



Let Them Be: What Does it Mean to Be Righteous and Righteous “Still?”

By Barbara L. Klika, MSW
Undershepherd
www.set-apart-ministries.org
September, 2014

*And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and **he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.***

Rev. 22:10-11 KJV

As we receive this series of four commandments from our Messiah through John, we must in good conscience consider what it means to be “righteous” and also “righteous still.” Despite our common confusion that being righteous is some kind of personal subjective matter, there really are instructions in righteousness to be found in the Word.

***All scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, **for instruction in righteousness:** 2 Timothy 3: 16 KJV*

Some translations have Messiah’s commandment worded slightly differently:

*Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; **let the one who does right continue to do right;** and let the holy person continue to be holy.” NIV*

*Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; **and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness;** and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.” NASB*

*“Whoever keeps acting wickedly, let him go on acting wickedly whoever is filthy, let him go on being made filthy. “Also, **whoever is righteous, let him go on doing what is righteous;** and whoever is holy, let him go on being made holy.” CJB*

As previously noted, the grammatical level of the phrases indicates that the first two topics, being unjust and filthy, are stated in the active, imperative modes, while the second two topics

of being righteous and holy, are stated in the passive, imperative mode. As simply as I can state it, it boils down to whether the action **comes from within** the individual or whether the action **comes upon** the individual from outside themselves. In all four statements, the imperative form stands: it is a command (not just a suggestion) to permit these things to occur, for good or ill. Stern, alone, has phrased it to indicate to me that he views being made holy as action from without. I will come back to that matter in the next article, dealing with holiness but wanted to note it here.

To declare that someone who is already righteous should be righteous **still** implies to me that there is a **continuance** of the same actions. Some translations have it that the righteous person is to be **more** righteous, which to me implies that the actions of righteousness need to **increase**. As we see the time is at hand, we are to then either **continue or increase** in the righteousness that already is shown in us.

The Greek word “eti” is translated as “still” or “more,” and Vine’s Expository Dictionary confirms that it can mean a continuing OR an increasing action.

But that begs the question of whether or not we know what being righteous really means. The NIV translation simply says “to do right” which I think is likely to be a phrase that many people are comfortable with. It seems to imply that we simply have to know the difference between right and wrong. Many people have their own understanding of this and have not ever felt compelled to check whether or not their understanding matches what our God says in His Word about it.

In our day, to declare that someone is righteous or one’s self is righteous seems to have a negative connotation to it, as though it is wrong to declare this, or bragging or impossible to achieve so it shouldn’t be claimed. Yes, we recall Paul’s statement.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Romans 3:10 KJV

But there is so much more to the story. In order to correctly understand the Word one must never simply pull a single verse out of context and build on that alone. **Surely our Messiah is not cruel, and would not have told the righteous to be MORE righteous if it were impossible to BE righteous!** Paul is addressing the question of the advantage of the Jew as compared to those who do not seek God. And whether Jew or not, if one is not seeking God, there can be no righteousness. The unregenerate soul and heart does not seek righteousness, but those who have received His Spirit are being regenerated.

It doesn’t take long to do a search in an online Bible and see how many people have been declared righteous. Noah, Abraham, Daniel, Job, and whole congregations of righteous people are noted throughout the Word.

What exactly does it mean then, to “be righteous?” Best practice is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. Genesis 15:6 KJV

And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us. Deuteronomy 6:25 KJV

*Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness;
according to my cleanness in his eye sight. 2 Samuel 22:25 KJV*

From these three observations, we see that righteousness has to do with belief, and with observing and doing the commandments of God. When we observe and do things His way, we are declared clean, free of defilement and sin: righteous.

*For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head;
and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.
Isaiah 59:17 KJV*

Isaiah further confirms that observing and keeping His commands is like putting on clothing or armor, much as Paul confirmed in his words to the Ephesians about putting on the full gospel armor.

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me
with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the **robe of righteousness**, as a
bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her
jewels. Isaiah 61: 10 KJV*

Isaiah further connects that way of living, in keeping His commandments, as being like clothing or armor, and now like the robe given to His people who are in preparation to be His bride.

*And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white:
for the **fine linen is the righteousness** of saints. Rev. 19:8 KJV*

Here is yet another reference to righteousness as clothing, yet also the actions and choices involved. The fine linen of the saints is their righteousness, the outcome of their having chosen to walk in obedience to the commands of God. Perhaps at this point, you will also see the comparisons of our taking up righteousness by our choice of actions, and also that He gives us His righteousness, so both an act from within us and an act from outside of us.

*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;
and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6: 33 KJV*

These are familiar words to many of us, though many have not looked further to see what exactly his righteousness refers to doing. These are also familiar words:

*He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in **the paths of righteousness** for his name's sake. Psalm 23: 3 KJV*

*Being then made free from sin, ye became the **servants of righteousness**.
Romans 6: 18 KJV*

Have you considered that being made righteous through our Messiah's shed blood and work on our behalf makes us servants of righteousness who follow Him on the paths of righteousness? It is a one time action, and an ongoing action. Once we have accepted His work, we need to do our part!

There is so much depth to this one line from the beloved Psalm 23, but now I am focusing on “the paths of righteousness” in which He leads. The word translated as “paths” is the Hebrew word, “ma’gal” meaning an entrenchment or track, from the root word “agol” meaning “round” or “to revolve.” (Note: Hebrew words and their root words together form a composite for deeper and clearer understanding of the meaning.) In my western thinking mind, a path is sort of a straight line, a linear connection between here and there. In Hebraic understanding, this path is more of a cycle, a revolving path that is worn deeply, entrenched. One can picture a beast of burden walking in a circle turning a mill, or maybe the ponies that provide rides to small children at a carnival...steadily walking the circular path without distraction. So the line from the psalm pictures more like being led in a cycle of righteousness for His Name’s sake. This picture then leads to consideration of what sort of “cycles” are there in His teachings? It doesn’t take long to discover that the *moedim*, the appointed times, the feast days that He has outlined for us in Numbers which are presented as being an annual cycle.

