

The Righteousness Paul Sought

"... that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Phil. 3:8b-9).

Paul expresses here a desire to be found righteous with God. He has written extensively of this subject, not only in this letter, but in letters to both the Romans and Galatians.

Paul stated that things that others would regard as "*gain*" were things he counted nothing. His ultimate goal was to be found in Christ with a righteousness which was from God by faith; not the righteousness which came by the law. What, if any, was the difference?

Notice he said that the righteousness which came by the law was "*mine own.*" Of this sort of righteousness Paul laid claim to having attained: "*as touched the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless*" (3:6). Did he mean that he, or any other who attained such righteousness, was justified or saved? Let him answer. To an audience in Antioch of Pisidia he said, "*Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:38f). To the Galatians he said, "*For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them*" (Gal. 3:10). How does one reconcile Paul's words of Philippians 3:6 ("*blameless*") with his following words: "*Faithful is the saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*" (1 Tim. 1:15)? Blameless, yet chief of sinners: how could this be?

Paul kept the law -- when he erred in some point (which he often did), he offered the appropriate sacrifice, therein by offering said sacrifices, he was blameless. There was one great problem, the sacrifices he offered were ineffectual (Heb. 10:4). And the attitude of just keeping law gave same the thought by just keeping commands they could be just before God. The righteousness Paul sought was that which came through Jesus: "*but that righteousness which is through faith in Christ*" (Phil. 3:9). Many years before Paul had written that in the gospel is "*revealed the righteousness of God from faith unto faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith*" (Rom. 1:16f). As he developed his argument that one is made righteous through the gospel, through one's faith (not through the law) he added, "*Now apart*

form the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21f).

Many suppose Paul taught that on the basis of faith alone one could be accounted righteous. They do not understand Paul’s argument. Yes, Paul said one is not justified by works, but he meant by this a system of perfect law keeping (Eph. 2:9). To many, “works” and “obedience” equal the same thing. They could not be more wrong. Paul stated without equivocation that obedience is essential (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The righteousness which is from Christ is based upon grace and faith in Christ. Faith in Christ must be demonstrated, otherwise it is not true faith. This principle is illustrated again and again in Hebrews 11 where the writer shows that the Old Testament worthies were justified by their faith plus obedience. Check it out and observe that in every instance where one’s faith was commended, that faith was a working faith. Paul longed for the righteousness of Christ -- justification from sins because one’s sins had been forgiven through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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