

Right Actions with Wrong Motives



Gary Wilkerson February 3, 2020

“[The] Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith” (Romans 9:30).

The heart of every follower of Jesus hungers to be holy before God — free from sin, victorious over flesh, pure and spotless before the Lord. This desire is planted in the hearts of man, an innate longing to live right. People of every religion — and even no religion — are moved to live well, love others, be the best person they can be. Some obviously do the opposite, but they still are conscious of a deep desire to do right.

We all fall short of this desire because of our sinful nature. For believers, failure to live in a way that honors God can crush the spirit. For nonbelievers, the spirit of this world can darken the mind to any sense of rightness.

The desire to live uprightly is behind the meaning of the word *righteousness* — to be in right standing with God. This means you live with right motives, emotions and behavior. It takes what is wrong in us — what is out of sync with God — and establishes right alignment with his purposes.

Is righteousness right behavior? Not necessarily. You can do the right thing while having wrong motives; in fact, some Christians do right things but are motivated by a pharisaical spirit. Their outward behavior is right but inwardly they are “dead man’s bones.” A lot of people seek righteousness with great passion but fail to attain it.

The key is justification. We know Jesus paid the price for our sins through his sacrifice on the cross to bring us into right standing once and for all. If we are not justified, we can never be righteous no matter how many good works we do or how many hours we spend in prayer.

And then there is sanctification. Both justification and sanctification are essential to our righteousness. Justification positions us as righteous and sanctification is the process of experiencing God’s righteousness functioning in our daily lives. This means we begin the ongoing process of walking uprightly before God.

Jesus is your source for both justification and sanctification through his gift of grace. He is your power, your newness of life, so let him relieve you of any pressure you may have felt to be righteous. Trust in him alone for your victory!

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