

BLAMELESS

False Humility and You: A Brief Theology of Holiness for Everyman

By Cody Marsh

Introduction

Some of you may be regular readers of my blog, *Word Like Fire*, and some of you may not. If so, then you are likely familiar with my experiences in open-air or “street” preaching. In my short few years as an open-air evangelist, I’ve encountered many people who profess Christ yet seemingly have no victory over sin. While this e-book does not attempt to cure that problem, I believe there is an underlying reason for most of it and that reason is bad doctrine regarding sin and holiness. Unfortunately, the issue of believers’ victory (or lack of it) goes beyond that believer’s personal walk and ultimately affects their witness for Christ. I hope to give you a decent explanation of that statement in the coming pages.

I’m not a Word of Faith kind of guy and this is not a Positive Mental Attitude devotional type of thing. However, there is some merit to the “As a man thinketh” proverb and I would like for you to see how your thinking may be leading you into a destructive theological construct that makes you no different than an unbeliever. You *are* different than an unbeliever, or at least you ought to be. Hang in there with me and hopefully you will see what I mean.

For my theologically astute friends: *BLAMELESS* is hardly meant to be an exhaustive treatment of any particular doctrines, especially Imputed Righteousness. Let the record show that I do believe righteousness is imputed (though not exclusively imputed), *but it must be practical righteousness* or it is no righteousness at all. This is a call to rethink some of our long-held positions that have left the church looking very much like the world from which it is supposed to be separate. God bless you in your walk with Jesus.

Chapter 1

What's This All About?

You may be wondering about the title of this book: *BLAMELESS*. And what is a “false humility” anyway? Well, a false humility is a presumptuous one. It assumes many things about the person possessing it as well as the world around it. I’ll give you an example:

A star football player (who knows he’s a star) is surrounded by fans who want him to sign everything from their t-shirts to their babies. His head swells with pride but he knows that the world around him would call him an egomaniac if he actually acted like the star that he is. So, what does he do? He signs those babies right on their foreheads but he does it sheepishly. His sheepishness, however, isn’t legitimate. He believes in his heart that he is different than the fans crowding around him. His humility is false.

If you are a Christian (and you ought to be), then you are different than the world around you (and you ought to be). It’s probably the case that, like the football star, you’ve been told that should you express that difference then you would be *self-righteous, holier than thou, judgmental, intolerant...* but you know in your heart that God has called you to greater things than those who are still in their sins. You know good and well that you *are* in fact different. I am writing this to encourage you to embrace that difference, but to do so rightly, not arrogantly or puffed up.

There is nothing, *absolutely nothing*, that makes my blood boil quicker than hearing a Christian, particularly ministers, claim to be still just as much a sinner as the next, *unsaved* man. At present, the motto of the church seems to be: *DON’T JUDGE OTHERS JUST BECAUSE THEY SIN DIFFERENTLY THAN YOU*. In fact, I’ve even seen it on

a church sign. It sounds good and all, but in reality, this saying was borrowed from the super tolerant gay pride movement and its supporters. Do you want that associated with your congregation or even your own Christian life? I certainly don't. That "motto" seems humble enough, but it's packed with theological connotations that are simply unjustifiable. The ramifications of a mindset like that amongst believers are too broad and scary to address in much detail here, but I will do the best I can.

World, I'm sorry to say but I am *not* like the unsaved man. Jesus says I *can* judge. God says I *am* different than you and I've come to terms with that (and praise God for it). Now, before you quit reading, hear me out. I am different, but not better. I can and should judge, but not unjustly. There is no cause for me to oppress you or hate you. In fact, if I do any less than treat you as better than myself, judge fairly and take up your cause when you are taken advantage of, then I will not be held *blameless* by God, but *guilty*.

Church, what we are facing is no less than the judgment seat of Christ. How majestic and wonderful it is to know that we, as sons and daughters of God, have the opportunity to arrive there with smiles on our faces at the glory set before us. But if we squander that glory here on earth because we are afraid to be separate from a world that worships whatever is on television this week, then we've deserved any condemnation that comes our way. If we go all of our lives compromising in order to keep the peace then to hell fire we will go, because we've lost our saltiness. When that day comes and Jesus says to some of us, "Depart from me, you worker of lawlessness," it will be no one's fault but our own, because in this lukewarm climate of American Christianity we have had ample opportunity to "Come out from among them." Instead, many men and women of God are indistinguishable from their neighbors and, like dogs returning to their vomit, they once again become friends of the world and enemies of the Ancient of Days. They forget that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, for he is a consuming fire.

