

RIGHTEOUSNESS

A Necessity!

By

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The dissolution of society which is now taking place is the inevitable result of man's losing sight of his purpose. Without a common purpose and goal, men choose opposing and conflicting goals which work toward the destruction of one another.

The revelation which Christ gives to the world centers on the purpose for which man is created and the means of attaining that purpose. Not only has the modern church failed in showing this purpose to the world, but in a large part has manifested conflicting and opposing purposes which have added to the problem instead of the solution. A prime example of this is the widespread support of material success as a standard of living rather than placing the highest value upon morals. Christ is upheld as a "Champion" to relieve physical suffering, advance political freedom and equality, and in general raise the material standard of living. While churches have been preoccupied with presenting an image of worldly success, ethics and morals have deteriorate at a rapid rate.

If we should choose one word from scripture to describe God, that word would have to be "righteous." Not only is this the word used most frequently in the Old Testament in describing God's attributes, character, and work, but it is the word which describes Christ, who entered the world as a manifestation of God in the flesh. From the very beginning, until He expired on the cross, never once in all of His life did Jesus act in an unrighteous way. He was tempted in all points as we are and yet without sin. Today, however, the concept of an absolute righteousness not only is considered to be narrow, it is downright scandalous. In our culture of equality, no absolute standards can be allowed to exist. One is neither righteous nor unrighteous. Therefore, there can be no absolute standards handed down from above, which means that God Himself is not to be seen as righteous, for we are created in His image.

Instead of emphasizing, as do the scriptures, the righteousness of God, man now emphasizes God's love. The goal becomes one of cultivating love, which without the guidance of a standard of righteousness, leads to further confusion. The basic purpose of Christ was to make man righteous. While He was not indifferent to human suffering, His first concern was human sin. When the house was so crowded that no one could get in at the door, a crippled man was brought to Jesus by the extraordinary efforts of his friends, who lowered him through the roof (Mark 2:2-12). But when Jesus spoke to him, His words were, "Thy sins are forgiven." The statement, obviously, was incongruous to the situation at hand. Who had mentioned anything about morals? The four friends had labored hard to find a way to get this crippled, helpless, suffering man to Jesus so that he could be healed, and then He talks to him about sin! Christ finally healed him, but only after He called attention to the man's basic need for righteousness, which far outweighed the problem of his physical handicap.

When the rich ruler came to Jesus, he called Him "Good Teacher," and Jesus rebuffed him, saying, "None is good save One, even God" (Mark 10:17-18). Christ was not denying that He was good, absolutely good, but the thrust of His statement was to the

fact that goodness is not relative. It is not the kind of nice-ism, often thought of as goodness. Man has managed to fall so far from God, that no man is actually good. There is not totally righteous.

One of the greatest problems of our day is the lack of a moral standard. In man's effort to establish equality, freedom and plenty as primary goals he has whittled away all the distinctive marks of morality. Generally, it is no longer permitted in public schools to say that a person who violates Biblical standards is wrong or immoral. Sick beings who follow perverted life styles (the homosexual, the lesbian) insist that there are no standards of moral righteousness governing sex.

From this it is only one step to assume there are no legitimate laws to govern other actions. Ergo! Who is to say it is wrong to lie? To kill?

By eliminating the image of God a One who is righteous, man has succeeded in eliminating the absolute standard of righteousness for himself. Yet the idea of good and bad still persists in the culture. This is neutralized by suggesting that all men are basically good. The most horrible crimes are committed and society refuses to punish the criminal because he is "basically good." He committed the crime because he is sick. Love dictates that he be treated for his sickness and not dealt with as an immoral person. Since God has been reduced to nothing but love we have almost eliminated the concept of righteousness and justice from human relationships.

One of the chief obstacles in the way of Christ and the gospel is just this basic myth that man is basically good. Believing this, one sees no need for cleansing from sin, for sanctification, or total conversion. Man only needs to touch up a few flaws with a self-improvement kit. If the myth were fact, that is, if man were basically good, then Christ's ministry of repentance and his death for sin were not only unnecessary but actually absurd. In fact, this is just what they were to those in His own day who held the false philosophy that man is basically good. To the Jews the gospel was a stumbling block; to the Greeks it was foolishness. To modern man, both Jews and Greeks, the gospel is absurd, because all men are basically good and the last thing such men need is someone to die to make them good.

Having discarded God, the standard for true righteousness, man forms his own conflicting standards. One is good if he is civic-minded; never mind that he is a tyrant to his wife and children. One is good if he is courteous and sweet to all people; never mind if he cleverly takes advantage in business deals. One is good if he treats all fairly and does favors for them without compensation; never mind if he denies God and exalts humanism, which is idolatry. Good has become a word to attach to anyone who pleases us.

The church that once existed for converting individuals to Christ that they may obtain the "righteousness of God" now exists to "do good" by rendering material aid and supporting legislation for welfare. In the meantime, individuals grow less and less "good" and there are fewer prophets calling them to true repentance — to the real good. Benevolence is demanded of a Christian, but it does not make him righteous. Cornelius was a man who "gave much alms," but he still had to believe the gospel and be baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 10).

God is the sum total of Good. To be truly good, one must be like God. This is the purpose of it all — man is created in God's image and the ultimate goal is to attain that image.

The departure from the image is the ruin of man and will ultimately result in man's destruction.

To his friends, the man with palsy was a good man. It is not likely that they would go to all the trouble of tearing up the roof of the house to get him to the Healer if they felt he was undeserving. We are more apt to overlook another's serious faults when he is suffering physically. But Jesus was not blinded to the man's evil by the sad state of his health. He was before Him a man who not only failed to be "good", but who was in a state of sin that required much more urgency than did his awful physical condition. So He forgave him of sin. Then after some criticism, by the learned religious leaders, Jesus healed him.

The greatest noise these days is made over problems that have to do with physical needs: poverty, energy, ecology, freedom, etc. Christ was not indifferent to physical needs, but His purpose was not to relieve suffering and physical problems, rather it was to solve the deepest need, the need to be good, to be righteous. Only by reflecting the image of God is there any purpose for man, and God is good.

Christ said that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). By His death, He met the penalty for sin for those who receive Him and they are not considered righteous in God's sight (Rom. 5:19-21, II Cor. 5:21).

All who stand in this relationship to God have one common purpose and one ultimate goal to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ. "We shall be like Him"(I John 3:2). Our goal is the same as God's, to have man in His own image, righteous as he is. John adds, "and everyone that has this hope set on him, purifies himself even as He is pure"(I John. 3:3). Since righteousness is the ultimate goal, the honest believer aims in that direction. Peter writes that after judgment there will be a "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness"(II Pet. 3:13). There is no future except for the righteous, therefore we "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" by trying to follow Christ, the pattern of righteousness. All other issues, such as economics and politics, must be determined by their relationship to the major one — righteousness.

This is the mark of distinction for God's people in the world. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loves not his brother"(I John 3:10). Instead, the tendency is to lower the distinguishing marks of righteousness and set up material standards of living as goals. We cringe at the thought of poverty, but wink at the sight of sin. One would rather be lauded for worldly success than set apart by holy principles.

Christians must somehow get rid of the worldly image of success — living for luxury and comfort, and get back to the holy image of godliness — the business of living for the sake of pleasing God and acquiring His righteousness.

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