DELIGHTING IN THE JOY

THAT IS OUR STRENGTH

CHAPELL

*view so clear to us that we will not stop seeing ourselves as God sees us. s from an earthly perspective, then we will so focus on our weaknesses . . . will be misery. But if we remember that God is the lifter of our heads e our eyes to see the affection in his own. When we see that his regard his grace will quicken our steps, strengthen our hearts, and delight our*

—BRYAN CHAPELL

*and the joy of a child, Bryan Chapell invites us to walk in a garden er and author for this fine work.*

—MAX LUCADO  
Pastor and best-selling author

*t the soul's delight will be realized only by godliness in the Christian s what the gift of grace is all about.*

—D. JAMES KENNEDY  
Senior Minister, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

*ocabulary of adjectives to describe it when we sing about it. And yet— 'hristians either have a stubborn tendency to refuse really to believe it, lications. In Holiness by Grace Bryan Chapell comes to help us.*

—SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON  
Senior Minister, St. George's-Tron Church, Glasgow

## *Works That Really Matter*

In an article titled "My Father's Legacy," Roy Atwood describes his father's passing away:

The days of my father's life were, by reason of strength and God's grace, 80 years (Ps. 90:10). He died a year ago. We still grieve his death, of course, but as the pain of his passing fades, we struggle with new pain: the realization of how swiftly the memory of someone as close as a husband, a father, and a friend can fly away. If each day dims the memory of the contours of his face and the sound of his voice, what will we remember of him ten or twenty years distant? What will his children's children know of him, his life, his hopes and fears, his failures and successes, or his view of God's world? What will be the legacy of his life?

Over time, we will forget the things he enjoyed. He loved the company of his well-oiled tools and rifles. He loved the rhythmic pulse of waves against the hull of his sail-boat running ahead of a fresh breeze. . . . However, over time, the waves will not reflect his image, and his precious tools and guns will be recycled into someone else's rusty barbecue or dented wheel barrow.

We'll forget the work of his hands. . . .

We'll forget his strengths and weaknesses. . . .

We'll even forget how his illusions of independence and self-sufficiency were shattered in 1988, when he fell off the roof of his home while cleaning the gutters in the rain, landed on the corner of a concrete sidewalk, and broke his spine between his shoulder blades. The fall almost killed him. In a split second, his pride and dreams and many of the things he loved most were gone. He never walked or worked in his shop or sailed again. He struggled with depression

and suicide many times. He never wanted to be a burden to his wife or his children, but his self-sufficiency was—in an instant—gone forever.<sup>1</sup>

This loving account candidly exposes a truth hard to face. All that we build, love, and live for will fade. The fading may take a minute or it may take millennia, but time and erosion will ultimately erase all our accomplishments from human memory. We, too, will be forgotten. Inevitably, time will erode our significance. We want to be remembered. We want our work to have lasting meaning. Yet we forget and will be forgotten.

Not only do the ravages of time seem to render our accomplishments insignificant, so also do the realities of grace. If God does not measure our worth by what we do, then why should we bother to serve him? Those who have experienced failure and have participated in serious sin may be encouraged by the good news that God does not value us according to our religious performance. However, there is a less attractive flip side to unconditional love: the apparent devaluing of obedience.

If our righteousness really makes no difference to God, then sacrifice is for fools and holiness can cost everything for nothing. Grace that entirely denies the worth of our works cheapens the deaths of martyrs and makes superfluous the devotion that causes our pain.

To properly evaluate the place of good works in the Christian life, we must understand that grace maintains the value of God's children apart from any merit of their own; but we must also understand that God uses our obedience to promote our good and his glory. By our accomplishments, God works his holy purposes in our lives, provides us with many temporal blessings and, most of all, fulfills our Spirit-instilled longing to honor God with all our heart, soul, mind, and might (cf. Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). While we must be careful not to define blessing only in terms of material possessions or earthly ease, we must also embrace the promise that God "rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

We know much of God's goodness, justice, mercy, and truth by the way he responds to our efforts to serve him. God's honoring of our righteousness does not change the degree of his love for us or imply that we can earn his affection. Still, his recognition and reward of righteousness does indicate that he values efforts that conform us more to his image. In so honoring our works, God demonstrates his regard for his own glory and cultivates in us an appreciation for the beauty of his holiness. The right-

eousness in us that God motivates and enables by his grace, he also graciously blesses.