Chapter 2

Saved...From What?

Most people in America today are saved. Just ask them and they'll tell you. Nine out of ten people on the street will let you know quickly that they are not afraid of death because they're going to heaven with Jesus. I sincerely hope that they're right. But if you were to look at your community, would you agree with these people? I wouldn't. Frankly, I find it difficult to believe that nine out of ten *churchgoers* are on heaven's roll call, but that's a conversation for a later time. The point is this: Only those who are worthy, whose robes are white and unsoiled will walk with the King. This is the same King that said the road to life is narrow and very few find it. If few find it, then how can the majority be on it? It's a question with an obvious answer.

I was riding with a guy one time and he was telling me of his salvation, and also of his struggles. Let me give you a short, (almost) verbatim rendition of our talk:

Guy: Cody, I know I'm saved.

Me: Saved from what?

Guy: (Silence) I don't know.

Such was the state of this man's life that he didn't even know what he was saved from. This was nothing new; he'd been wondering what it was that he was saved from ever since he responded to the altar call. Drunkenness had taken the place of drug abuse in his life, violence took the place of sexual immorality, and Bible study took the place of idle mornings. But from what was he saved? He didn't know and I couldn't tell him. Some of you

may be just like this guy. Maybe eternal hell is all that you can come up with for an answer to this question, but it ought to be more than that. This isn't just rhetoric from me, I assure you. Here shortly I'll stop my talking basically altogether and it will be all scripture. Then you can decide for yourself what you're saved from. I'll give you a clue: If it isn't *sin* then you may have a problem.

From the very beginning of time God had a plan to send his Son Jesus to save us *in* our sins, right? Let's look:

*"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people **from** their sins.'" – Matthew 1:20, 21*

Did you catch that? Jesus came to save us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. There's an enormous difference. To negate this principle is to negate the entire New Testament. If we don't get this firmly drilled into our heads, then we will misinterpret the rest of the scriptures all the way to Revelation. *It's the most wonderful truth in all of history that Jesus saves from sin!* Why in the world would we want to water it down to something less than it is? The guy I had that conversation with had been a believer for many years, but what was it that he believed? Whatever it was it provided no results. If we are personally noticeable because of our fruits, then how about a Jesus that can't or won't change my life? What sort of fruits does that powerless Jesus produce? Just as you will know Jesus' followers by their fruits, you will know a person's Jesus by *his* fruits.

Did you know that Jesus commands you to be perfect? Well, he does:

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” – Matthew 5:48

Taken out of context, this statement by Christ has been used to defeat the faith of believers all throughout history, but what does it mean? I certainly can't be as perfect as God who created the world, knows everything, never makes a mistake (because he knows everything)...so what is Jesus saying? *In our conduct we are to be perfect.* No, I'm not putting words in Jesus' mouth. Look at the context with me and you'll see it, too. Jesus' call to perfection is the summation of his awesome examples of loving our enemies. God loves his enemies every day, making the sun rise *“On the evil and on the good,”* providing everything for both the evil and the good, because every good thing comes from him. In other words, God is constantly blessing his enemies even though they hate him, and we are to do the same. In doing that, Jesus says, we will be “perfect.”

I don't want you to miss another amazing and obvious truth in that passage, *Matthew 5:43-48*, that there are those that God calls “good.” If you are a follower of Christ, if you obey the commandments of Jesus, then you are that “good” person. I, too, am a good person. Please, don't gasp too hard or it may choke you. I am righteous and blameless before God as I'm writing this and, if you're like the majority of American evangelicals, you just got sick to your stomach when I said that. You may even be thinking of ways to prove me wrong, for errors in this book or in my life. Your vast theological knowledge just kicked in and told you that I'm full of it and that you ought not read on, but I'm begging you to read on anyway. Despite what you know about the scriptures, read on.

