

God's Righteousness Vs. Man's Utopia

By

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Daniel, who prophesied in the 16 century BC, wrote that seventy weeks (in history – 490 years) were decreed “to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy” (Dan. 9:24).

What is this “everlasting righteousness”, its purpose, and the means of attaining it?

ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS. God is the One Who says what is right. He ought to know: he is the architect and creator. Obviously, when men deny God, they also deny that there can be any hard and fast rule of what is right, hence the degeneracy extant today. Even when men do their best to body God they readily see that they have not attained the perfect goal, and acknowledge the truth that “there is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:10), because God desires absolute righteousness. God Himself is totally righteous without the least flaw or tendency to that which is unrighteous. The Psalmist wrote, “For Jehovah is righteous; he loves righteousness: the upright shall behold his face (Psa. 11:7). Jesus said, “My judgment is righteous” (John 5:30). God's righteousness is demonstrated in Christ “who did not sin” (I Pet. 2:21). This is the righteousness of which Daniel prophesied.

THE PURPOSE OF MAKING MEN RIGHTEOUS. Were righteousness merely the practice of good deeds as measured by human standards, it would be a relative matter and hardly worthy of the profound significance given it in scripture. But the purpose of making men righteous is not to elevate social standards; rather it is to reconcile men to God, making it possible to have life and fellowship with Him. God created man to be in His image; that is, with absolute righteousness like God's, hence, the penalty for sin as decreed by God is death. This is pictured throughout the Old Testament in that death (not imprisonment) is the penalty for numerous crimes. Paul plainly writes that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). There is to be no sin or unrighteousness in God's presence. Therefore, for man to have life he must be rid of all sin and made absolutely righteous in God's eyes.

This is demonstrated by Jesus who, under the guilt of sin, was put to death by a righteous act of God (Rom. 8:3, Isa. 53:4, 10). But since He had no sin of His own, death actually had no power over him, and he arose from death. To be under the guilt of sin is to die, but to be righteous in God's sight is to receive eternal life. In the Revelation it is said that those who have part in the “first resurrection” do not come under the penalty of the “second death” (Rev. 20:6). The first resurrection is our spiritual resurrection from the power of sin. “Even when we were dead through our trespasses (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace have you been saved) and raised us up with him...” (Eph. 2:5, 6; Cf. Rom. 6:4). The necessity of absolute righteousness is further seen in the quality of the world to be inhabited by God's eternal saints: “according to his promise we look for a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness” (II Pet. 3:13). Thus the impossible (humanly speaking) situation of man, who by his own life and works

fails to measure up to God's absolute righteousness and yet has no hope of life eternal without it. The purpose of righteousness is that man might have fellowship with God, receiving life and immortality in that righteous world to come.

HOW BROUGHT ABOUT. "He who knew no sin h made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). Here is the good news, where Christ comes to "bring in everlasting righteousness." "Because Christ was offered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (I Pet. 3:18). Christ, assuming our sin, sustained the penalty for sin by dying, not for his own sin but for ours. The believer therefore is made righteous in God's eyes, not the relative righteousness as viewed in the eyes of man, but, as Paul wrote, "the righteousness of God." Righteousness is the crux of the matter in our relationship to God. Nothing matters so much as this, to be "found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own...but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:9, Cf. Heb. 9:26, 10:10 & 14).

MEANING FOR THE 20TH CENTURY. Daniel's prophecy concerning the seventy weeks has been fulfilled. Christ indeed has finished transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, brought in everlasting righteousness, sealed up vision and prophecy and was indeed anointed the Most Holy (Dan. 9:24). In view of this there are significant facts for the modern believer. We will list a few.

1. The purpose of God in Christ was not to establish a political Utopia, a one-world government system on this earth with every man satiated with material things, "for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Christ's object in coming to the world was to make individuals righteous, to "deliver us out of this present evil world" and not to be an earthly ruler of a world government (Gal. 1:4).

2. The church was not established for political purposes; it is not a pressure group designed to legislate over world problems and morals. Rather, it is a fellowship of men make righteous; its mission is to preach the gospel of Christ that all mankind might know of such righteousness and its benefits. Jesus promised no blessing connected with political aspirations, material prosperity and natural or material achievements; instead, he said, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). The New Testament holds no promise of a reward or blessing for valor in regard to the kingdoms of man. But there are several blessings pronounced for those who suffer for the sake of righteousness in God's spiritual kingdom (Matt. 5:10, I Pet. 3:14, etc.).

3. Mere reformation does not erase sins nor make one right with God. One is either completely clean and righteous or he is in sin and under its curse. Neither will good works nor worship make one righteous. This is done by Christ. He not only cleanses from past sins but keeps one clean through the vital connection of faith, so that the Christian remains righteous (cleansed from all sin), even though he is not able to live absolutely perfect or totally right. "If we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). There is a vast difference between a church filled with lukewarm members with a variety of motives for their presence, and the assembly of saints who come together recognizing the work of Christ in making them righteous in order to fellowship God and receive eternal life. Saints worship because they are made righteous. They have been baptized into Christ's

death (Rom. 6:3) and that death was to make men righteous-free from sin and death. Thus baptism is an act of faith in the death of Jesus, and the entrance into that vicarious death by faith. The Christian continues to celebrate Christ's death in the Lord's supper each week, because Christ has made him righteous through that death. The true church of Christ is filled "with joy and peace in believing" and not taken up with the material desires of the day, as is commonly seen.

4. The righteousness spoken of by Daniel has already been brought in by Christ and we do not look for Christ to come again to fulfill this prophecy in any earthly kingdom. The unrighteous will continue to flourish until the end of the world (Matt. 13:49). Since at Christ's first coming He established righteousness, making believers righteous by His death, at His second coming He will "judge the world in righteousness" and execute the unrighteous (Luke 19:27), as pictured in the Old Testament types and portrayed on the cross, where Jesus, in the role of sinner, was "smitten of God" by the stroke that was due sinners (Isa. 53:8). If men do not attain righteousness before His coming, it will be too late to do so after He comes. "Now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2).

5. It is acknowledged on all sides that the major problem today is spiritual, that disorder, crime and deterioration of human values is due to man's spiritual degeneracy. It is strange then that there is a rising tendency on the part of religious leaders to preach a materialistic and carnal, and in contrast to Christ's doctrine of spiritual bread and water and detachment from this world. Paul "reasoned of righteousness, and self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts 24:25). We are explicitly commanded: "If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth" (Col. 3:1-2).

Having been made righteous by the Lord Christ Jesus, let us "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness" (I Tim. 6:11).

"Seek you first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

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