The Bible confirms the value to God of our good works by underscoring his promise not only to bless them but also to make them endure. The psalmist writes:

PSALM 112

<sup>1</sup>*Praise the LORD.*

*Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,  
who finds great delight in his commands.*

<sup>2</sup>*His children will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.*

<sup>3</sup>*Wealth and riches are in his house,  
and his righteousness endures forever.*

<sup>4</sup>*Even in darkness light dawns for the upright,  
for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man.*

<sup>5</sup>*Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely,  
who conducts his affairs with justice.*

<sup>6</sup>*Surely he will never be shaken;  
a righteous man will be remembered forever.*

<sup>7</sup>*He will have no fear of bad news;  
his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

<sup>8</sup>*His heart is secure, he will have no fear;  
in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.*

<sup>9</sup>*He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor,  
his righteousness endures forever;  
his horn will be lifted high in honor.*

<sup>10</sup>*The wicked man will see and be vexed,  
he will gnash his teeth and waste away;  
the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.*

Three times this Psalm tells us what will endure forever (vv. 3, 6, 9): righteous actions, righteous persons, and God's righteous care. Knowing that our accomplishments have enduring significance and are part of heaven's plan for our lasting security encourages us to serve God not primarily for rewards that will fade but for eternal purposes.<sup>2</sup> This perspective does not deny that God ordinarily blesses obedience with earthly



benefits, but it does keep us from considering those benefits only in terms of material prosperity and personal comfort.

Those whose affections have been renewed and reshaped by the Spirit of God desire above all things the fulfillment of God's purposes even at the cost of their own pleasures, advantages—and life, if need be. For such reasons the writer of Hebrews not only commends those whose faith delivered them from lions, flames, and sword, but also those who in faith suffered torture, jeers, flogging, prison, stoning, being sawn in two, death by sword, deprivation, destitution, and persecution (Heb. 11:33-40).

Because God's eternal purposes may require the forfeiture of earthly benefits, we cannot make temporal rewards the chief motive of our obedience. Such rewards are not absolutely promised in Scripture and would be unsuitable as the chief aim of our lives.<sup>3</sup> If Christians always received material blessing as a recompense for obedience, then it would be impossible to separate personal duty from divine bribery. Christianity would become merely a bartering system for personal gain. God's ends are not so shortsighted or earthbound. Understanding God's enduring purposes, so that we can appreciate the significance and blessing of our good works, requires an in-depth understanding of the three things God promises will never fade away: righteous actions, righteous persons, and his own righteous care for us.

## — OUR RIGHTEOUS ACTIONS —

At the end of the psalmist's description of the righteous man, one of Scripture's most amazing statements appears. Speaking of the righteous person, the Bible says, "[H]is righteousness endures forever." This is an extraordinary promise. What can we do in this life that will last forever? Were we to amass the fortune of Bill Gates, write a novel equal to Hemingway, achieve the recognition of Elvis, or build an empire to rival Alexander the Great—none of these would last forever. Yet people expend their life's wealth, wisdom, and work striving for something that will make their mark.

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's fabled Ozymandias rises from desert sands to mock all who think that their works will last. Shelley writes of meeting a traveler from an "antique land" who tells of discovering the remnant of a huge statue. In the traveler's account, the massive head of the

statue lies on the ground, and its trunk has disappeared. Only legs of stone remain standing on a pedestal with these words:

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"

Apart from that boast of great achievement, no other sign of Ozymandias' empire can be seen. Shelley concludes simply,

Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The message is clear: despite its apparent greatness, no human achievement really distinguishes anyone for long.

No matter what we achieve or amass, someone else has done or will do more, or better, or younger, or faster, or against greater odds. Those who do make some significant mark still discover that time and circumstances eventually level every achievement. And even if that leveling does not occur immediately, one's own ability to appreciate the significance of an achievement has a finite limit. Yet against the backdrop of the temporary nature of all human accomplishment, Scripture declares that something will endure: our righteousness. How can this be?

## BY RIGHTEOUS INFLUENCE

The mystery of the enduring nature of our righteousness is partially solved by recognizing that preceding the promise of lasting righteousness are God's promises of generational influence and home establishment. The psalmist says that the children of the righteous will be mighty (Ps. 112:2), and that his house will be known for its prosperity (v. 3). We should recognize that these are idiomatic Hebrew expressions of general blessing. They are not unqualified promises of a life without problems. This is evident in the following verses, which indicate that even the righteous must face times of darkness (v. 4), temptations of greed and selfishness (v. 5), matters that threaten one's equilibrium (v. 6), bad news (v. 7), and foes (v. 8).

