

11. The Fruit of the Spirit is Righteousness (1Q 2010—The Fruit of the Spirit)

Biblical material: Matt. 5:6, 23:25–28, Rom. 3:28, 8:4, 10:3, Gal. 3:6, 1 John 2:3–6, 5:1–3.

Quotes

- You and I were created to tell the truth about God by reflecting his likeness. That is normality. How many lies have you told about God today? *Ian Thomas*
- True religion is real living; living with all one's soul, with all one's goodness and righteousness. *Albert Einstein*
- If I must choose between peace and righteousness, I choose righteousness. *Theodore Roosevelt*
- Men love everything but righteousness and fear everything but God. *Vance Havner*
- The task must be to banish from mankind's thought the idea that anybody has the right to use force against righteousness. *Alexander Solzhenitsyn*
- Our righteousness is in Him, and our hope depends, not upon the exercise of grace in us, but upon the fullness of grace and love in Him, and upon His obedience unto death. *John Newton*

Questions

What do we mean when we use the word righteousness? What is the source of righteousness? How can even such terms as “righteousness by faith” be misunderstood? What does “right-being” and “right-living” prove? How does God make us right? What is our role in this work of the Spirit?

Bible discussion

We need to hunger and thirst for righteousness—that's how much we need it (Matt. 5:6). Right-being and right-doing do not come from outward observance (Matt. 23:25-28), rather this comes from our relationship with God: “We're convinced that people are made right through trust in God, not from legal observance.” (Rom. 3:28 FBV). How does this happen? Through the power of God in Christ: “For what the law couldn't do because it was powerless due to our sinful human nature, God was able to do by sending his own Son in human form. Dealing with the whole problem of sin, he destroyed sin in human nature. In this way we could fulfill the right requirements of the law as we follow the Spirit and not our human nature.” (Rom. 8:3, 4 FBV). Speaking of his fellow-Jews, Paul longs for them to understand the true way of righteousness: “I can testify to their fervent dedication to God, but it's misplaced. For since they don't understand God's way of making us right with him, and since they try to set themselves right their own way, they're not right with God.” (Rom. 10:2, 3 FBV). Galatians 3:6 speaks of Abraham trusting in God and this being “counted” as righteousness—what does this mean? John makes it clear that if we make claims to knowing God, we need to live as Jesus did, and follow his commandments (1 John 2:3–6, 5:1–3). Only then do we prove to ourselves and others that our claims are true. For anyone can make claims to righteousness, but the proof is in the life—the fruit that the Spirit brings.

Comment

Righteousness by faith! Such an eloquent slogan—yet what do we mean by it? In the original context as a summary of Luther’s position, it was in contrast to the works of righteousness he rebelled against. Yet even this phrase can be misunderstood—for example, as if righteousness was dependent on our faith, which makes it human-centered once more!

If we were to make salvation just a matter of accepting this or that concept how much easier it would be. We have all the terms—forensic justification, imputed righteousness, blood atonement—but what on earth do we mean? At times, the words and the images get in the way of the reality. As in this case, where the picture language of the “blood of Christ” ceases to mean the full and complete demonstration of the trustworthy and saving God to us, but becomes simply some kind of “magic formula” that makes us right with God again. It has about as much to do with salvation as all the “splinters of the cross,” the vials of “Christ’s tears,” or the “stains of Christ’s blood” that were venerated as holy relics in the Middle Ages.

No magic. But a miracle: How God came to us to show himself, and to die as we will die if we reject him, and to rescue us from ourselves by transforming us into his image as we love and trust him. For salvation is knowing God (in the full Biblical sense), not some imagined ceremonial or symbolic language, however good it sounds. *It’s what it means that counts!*

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3 NIV emphasized.) Making God known was Jesus’ mission: “No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” (John 1:18 NIV.) Jesus said to Thomas: “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” (John 14:7 NIV). And at the end of his prayer for his disciples, Jesus declares his mission accomplished: “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and I myself may be in them.” (John 17:26 NIV).

This is what the Spirit brings—the righteousness which means right-being and right-doing, which can only come from him who is always and truly right—God himself!

Ellen White Comments

Here [in the Bible] are recorded the struggles, the defeats, and the victories of the greatest men this world has ever known... The curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin, to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. {CE 65}

In Jesus mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. In His life and character He not only reveals the character of God, but the possibility of man. He was the representative of God and the exemplar of humanity. He presented to the world what humanity might become when united by faith with divinity. {1SM 349}

By precept and example, He [Jesus] taught men the way of righteousness, representing the character of God, and giving to the world a perfect standard of moral excellency in humanity. {SD 137}

Prepared September 14, 2009 © Jonathan Gallagher 2009