Chapter 3

King David the Liar

If you are among those who believe that you will never be righteous (probably based on 1 John 1:8), then you are going to *hate* this chapter. Here's why: According to you, King David was a liar, Paul was liar, Peter, James, John...all liars...and Jesus, too, is a liar. As the list of liars grows, then you will feel awfully lonely because all of your heroes (and your Savior, too) have fed you a big bowl of deceit. All of the names I mentioned believed and taught that righteousness is not only possible but necessary. In other words, you are obliged to be blameless, a holy person before a holy God. You will be held personally liable for all unrighteousness in your life, despite what any doctrines (e.g. Imputed Righteousness) tell you. I want us to examine together a passage that revolutionized my walk with Jesus, *Psalms 19:12, 13*.

"Who can discern his errors?

Declare me innocent from hidden faults.

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;

let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,

and innocent of great transgression.”

According to David, there are two types of sins of which to be declared innocent. There are *hidden faults* and *presumptuous sins*. Hidden faults are those things that sort of sneak up on us. They are unintentional sins, gross shortcomings that we may be unaware of, or they could be a number of other things. What they are *not* are sins deliberately committed. They are not *presumptuous* as the others are. Have you ever committed a presumptuous sin, sinning and expecting (or at least hoping) that God would forgive you for it later? I definitely have! My life was plagued by that type of sin for a long time. You know those sins before you ever commit them because they are the ones you try to justify and rationalize in advance, and I think a good many of you know exactly what I mean.

This little passage in a sea of passages is packed so full of incredible truth that it would take multiple chapters to do it justice. So, let me attempt to break it down in just one with the understanding that you will research it and give it as much weight as it deserves. I hope you like to cross-reference stuff, because I do, and so we shall:

“Keep back your servant from also from presumptuous sins...”

[cf. Jude 24]

“Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling...”

“...let them not have dominion over me!”

[cf. Romans 6:14]

“For sin will have no dominion over you...”

“Then I shall be blameless, and innocent...”

[cf. Jude 24, Colossians 1:21, 22]

“...and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

Hopefully, you are now getting an idea of why I claimed to be blameless before God as I write this book. It is because the Lord has kept me this way at my request and his good pleasure. Of course, I am perfectly capable of choosing to sin against him presumptuously, but have not done so today. Therefore, as I write this, I am blameless. Is that overly simplistic? I don't believe it is. In fact, that is what Christ has called us to. Did he not tell us to pray the very same thing? That God would keep us from temptation and save us from the evil one? For anyone who knows the Lord's Prayer, you know that's exactly what he tells us to do. He says that for good reason because God is *“able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...(Ephesians 3:20)”* Indeed, Jesus is *“able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them*

(Hebrews 7:25).” If you are anything like me, you need that salvation to the uttermost, that complete and total purity that only Jesus can give. If you’re smart, you’ll praise God for the opportunity to be saved in such a way!

Chapter 4

Practical Righteousness

If I haven’t lost any friends yet, I may at this next point. Righteousness *better be practical* or it is no righteousness at all. What do I mean by that? Well, we’d better not be sinning against God and His people or we’re in big trouble. According to Jesus, we’re in danger of the fires of hell for simply lusting over someone of the opposite sex (or the same sex), or even for being angry with our brothers or sisters *(Matthew 5:27-30; 21,22 respectively)*. *Jesus Christ did not abolish the moral law of God*. There is no shortage of evangelical scholars who claim otherwise, but we do not rely on the interpretations of men; rather we trust the scriptures on all things and test all things against them.

The New Testament is clear that no unrepentant sinner enters the kingdom of God. I will give you the usual proof texts for that momentarily, but I want to examine them in their contexts. In order to do that, I want to take you to the words of Jesus first. In *John 14:15* Jesus says, *”If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* But what are the commandments of Jesus? They are the commandments of love, love for God and love for one another. This all sounds very utopian, but that is Christianity in plain explanation. Just one chapter later, in *John 15:12-14*, Jesus makes a very explicit statement when he says:

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another **as I have loved you**. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”*

So, according to Jesus, who is his friend? It is the one who *does* what Christ commands. *It is not the one who merely believes, it is the one who does*. I know how this will come across to some of you, but to others who respect the authority of scripture, you will understand: Contrary to popular belief (and the popular, contemporary Christian music), Jesus is *not the friend of sinners* that we’ve made him out to be. It is true that he ate with sinners and tax collectors, no one would deny that, but his message to them never changed. It was *always* the call to repent and keep his commandments. In other words, he did not merely keep company with sinners, but preached the Gospel to them as well. The Biblical Jesus never watered his message down to be relevant and *he never extended his hand of fellowship to those who would not extend their hearts in repentance*.