God does not absolutely promise that all godly people will have families without problems and homes without leaks. Nevertheless, the psalmist wants us to understand that one of the ways God blesses is by the effects

of personal righteousness rippling through one's family and home. Godliness establishes homes on foundations more secure than the world can provide.

Recently the Rev. Stuart Perrin, one of the long-term leaders of our church, died. Stuart's two sons—both pastors—shared the preaching of the funeral message. They told of their father's spiritual heritage. Weakened by cancer complications, their father's mother contracted influenza in their northern Minnesota home and died when he was only four. The family had been made destitute by paying for multiple illnesses. There was nothing material the faithful mother could pass along to her four-year-old child. Still, as she lay dying, she called the boy to her bedside. She told him that though she had no earthly goods to give him, she was leaving him a heavenly inheritance. Then she shared with the young boy these words of Scripture that he held dear the rest of his life:

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand (Isa. 41:10).

When Stuart's son, the Rev. Dan Perrin, told that account, his wife and children all nodded their heads, as did the wife and children of Dan's brother, Ric. They had all heard the story many times. But the story was more than sentiment. As each of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of that dying mother nodded acknowledgment of the account, there was evidence that her righteousness was enduring to the third and fourth generations of those who loved the Lord. Her righteous influence endured for multiple generations though her life was cut short.

This godly family demonstrates how our righteous influence can have enduring effects. Very few things that we do in life have more than a passing significance. Fewer have a lifetime of impact. For God to promise that our righteousness can have an impact for three or four generations is a great treasure for every parent, grandparent, teacher, or leader who wants to pass on a legacy of faithfulness to succeeding generations.

But what is truly astounding is that God does not promise that such a legacy will last for only a few generations; he promises that the influence of our righteousness will endure forever—a thousand thousand generations. This is a great grace—a provision of heavenly proportions not achiev-

able by human effort—that should motivate holiness in us even when times are hard and blessings are not presently evident.

By promising to use our righteousness to influence generations and secure our homes, God helps us order our priorities. Though there are times when we must give our families less attention due to the press of circumstances or competing responsibilities, hearts that are conscious of eternal implications guard home life. None should ignore the incentive that the grace of enduring righteousness provides. I, too, must honor God as I balance my work and travel schedule against my family obligations.

All who are in responsible positions know how work priorities cry for attention and urgency. Still, God intends for us to weigh eternal consequences when we consider spending a few minutes with a child in the sandbox against seeking a few more ways to impress a client, or when we weigh time at home against spending a few more days away to earn more corporate recognition or a bonus check. The grace that provides for our righteousness to influence eternity calls most of us to serious reflection and repentance as we consider our family priorities against the personal compulsions of fame and gain.

#### BY RIGHTEOUSNESS ITSELF (V. 3B)

As impressive as are the promises of the enduring influence of our righteousness, they are not the most impressive nor mysterious aspect of the psalmist's message. The psalm does not only suggest that the *influence* of our righteousness will endure forever; it specifically says that our righteousness *itself* will endure (v. 3b).

This promise of enduring righteousness is difficult for me to grasp. I can imagine how righteous influences could endure. Cascade theories in science speculate that, as a result of multiple cause-and-effect sequences, a butterfly flapping its wings in Hong Kong can result in a thunderstorm in New York weeks later. I can similarly theorize how one's faithfulness can reverberate with enduring effects that God controls. Still, it is hard for me to fathom how the original righteousness itself endures. Still the Bible says, "righteousness endures forever."

The eternal nature of our righteousness echoes in the apostle Paul's familiar words, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). Each good work that we accomplish God prepared for us to do before the foundations of the world were laid. Each word of encouragement, restor-



of charity, or act of courage and compassion is a vital link in an eternal chain of God's purpose. The significance of each action is marked not merely by its passing place in time but by its permanent position in God's eternal plan for establishing his everlasting kingdom. Knowing that the righteousness itself, however insignificant to us, is actually part of an eternal plan changes our perception of the importance of our lives, and should revolutionize what we view as worthwhile for our efforts.

