

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. (2Corinthians 11:15)

Paul, in speaking of those who serve Satan, says that they disguise themselves. They try to look like “servants of righteousness.” Obviously, since that is a disguise, they must be engaged in unrighteousness while true servants of God are engaged in righteousness. Some at Corinth claimed to be ministers of righteousness but were not.

The term, righteous, is used a lot—sometimes without an understanding of what it means. Notice the meaning of the term. Chasing down etymological paths from our language, the concept of “adhering to a straight line” is found. Spiritually speaking, the “straight line would be the standard set by God. “Righteousness” in our language, formerly was “rightwiseness”—skilled in adhering to the line. “Righteousness” simply refers to the quality of being right or acting justly. There are different kinds of righteousness. Not that God has set multiple standards, but that man many times attempts to set other “straight lines.”

There is self-righteousness or human righteousness. Many of the Jews of Jesus’ day had this very problem. This is why He taught with a story aimed at correcting this type of righteousness (**Luke 18:9-14**). This type of doing right is right as determined by self. There is much of this—it is probably the most prevalent “righteousness.” All types of efforts to show righteousness by men’s standards are employed: wearing of black stockings, refusal to wear cosmetics, and refraining from eating certain things, and other things that may come to mind. Nothing devised by men can establish righteousness.

There is the righteousness which is of the Law given through Moses. Paul alluded to this when speaking of himself: “*I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law ...*” (**Philippians 3:8-9**). He also describes this in his letter to the Romans: “*Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works*” (**Romans 9:31-32**). This is practicing that which is required of that Law because it is in that Law. If you were an Israelite living in that age, then that Law would have been your “straight line.” However, today there is a different “straight line”—something better (read the letter to the **Hebrews**). Sabbath day keeping at present is an example of someone wishing to be “right” by the Law given through Moses.

There is a hypocritical righteousness. The scribes and chief priests used this type of righteousness. “*The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor*” (**Luke 20:19-20**). Even

righteousness which seems to be based on faith can be hypocritical. This is precisely what our text from Paul's letter illustrates (**2Corinthians 11:14,15**).

There is a righteousness which is of faith. Notice the conclusion of **Philippians 3:9** that was noted previously: "...that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Also, notice the preceding verse to the passage noted from Paul's letter to the Romans: "Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith" (**Romans 9:30**). This righteousness is the one that counts—this is the one worth living and dying by. Can I get there?

Where is true righteousness revealed? It is revealed in the gospel. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH" (**Romans 1:17**). Notice where proper emphasis ought to be placed. Why try to go to the law of Moses for righteousness? Why go to man's opinions for righteousness?

When is the time to be righteous? Now is the time. God's grace which brings salvation hath already appeared. "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (**Titus 2:11-14**).

How does one become righteous? First of all, there is heaven's part in making one righteous: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction" (**Romans 3:19-22**).

Man has a part, too. He must believe (**Romans 10:10**), be born anew (**1John 2:29**)—being baptized, being obedient (**Romans 6:3-11,17-19**). Continuation in pursuing right (**1Timothy 6:11**), living right (see again **Titus 2:12**), practicing right (**1John 3:7**) must be the norm. This is wearing His righteousness: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (**Revelation 19:7-8**).

Why should one seek to be righteous? Others can't save you, you must believe God's standard (**Romans 10:4**). Also, righteousness enables us to have the prize after awhile (**Philippians 3:9-12**). Won't you do your part that you may be righteous in God's sight?