It is true that Jesus is called *“A friend of tax collectors and sinners”* in *Luke 7:34*, but this is an accusation, not a truth about him. If it is true that he really is *“A friend of tax collectors and sinners,”* then it is also true that he is *“a glutton and a drunkard,”* but we don’t say that about Jesus because we know that he had no sin. But didn’t he eat with those same tax collectors and sinners? Absolutely, he did, but let’s look intently into that scripture in *Mark 2:15-17* to which most people refer when refuting the idea Jesus set himself apart from those sinners.

“And as he reclined at table in his house (that is Matthew’s house), many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does

he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

The simple truth of this passage is wonderful. Jesus kept his message pure, as we should expect. Yes, he reclined at the table with these tax collectors, prostitutes and whoever else was joining them, but in their presence he called them “sick” and agreed that they were “sinners.” There is no denying Jesus’ intention in dining with these people. It was to love them where they were in life, not by giving them hugs, but by preserving the message of repentance and teaching them the Gospel. We know this because Matthew, in whose house they were gathered, became one of the most influential disciples in Christian history. From whom did he hear the Gospel message that leads to repentance and life if not from Jesus himself? The Gospel that Matthew heard was one that led him to be a friend of Jesus, a keeper of his commandments.

Now, on to my assertion that righteousness must be practical: We will examine this point from two angles. First, I want to take you into the book of James. The intent of the passages I will be citing are largely debated, mostly by those who refuse to believe what the Bible plainly says, that *faith without works is useless*. I will briefly address the supposed contradictions between James and Paul on this issue, but I want to stay focused on *practical righteousness*. How can righteousness be practical and why should it be? Well, “*Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin (James 4:17).*” Righteousness should be practical because, if it isn’t, then we are sinning. So, there is the *why*; now, let’s get to the *how* of it:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” – James 2:14-17

Obviously, James sees a practical aspect to the commandments of Jesus. The root word commonly translated as “righteous” and “righteousness” in the NT is *dikaiosynē* and is easily translated as “just” or “justice.” I say that to show the intended meaning of James’ exhortation to *actually do the work* that Christ commanded us to do when he told us to love one another, being just and loving one another in a fair and very real way. This is echoed by John when he says, *“By this we know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked,”* and again when he boldly states, *“Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous (1 John 2:5, 6; 3:7 respectively).”* So we see that James is in agreement with John, with Jesus and even with Paul. If there is no real, practical love in our lives, then we are not righteous. If we are not doing the things Jesus commanded us, *walking as he walked*, we are unrighteous.

I will now briefly address James’ claim that we are *not justified by faith alone*, but faith and good works (*James 2:24*), and will show you how it is easily reconcilable with the Paul’s statement in *Romans 3:28* in which he says, *“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”* The context of James is walking in the commandments of Christ, whereas the context of Romans 3 is walking in the commandments of the Mosaic Law. The two are in no way comparable, and when Paul speaks in this passage, he is clearly referring to the attempts of Jewish believers to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised and keep Mosaic Law. He most certainly is not referring to the *“good works”* of *Ephesians*

2:10, which Paul says we were saved in order to do! And he is definitely not contradicting James in any way. We are not saved from sin in order to go to heaven (at least not exclusively) but to make heavenly things happen here! Salvation is for Christlikeness now, and the apostles were acutely aware of that. Though it has been lost and muddled over the last 2,000 years of systematic theologies and warring doctrinal constructs, the great truth of the Bible still stands. We are called by Christ to be *“A people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).”*

So many believers today are under the impression, due to immense false teaching, that they are somehow able to be saved while living in unrighteousness. This is categorically untrue. The apostle Paul, for all that people claim he believed, taught this truth: That the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” – 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” – Galatians 5:19-21

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and god. Let no one deceive you with

*empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” –
Ephesians 5:5, 6*

In other words, Paul’s position was this: *“Do not go on sinning (1 Corinthians 15:34).”* But isn’t that harsh of Paul, the grace teacher, to say? No, not if we take a scriptural view of grace. Paul himself describes the gift of God’s grace in *Titus 2:11, 12*.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bring salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age...”