I have always felt that one of the purest acts of ministry is visiting Alzheimer's patients. Ordinarily, when I visit hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons, part of me—the noble part—is motivated by selfless care and a desire to take the hope of the gospel where it is most needed, but there is another part of me that visits more out of self-protection than compassion. Sometimes, I must confess, I go to those hurting because I fear that if I don't visit frequently or long enough, people will attack me for not fulfilling my pastoral duties. I do not have to worry about such mixed motives, however, when visiting an Alzheimer's patient in the later stages of the disease. Thirty seconds after I leave the room of such a patient there will be no remembrance of my visit. There may not even be any awareness of my presence while I am at the bedside. I get no "credit" for the visit.

The effort to bring a few seconds of human warmth to one of such fleeting awareness would seem of no lasting significance. But God says that righteousness endures forever. As unnoticed and inconsequential as such a small act of compassion may seem, it is eternal. How? I cannot fully explain. Perhaps the eternal significance lies in the difference such an expression of compassion causes in me as much as the effect it has on another. Still, where my explanation falls short, God's promise to preserve my righteousness endures.

This side of heaven we will not see how most of our small acts of kindness, or even our great acts of courage that are unnoticed or misunderstood, fit into God's eternal plan. But we walk and act in the faith that such actions are eternal, because God promises this is so. The grace that makes our righteousness more significant than we can imagine or arrange should inspire a willingness to serve where the world will not notice and to give of ourselves when no one else will bother.

Knowing the eternal implications of our actions enables us more and more to live for heaven's effects rather than for earth's approval. A gentle touch offered to a crying child on the street, an angry word withheld, the willingness to lose a business deal for integrity's sake, uncomplaining par-

ticipation in the dreary routine of dishes and diapers, a smile offered to a harried clerk who has rung up the wrong bill—each unnoticed act of righteousness remains eternal and, as a result, is worthy of our efforts.

The Christian walks through the world with a hidden smile, knowing that by God's grace each act of love and sacrifice is eternal though the world cannot see it. As we see our world through the eyes of Scripture we know that each day and every moment is lived for eternity and, thus, that no righteous act is fruitless and no sacrifice is vain (1 Cor. 15:58). The life of faith embraces God's promise of enduring righteousness, allowing us to walk in the constant joy of knowing that our efforts and sacrifices do not escape his notice.

When we do not respond in kind to the angry driver who cut us off in traffic, we can grin with the awareness that our restraint of the moment produces long-lasting righteousness. We can laugh with the delight of thinking to ourselves, "That driver got an instant's satisfaction out of taking advantage of me, but I did something eternal in not reacting to him." Then the joy of the Lord again becomes our strength for continued and reinvigorated obedience. This is the strength we need not only for moments in traffic but for months in abusive homes, for careers in thankless professions, and for lifetimes of chronic disease and inexplicable difficulty that make no sense apart from the promises of eternity.

## — A RIGHTEOUS PERSON —

Our scriptural spectacles not only help us to see the difference between temporal and eternal endeavors, they also enable us to discern what (or whom) God eternally treasures. A key shift of wording occurs the second time that the psalmist identifies what endures forever. He says that a righteous person himself will be remembered forever (Ps. 112:6).

As comforting as is the promise that we personally will be remembered forever, it seems as improbable as the assurance that our righteousness will be so remembered. When my family last moved, I had the opportunity and obligation to rummage through the various boxes stored in our attic to decide which accumulated "treasures" we really needed to load into the moving van. Leafing through old papers in one box, I discovered my final college report card.

Surely I saved this record because the grades were once very important

to me (twenty-five years ago). I opened the envelope to revel in what I recalled as academic excellence, but no such joy awaited me. Years of modulating heat and humidity in the attic had caused the ink to fade from the grade card. No grades were visible. Time had even erased the list of courses I had taken. Without the written record of my work I could not remember my grades, what classes I had taken, or even who my professors had been.

As an educator, the failure to remember my own academic endeavors is quite distressing. If I can forget grades, courses, and instructors, then this may be true of other people. It may even be true of my students. My students, too, are likely to forget their grades, the contents of the course I taught them, and me!

Still, my God promises that he will not forget me. He will not forget me even though my classes are forgettable. Though he knows better than anyone that there are only occasional flashes of eloquence amid the jumble of supposedly sophisticated words; that there are shameful bursts of impatience despite infrequent thoughts beyond the obvious; that there are long stretches of mediocre repetitions of stale lectures punctuated by too-frequent expressions of personal arrogance . . . though he knows and endures all of this, my God promises to treasure his memory of me forever.