Many have discounted these feast days as “Jewish holidays” when in fact the Word says no such thing.

They are the LORD’s feast days! As one studies further, it becomes shinningly evident that each of these Feasts is a picture of our Messiah’s work on our behalf! For most, it is easiest to first see the connection with His first coming, His death and resurrection. We have commonly called Messiah Yeshua the Lamb of God, but until one studies the Passover and understands that the physical lambs brought to sacrifice were just a picture of Messiah, that symbolic connection with His cycle of Feasts may have been missed. He fulfilled the Spring Feasts of God in His first coming, and I believe He will perfectly fulfill the Fall Feasts on His Return. We are often familiar with hearing of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, but also may have missed the symbolic connection with the Final Feast of Tabernacles.

Until then, I am walking the cycle of His annual feasts, in what is called “*mikray kodesh*,” a holy rehearsal so that I am ready when He comes. I am “wearing in” the entrenched path of how I live my life by walking after Him in the cycle of life that has been established in the Word...and no longer walk in the paths that involve holidays He did not command me to honor. The annual cycle of my life now follows after what Messiah did when He walked the earth. I understand this to be a significant part of what it means to walk after Him in paths of righteousness.

And perhaps the most significant of all, is the “first Feast” of keeping the cycle of the seventh day. It is referred to as the one enduring sign of the relationship between our God and His people. This truth is stated in Exodus and verified again in Ezekiel:

*Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, **Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations;** that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Exodus 31:13 KJV*

*And **hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you,** that ye may know that I am the LORD your God. Ezekiel 20:20 KJV*

The next question that seems to arise while dealing with the question of righteousness meaning to observe and do His commandments is that of whether or not Messiah’s death and resurrection did away with those previously given Laws. Did He provide some new set of laws that we are to observe and do?

I was recently asked why Jews have such a hard time understanding that Jesus is their Messiah. My reply is that the westernized Jesus doesn’t meet the Deuteronomy criteria:

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him. Deuteronomy 13: 1-4 KJV

Our “western” understanding that Messiah didn’t keep the Law, that He didn’t observe the Feasts or Shabbat or the dietary restrictions listed in the Word are enough to cause them to believe that He is not “The One” to come. I also found the following interchange very enlightening and hope the reader will as well. The teaching of the Old Testament can be called a doctrine; a system of beliefs and practices. Here it is described in a poetic picture of the life and nurturance that our God’s doctrine brings.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Deuteronomy 32:2 KJV

Those observing Messiah’s teaching and doctrine were astonished at what new things they heard and asked Him where He came by this knowledge.

*Jesus answered them and said, “**My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.**” If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but **He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.** John 7: 16-18*

In other words, **Messiah confirmed that what He taught is the same as what the Father teaches.** He went on to confirm that no unrighteousness will be found in one who seeks the will and the glory of the Father, not of himself.

And here is a verse that has become a stumbling block for many:

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Romans 10:4 KJV

On a casual reading, it does indeed appear that there is no need to honor God’s commands/Law in order to be righteous. But upon deeper study and consideration, one will recognize the use of the word “end” does not always mean that something is no longer relevant. An “end” may also refer to a “goal.” Perhaps you will recognize the phrase, “the end justifies the means?” In this case, it is saying that it doesn’t matter what is done as long as the final outcome/goal is seen as good. In our understanding, Messiah/Christ is the goal of the laws toward being righteous in that when we honor them, we are becoming more like Him, our goal.

Another familiar verse adds to the picture:

***All scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, **for instruction in righteousness:** 2 Timothy 3: 16 KJV*

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the only Scripture that existed was what we call the Old Testament. It is the same Word that is described as eternal, good, light, liberty, and unchanging in so many places throughout the Psalms and Psalm 119 especially. So we can look to the “Old Testament” to find out what “instruction in righteousness” is about...the references already provided are a starting point to identify the ways in which we observe and do His commands.

Hebrews 5 offers a warning that the understanding of righteousness is not a “milk” matter, but one of “meat,” meaning that it is not easily and quickly understood but requires maturity and study in order to correctly teach it...and observe to do it!

Messiah’s admonition to us through John in Revelation then confirms that not only are we to be walking in righteousness as one of His people, we are to continue and/or increase in that righteousness. We are to be ever learning, wearing down the groove or trench of the cycle in which we walk, rehearsing for THAT DAY when He comes and sets His Feet down here again! We need to study His entire Word because His instructions did not change with Messiah’s death and resurrection by Messiah’s own Word.

Conclusion

To be righteous is described throughout the Scriptures as adhering to the teachings and ways of the God of Israel. To be righteous is to walk after Messiah as He leads us on paths of righteousness, not because we deserve it, but for His Name’s sake. To be righteous is to keep His commands, His Feasts, His instructions. Messiah confirmed that He taught the same doctrine as His Father. Had He done otherwise, He would have failed the test of genuinely being of the Father. To walk after our God and His Son, our Messiah Yeshua, is to follow and honor, hear and obey His commands...the ones that are the same from age to age. Messiah’s work on our behalf is our righteousness, bestowed on those who believe, and what makes it possible for us to pursue a lifestyle of righteousness, doing what the Father taught and continues to teach today.

When we follow, honor, hear and obey His Word and His teachings on righteousness, we find ourselves doing things differently than others, which leads us directly into the final command to be more holy, or as it is literally translated, set apart, for His purposes.