So, we see that the grace by which we are saved is not simply an unmerited favor (though that is certainly partially true), but it is instruction from the Lord Jesus in the ways of godliness. Paul believes that grace is far more than God overlooking the sins of the unrighteous; the grace of God is sanctifying, teaching us to obey him and keep his commandments. This grace saves us from the dominion of sin when, by faith, we trust Jesus to lead us out of the sins that will destroy us and allow him to lead us into everlasting life. *The grace of God is discipline, and it is for our good, “That we may share in his holiness (Hebrews 12:10).* Its purpose is to train us up in the way we should go, as little children, so that we will learn to *“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).”*

Sin is sin because it harms the community. No one will disagree with that. If I am an adulterer, I’ve harmed my wife. If I steal from you, then I’ve taken what is yours and caused you harm. If I’ve murdered you, well...I’ve caused the ultimate harm to you and the community. God will not allow his people to do such things, as he

intends to have a blameless people in the name of his utopian religion, Christianity. If you and I obey the commandments of God, we will cause no harm (at least not intentionally), and we will bring the utmost honor to our God who has saved us from the powers of darkness to deliver us into his marvelous light.

Likewise, if we neglect the Christ's commandment to love, we have sinned, because sinning isn't found only on the list of *don'ts*. In *Matthew 25:31-46*, Christ is clear that those who inherit the kingdom are the ones who have lived the commandment to love. These are the ones whom he calls his sheep. There are goats, too, and these are the ones who knew Christ was Lord (v44), but did not do what he had commanded them. Their faith was useless because it was unaccompanied by the works for which they had been saved. Jesus mentions these goats prior to this in *Matthew 7:21-23*. Here is what he says, and we are all familiar with it:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Chapter 5

“You Shall Be Holy” – 1 Peter 1:16

Jesus will not accept a single unrepentant sinner into his heaven, regardless of what any theological system may tell you. I hope I’ve been able to prove that in this short book, or at least give you a doorway into the *real doctrines of grace*. Christ’s message was and still is *“Repent or perish” (Luke 13:1-5)*. It is the grace of God that has provided us such a wonderful opportunity, through the blood of Jesus, to be washed clean of our sin and to be blameless before him. The simple conclusion of Christian theology is this: We are washed by the blood of Jesus when we walk like Jesus (*1 John 1:7*). To do so requires a much greater faith than what is commonly preached today; *it is a faith that does something*, and doesn’t settle for simply believing. This short book is a call to return to that great doctrine of holiness, being blameless and pure in heart.

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” – Hebrews 2:1-3

If you do not know Christ as your Savior, if you are unsure as to whether you are heading to heaven or hell, life or destruction, then allow me to take up the rest of this book to tell you how God has purposed to save you and what you can do about it. Jesus came for you, to seek and save you as a lost sheep. If he has found you today and you wish to receive the gift of salvation from sin and the hope of heaven, then here is what you must do:

1. Believe in your heart that Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified on a tree, buried, and that God raised him from the dead. Confess this to yourself and to a Christian (*Romans 10:9*).

2. Repent of your sins, meaning turn from your sins and turn to a life of godliness. An example of repentance can be found in *Ephesians 4:28*: “*Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*” The thief should go from taking from others to being giving of himself. That same change of life goes for any sin, not just stealing.

3. As part of repentance, you must be baptized (*Acts 2:38*). The Bible says baptism is “*An appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21).*” With repentance and baptism comes the promise of a new life (*Romans 6:4*). You will receive the Holy Spirit and be born again (*Acts 2:39; John 3:7*).

4. Walk faithfully with Jesus, keeping his commandments, and confessing your sins to him if you fail (*1 John 1:7, 9; Revelation 3:5*). Trust God, because, he is the only one who is able to keep you from stumbling and to keep you blameless (*Jude 24*).

If you desire further study, please, contact me at brothercody@mail.com. If you are ready to speak with someone personally and to accept the Lordship of Christ, please, contact a church of Christ nearest your home. God bless you.