The best time to be reminded of God's enduring memory of us is probably when we have lost what we thought would make us significant, or when we have achieved it only to discover the hollowness of what this world says is glorious. So many spend their lives in frenetic pursuit of what will set them apart, only to discover that achievement gained or lost is more a matter of circumstances and timing outside of our control than of personal giftedness and character.

Joseph Conrad's antihero in the film version of *Lord Jim* speaks with biblical poignancy of the unreality of human assessments of our achievements. He recounts the things that have formed his own reputation and says, "I have been a so-called coward, and I have been a so-called hero, but I tell you now there is not the breadth of a piece of paper between the two." For such reasons the Bible graciously points away from our achievements as the primary basis for our remembrance and says, instead, that God remembers us.

Against the backdrop of life's futility and peril, the psalmist promises that the memory of the righteous will endure. Though this world holds no guarantees of respect, recognition, or remembrance, God promises his own people this surpassingly royal treatment: an eternal record. "The righteous will

be for a memorial forever," the psalm literally says. God will make a righteous person a memorial of divine blessing for all of heaven and earth to honor.

But surely this cannot be. Millions of faithful have died unnoticed and unremembered. Common sense tells us this. Who among us really expects to be remembered by history? A little more that a half century after the end of a world war we struggle to remember those who fought and the significance of their cause. The memorials of those who died in the defense of our liberty decay without adequate funding from the very nation they defended. How, then, can God promise eternal remembrance to the righteous?

The answer is that the names of the righteous are memorialized not in the records of earth but in the annals of heaven. The prophet Malachi writes of the Day of Judgment:

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name (Mal. 3:16).

For the righteous this is enough—God will remember us. Though friends and family forget us, and though our name becomes tarnished and belittled, yet our God holds us forever in his heart as a precious treasure.

We may work for a company for thirty years and, three weeks after departing, be treated as though we were never there, but God will continue to rejoice over us forever. The aging invalid in a nursing home whose children never visit, and whose friends have all departed, is not forgotten. God maintains an eternal record of the righteous and from heaven offers this assurance: "I remember you. I will never forget you."

Confidence in heaven's memory grants earthly courage for divine purposes. Because God will maintain our name in his records, we do not need to fear that a failure properly to calculate what will bring us the most recognition, respect, or significance will disqualify us from heavenly glory. We can afford the vulnerability with others that compassion and grace require—loving the unlovely (v. 4), lending freely (v. 5a), acting justly (v. 5b).

My father once turned down a promotion that would have required a move to another city at a time when he felt it was more important that we have family stability. Though I write of the selflessness and nobility of that decision, his company has already forgotten, and one day I will forget what my father did. The earthly record of his sacrifice will fade with the ink of these

pages. But heaven will not forget. What my father did in faithfulness to his family and to his God will be memorialized with my father's name in heaven.

As I write these words I must continually preach them to myself. Each year our seminary must raise millions of dollars to continue to support the ministries God has committed to our care. If we do not raise the money, it will not matter how nice is the title and prestige of my position; the year will be counted as a financial failure. And if there are repeated years of financial shortfall, then I will be judged to have failed in this position no matter what quality of books I have written, or how wisely I have taught, or how carefully I have administered.

The financial responsibilities of my position sometimes weigh heavily on me, and I can become paralyzed by their pressures. In those moments I also must hold precious the promise that God does not measure my worth by earth's accomplishments. As I am faithful to him, regardless of outcomes, he remembers and treasures me forever. My name is written in heaven, and nothing done here will erase it there.

Whether our calling is to professional ministry, business, homemaking, the arts, or politics, all of God's people need these truths of heavenly remembrance. God will call some of us to endeavors that do not flourish. Some of us will assume positions where we will not experience success as the world measures it. Many of us will serve people who do not appreciate us. A sad number of us will have marriages that come unglued. All will face challenges to our sense of significance. In each of these areas, the degree of our continued faithfulness will in large measure be determined by how real and deep is our perception that God remembers and values us even when others do not.

We must rest in the faith that regardless of what pressures or failures come upon us, we need never fear any loss of real significance. God has promised never to forget us. We are precious to the eternal King of the universe. Our name is written in his book of remembrance, and nothing in this world can ever erase it!

