

...it is not we who possess righteousness, but righteousness which possesses us; we are its servants.

Colin Brown



NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH

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OH, HOW EASY IT IS FOR BELIEVERS TO LIVE BY THE RATIONALES OF THE WORLD in which we all live. We're going along, minding our own business, thinking everything is perfectly hunky-dory, when suddenly we realize that we have been buying into the corporate mind-think of the world's system. We didn't mean to; we didn't purposely reject God's counsel in favor of man's. But there it is, and we've been caught.

Society's idea of righteous living is not unlike that of the ancient Greeks, who considered righteousness to be synonymous with "rightness"—that is, exhibiting behavior that fitted neatly into the established, accepted norms of the community.

The world thought of righteousness as the general designation under which were summed up a man's specific acts of conformity to law, the sum total reached by the addition of many specific instances of conformity to a standard of duty. The world...said, and says, Do the deeds and win the character.

Alexander MacLaren

Someone who was righteous treated others well, was a "good" person who fulfilled his obligations toward his fellow man and his many gods. Was he kind to the poor and did he help old ladies across the street? Then he was a righteous person. Did he visit the temples regularly and offer sacrifices to the gods? Then he was a righteous person.

And those standards are not far afield of how our society defines a righteous person. Do you visit shut-ins and return the overage when the clerk hands you too much

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change? Then you are a righteous dude. Do you go to church every Sunday and tithe regularly? Then you are a righteous dude.

Even some members of the clergy, such as this United Methodist pastor, can let these standards slip into their thinking:

What does it mean to be a Righteous Dude? It means to live your life according to the Gospel, and to be interested in the lives of others; not just so you can change them, but because you genuinely are interested in them as they are. It means to accept their culture and their lifestyle, to present the simple love of God and the salvation of Christ, and to attach as little of your own culture to it as possible. It means to learn about people in humility, in gentleness.

This comment, from a message of his based on 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, is, on one level, perfectly sound when restricted to the context of evangelism. The believer *is* to be winsome and non-judgmental when he presents the gospel message. But what doesn't belong is the idea that one's level of righteousness is dependent on how we live—*"to live your life according to the Gospel, and to be interested in the lives of others."*

That standard works just fine for those not in Christ, for their behavior is all they have to work with. (On the other hand, why would they be living their life according to the Gospel?) For the believer, however, there is a higher standard—a standard that is not and cannot be attained in the flesh. The Christian's righteousness is not determined by his behavior; there is nothing he can do to become or be righteous. The Christian's righteousness is from God alone, through faith in Christ Jesus.

...that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but

that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Philippians 3:8b-9

This passage from his letter to the Philippians is a pivot point for the apostle Paul: from *saving* righteousness—justification through the atonement of

Christ on the cross—to righteous *living*. And neither are produced by the flesh.

One is not saved by acts of righteousness ("derived from the law"), nor does one, after that moment of justification, live righteously through acts of kindness or obedience. All righteousness belongs to God, and if we possess any of it, we do so through *faith*—not behavior.

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Romans 4:3

When God looks on the unregenerate, does He see any righteousness? No; outside of faith in God through Christ, there is no righteousness.

When God looks on you, a believer, does He see *your* righteousness? No; He sees *Christ's* righteousness. The believer is declared righteous only through faith in the atoning blood of Christ Jesus, and any righteousness

he possess after that declaration, is not his, but the righteousness of Christ working in and through him.

...and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Romans 6:18

*I thirst, Thou wounded Lamb of God,
To wash me in Thy cleansing blood;
To dwell within Thy wounds; then pain
Is sweet, and life or death is gain.*

*Take my poor heart, and let it be
Forever closed to all but Thee:
Seal Thou my breast, and let me wear
That pledge of love forever there.*

*How blest are they who still abide
Close shelter'd in Thy bleeding side!
Who thence their life and strength derive,
And by Thee move, and in Thee live.*

*What are our works but sin and death,
Till Thou thy quick'ning Spirit breathe?
Thou giv'st the power thy grace to move;
O wondrous grace! O boundless love!*

*How can it be, Thou heavenly King,
That Thou shouldst us to glory bring;
Make slaves the partners of thy throne,
Deck'd with a never-fading crown?*

*Hence our hearts melt, our eyes o'erflow,
Our words are lost, nor will we know,
Nor will we think of aught beside,—
My Lord, my Love is crucified.*

John Wesley

continued...