### — GOD'S RIGHTEOUS PROVISION —

This promise of divine remembrance goes against the logic of our world and perhaps against our own consciences. We may like the words of assurance but still doubt their truth because we know that there is nothing in us

or our accomplishments that warrants this eternal record. In fact, we may know that our weaknesses and failings have sufficiently eroded our stature before God to justify his forgetting his grace to us. Candid assessment of our lack of warrant to claim a heavenly memorial indicates why we need this psalm's final explanation of why we will not be forgotten.

The third time the psalmist mentions righteousness enduring forever he adds the ultimate reason that God will not forget his people. God promises their remembrance not on the basis of their accomplishments or inherent worth, but on the basis of his own action in their behalf. Heaven's remembrance is not because of our having done righteous deeds or our having been righteous people, but because of God's having made righteous provision that he will not forget.

### A HOLY RESCUE

The psalmist repeats the assurance that a person's "righteousness will endure forever" in order to make a key addition in the final refrain (v. 9). To the repeated assurance of enduring righteousness the psalmist adds the promise that a person's "horn will be lifted high in honor." This is an unfamiliar expression for our modern ears, but the Hebrews understood. The divine promise to lift the "horn" (a word symbolizing dignity or strength) of a righteous person meant that God would maintain or provide an individual's honor. The individual does not provide his own regard. The verb is made passive to indicate that the person's dignity is lifted up, or maintained, by another.

The emphasis on divine provision grows with the realization that six of the seven times the term "horn" is used in the Psalms, either it refers to God himself or it occurs in tandem with a description of what God will do for his people. Thus, the words of the psalmist are here meant to assure us that God himself acts in our behalf to provide the dignity and strength we need to justify a divine remembrance.

This promise of holy preservation continues the earlier assurance that a righteous person need not fear because "in the end he will look in triumph on all his foes" (v. 8). God's ultimate rescue of the righteous becomes the source of vexation of the wicked (v. 10), but it is the source of animation for us. Knowing that our weaknesses and the challenges we face will not ultimately destroy our heavenly status gives us courage for our earthly battles.

A pastor friend of mine is a Vietnam War veteran. Today he pastors in a very challenging setting that he will admit causes him occasionally to



doubt his adequacy for the battles he must face. Still, he has faced major hurdles and setbacks without flinching, and has experienced God's blessing on stalwart efforts. As a military veteran my friend expresses his resiliency this way:

A well-trained soldier is not afraid of his adequacy in battle. In fact, in some ways he looks forward to the challenge of using his skills and equipment. It is not the fighting that scares him. It is the realization that out there somewhere may be a bullet with his name on it. But the wonder of the Gospel is that God promised there is no such bullet for the believer. Though we are in for the fight of our lives and may experience great loss—even of our lives—we know that the enemy is ours. God has promised that our souls are secure, and that he will ultimately defeat all our spiritual foes.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible's assurance of our eternal security is meant to equip us to fight fearlessly in the righteous causes to which God calls us.

#### A HOLY TRANSFER

The same grace that offers us protection that we could not forge also provides honor we cannot earn. The very first verse of Psalm 112 marks a holy transfer. The preceding Psalm 111 (which was meant to be read in tandem with Psalm 112) is devoted to describing the Lord and his righteousness. Though Psalm 112 starts the same way, the focus soon shifts. Praise of God moves to descriptions of blessing on the one who "fears the Lord." Scripture identifies those who fear the Lord as those who in abject humility recognize that their present existence and future eternity are dependent on God's mercy (see Luke 1:50; Acts 9:31).<sup>5</sup> To such people God promises his blessing, but the source of that blessing is not in them.

An amazing expression of God's grace appears in the way that these two psalms interact with each other. Ten times the psalmist uses the Hebrew terms applied to God in Psalm 111 to describe the righteous man in Psalm 112. Psalm 111 says God's "righteousness endures forever," and that he is "compassionate," "generous," "just," and so forth; and these same concepts are used to describe the righteous man in Psalm 112. The Bible transfers the terms of God's own character and attributes to the person who fears the Lord. Those who depend upon God's mercy receive the dignity they do not deserve and the honor they could not earn. They are granted the glory of God's own righteousness.

Ultimately this transfer of divine attributes to human vessels explains why God can promise to remember the righteous forever (2 Cor. 4:6-7). Our eternal record is not based on what we accomplish but on God's work in our behalf. While we have the privilege of participating in eternal causes, the reason that the righteous and their works endure forever is that God sanctifies our feeble and faulty efforts by instilling his own righteousness in them.

Ultimately it is God's righteousness alone that is worthy of an eternal remembrance. In his grace he shares his holiness with us so that our works will have the status of his own. Our works are made worthy of eternity by virtue of the mercy in *him*, rather than on the basis of the merit in *them*.

The New Testament expression of this promise of imputed (or transferred) righteousness is the apostle Paul's often-repeated expression "in Christ."<sup>6</sup> Paul uses this phrase to refer to the continuing effect of our sin being covered by Christ's atoning blood. Not only did his blood wash away the guilt of our sin, it continues to cover us with his holiness so that we are always in union with him—enveloped by his mercy, clothed in his righteousness. His righteousness so permeates and encapsulates our works that, though they are always imperfect, yet our holy God can use them.

God allows us to express our love for him through our good works, which he uses in the world to accomplish his kingdom purposes. He also uses our works in us to conform us more to the likeness of Jesus. Still, the righteousness accomplished by our good works does not result from the purity of our actions and motives—for our actions and motives have too much of the mix of our fallen humanity in them. Our righteousness, rather, depends always on God's application of the sanctifying merit of Christ's blood to even our best works. A portion of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* cited earlier beautifully expresses how and why God uses our works even though they will never reach the standard of perfection his holiness requires:

[B]elievers being accepted *through Christ*, their good works are accepted *in Him*; not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable and unprovable in God's sight; but that He, looking upon them *in His Son*, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections [emphasis mine].<sup>7</sup>

God demonstrates his sovereign care by blessing what does not measure up to his standards—and would even warrant his judgment based on

its own merit—by accepting our sincere obedience on the basis of Christ's work in our behalf. When Christians bring their bouquets of good works, our Savior shows his mercy as he "gathers out all the weeds from their duties and makes them acceptable to God."<sup>8</sup>

Francis Schaeffer referred to this grace, by which Christ purifies our works so that they glorify God and sanctify us despite their imperfections, as "the present value of the blood of Christ."<sup>9</sup> The phrase reminds us that our dependence on Christ's justifying work to forgive our sins does not cease when we become Christians. We do not come to God on the basis of Christ's shed blood and then maintain our holy status by personal grit and determination. Rather, every day and in every action we are dependent on our Savior's grace to wash our works in the purifying streams of his blood. Apart from him we can do nothing that pleases God. Through him and in him alone we are enabled to do those works that please God, sanctify us, and have eternal significance.

I began this chapter with Roy Atwood's account of the passing of his father, who had become an invalid after enjoying active pursuits most of his life. Atwood does not end the story, however, with the acknowledgment of his father's loss of strength and pride. Another source of significance eventually took over his father's broken body:

In his state of almost complete physical and spiritual dependency, God turned him to Christ and his sufficiency. . . . We will not soon forget how dramatic and obvious was the change in his life: his anger was replaced by joy; his bitterness by tenderness; and his hardness by a gentleness of spirit. His final years as a faithful Christian man, husband, father and grandfather were his finest. But even these will fade with time.

So if all that my father was and did in this life will vanish over the years, what will be his legacy? All that can endure is the work of someone else who does not forget or fade with time. Only the Atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ—not my father's own good and bad deeds—will be his legacy to his family and friends. The only legacy he could leave us is the simple testimony that he has triumphed over death through Christ's gracious work of redemption—plus nothing.

My father's legacy to his children's children will be that God's grace and covenant faithfulness were sufficient even for a man whose face and voice many will soon forget . . . because Christ's person and work endure.<sup>10</sup>

Atwood's father experienced the reality of the holy transfer that the psalmist extols. As God's own character and attributes took root in the soil of a human soul, anger was replaced by joy, and bitterness was transformed into a sweet spirit. Yet even this exchange of characteristics was not the ultimate miracle of the divine transformation God accomplished in the aging man's life.

More profound than the reformation of personality was the promise of eternity. For even when the joy and tenderness of character would fail, God's work in the man would not. When strength of body and will ultimately yielded to the realities of mortality and the ravages of time, God preserved and continues to maintain the legacy of righteousness that his Son alone provides. Neither death nor the passing of time will rob from God the memory, significance, and presence of one who has been granted the holiness of Christ forever. Because his righteousness is ours, his triumph over sin and death is ours. No act or life committed to him ever loses its eternal place in his kingdom. In the world revealed by the eyes of faith there are no little deeds and there are no little people.<sup>11</sup>

God's transfer of his righteousness to us grants us a beautifully fresh perspective on the service he allows us to do for him. Because God makes our works holy, not only are the great achievements of our lives pleasing to him and purposeful for his kingdom, but so are the unnoticed and insignificant actions we do in his name.

No cup of water shared, no load lifted, nor any life given in the cause of righteousness is ever insignificant regardless of the world's estimation. By bathing even small duties in the character of his righteousness God makes our actions holy, and as such they are as pleasing to him as the most majestic choral anthem on Easter morning and as precious as the prayer of a child in whom there is no doubt. The proof of the value of such acts is their enduring significance in the kingdom of the One who forgets neither the deeds done in his name nor those who do the deeds—for his glory.

## — OUR LEGACY —

As we consider where God may be calling us—to the mission field, to a stand of courage in our present profession, to a testimony of faithfulness in a troubled family, or to a place of sacrifice in the cause of Christ—we must not forget what God will remember. Our Savior says that no act of divine commitment and no person who serves him will ever be forgotten, no mat-

ter what their significance from a worldly point of view. Such a biblical perspective will make us “content to fill a little space if thou be glorified”<sup>12</sup> and will assure us of the value of every duty done for Christ. If we think that the battle is not worth fighting because the odds against us are too great or the failures of the past are too overwhelming, then we must consider again the provisions of our God. He promises us an eternal rescue, and a reckoning to us of his own character, so that we can commit ourselves to the only purposes that are eternal.

Because of its everlasting significance, no work done for God is trite, and no person who serves God will be forgotten. To give this encouragement to those who may serve in places insignificant by the world’s estimation, church history professor David Calhoun likes to tell graduating seniors at Covenant Seminary this story of the missionary statesman Charles Simeon:

Simeon kept a portrait of the deceased missionary Henry Martyn over the mantel of his fireplace. Simeon had served as a spiritual father to Martyn at Cambridge, honing the young man’s theology and inspiring him with missionary zeal. It was Simeon who saw Martyn off as he left Portsmouth and sailed for Asia.

They never saw one another again. But for seven years Simeon constantly kept the novice missionary in his prayers through the young man’s amazingly successful ministries in both India and Persia. Then came the terrible message. After only those few, fervent years word came to England that Martyn had contracted a disease and died on the mission field.

A portrait of Henry Martyn, painted in India, was sent back to Simeon. He hung it in the honored place over his mantel so he could tell others the testimony of his young friend. Years later looking at that picture he would say to guests, “See that blessed man. No one looks at me the way he does—he never takes his eyes off me; and seems always to be saying, ‘The years are short. Be serious. Be in earnest. Don’t trifle—don’t trifle.’”<sup>13</sup>

Someone else never takes his eyes off of us. He holds us in his precious regard forever. Our God has given us this wonderful blessing of his grace. He will preserve our righteousness forever. Out of love for him and in appreciation of the significance of what he allows us to do, we should make the most of his provision and believe that what is done for him is never a trifle. For whatever is done for man will pass, yet all that is done for God will last.

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 T E N
 

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## *That’s Not Fair*

“That’s not fair!” said my son.

He had just purchased a hat on a first-time-ever visit to France and the storekeeper gave him change in Belgian francs. Said the French clerk, “I have run out of French francs. You don’t mind if I give you change in Belgian francs instead of French francs, do you?”

My son thought, *A franc is a franc. So, sure, that will be all right.*

Only later did my son’s cousins who live in Belgium tell him the sad truth: about five French francs equal the value of a United States dollar, but it takes about forty Belgian francs to do the same. My son had gotten francs as he had expected, but they were worth only about an eighth of what he should have received in change. The accounting of the clerk left something to be desired. My son was rightly offended by not receiving what he was due.

We should feel some of my son’s offense when we read Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard. Everyone receives a certain amount of money—a day’s wage—for their work, but some have worked only a fraction of the time of others. That’s not fair. Even though Jesus tells the account, what the master pays his workers is still not fair. If I were to hire one of my children to clean out the garage for a few bucks, and he worked from seven until noon, then I would not even consider paying the same amount to another child who joined him in the task for the last twenty minutes. Yet Jesus says that such is the accounting system of the kingdom of heaven. Here is how Jesus explains heaven’s economy: