

“**RIGHTEOUSNESS**”

The Tenth Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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In addition to the nine characteristics of the singular fruit of the Spirit given in Galatians 5:22-23, Paul adds righteousness and truth in Ephesians 5:9. In this passage, he writes, "for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth." Goodness is a quality that was previously given in the Galatians' passage. Thus, two additional qualities are supplied.

Because of a manuscript variance, the American Standard Version translates Ephesians 5:9 as "the fruit of the light." However, in both Galatians 5 and Ephesians 5, Paul is contrasting "the unfruitful works of darkness" (Ephesians 5:11) with walking "as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). "The unfruitful works of darkness" are comparable to the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21), and "walk as children of light" is comparable to "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). Because of this similar comparison, many of the same characteristics are named. The works of darkness and the works of the flesh include such things as fornication, uncleanness, and idolatry while walking as children of light and walking in the Spirit are both characterized by goodness, righteousness, and truth. In this article, consider righteousness, an additional and tenth characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit.

"Righteousness" is the quality of being right or just. It is most certainly an attribute of God. The psalmist David declared, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17). However, to humanity, the term is employed in three ways.

First, righteousness is used of a person's actions toward another. In this way, it is right actions or fair dealings. This is the opposite of lying, cheating, and stealing. Amos convicted Israel of old saying, "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth" (Amos 5:7). The way they did this was by not heeding the words of the prophets, by treading down the poor, and by taking bribes (verses 10-12). Sadly, even though God had blessed them richly, they continued to turn "judgment [justice - CN] into gall, and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock" (Amos 6:12). Less than a hundred years later, Micah convicted Judah of the same crimes. The wealthy of Judah coveted land and houses (2:1-2), robbed the poor (2:8), cast out women from their houses (2:9), and were deceitful in business (6:11). Like Israel, Judah's rulers were greedy like cannibals and abhorred justice (3:1-3, 9), and their judges sought bribes (7:3). This even bled over to their

religious leaders. Some prophets prophesied and some priests taught for money (3:11). Thus, Micah explained what the Lord required of them. He wrote, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). Fearfully, this is the same sad state of affairs in our time.

Second, righteousness is used of living equitably or justly. This obviously includes the previous thought, but it is more than just fair dealings with our neighbors. This thought includes such things as holy and godly living which entails proper service and worship. Though men cannot attain unto perfect righteousness, God has always expected men to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). Living righteously demands a standard. Since God is truly righteous, He is the rightful standard of righteousness. As we have already seen, He is by His very nature characterized by righteousness. Since He is righteous, His word is also characterized by such. In speaking about the word of God's righteousness (Psalm 119:123), the psalmist David exclaimed, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172). Thus, the standard of righteousness which all men should strive to obtain is the word of God. With this in mind, notice this statement of Jesus: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). Like many today, the Pharisees sought to "establish their own righteousness and did not submit to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3). True disciples of Jesus, however, submit to the rightful standard of righteousness — the word of God. We are not our own standard of right. Wise Solomon wrote, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). In fact, man does not have the knowledge, wisdom, or authority to establish any standard of righteousness. Listen to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Thus, in order to be righteous, we must live righteously. Remember the word of John, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7).

A third way the term "righteousness" is employed within Scriptures is in the sense of justification. This is how Paul employed the term in Romans 4 when he wrote that God imputed righteousness to Abraham and David. Righteousness was not imputed because of any works of the law (Romans 4:3,5). It was imputed because of faith (Romans 4:3,5). That, of course, does not mean that David or Abraham did not obey. They most certainly had a living and obedient faith (James 2:21-23). Righteousness was not imputed unto them as a payment for works. In

other words, no person (including Abraham and David) can earn justification. Justification is imputed by faith. Again, that does not mean that obedience is not involved for it has part in a living and active faith. In fact, James makes it perfectly clear that obedience must accompany faith. If it does not, then faith is dead (James 2:20,24,26). However, faith is not the source nor the agency through which righteousness is accounted. God is the source of this justification or righteousness, and Jesus is the agency by or through whom righteousness is imputed. Faith is a condition which a person must meet in order to gain justification. In Philippians 3:9 Paul wrote, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." In explanation, Paul is saying by means of or through the agency of Jesus, righteousness which is out of or from the source of God was extended to Paul by faith. Justification or righteousness from God through Jesus was conditional upon faith. This saving faith is a living and active faith demonstrated by obedience.

Notice how all this ties together. Our justification is dependent upon our living equitably, which is in turn dependent upon our right actions and fair dealings with our fellow man. Just as an unmerciful person cannot expect God's mercy (Matthew 5:7), an unrighteous person cannot expect to stand justified or righteous before the righteous God of heaven. Also, since none of us can obtain perfect righteousness, then everyone of us needs God's justification. Jesus makes this possible through His propitiatory blood. In Romans 3:24-26 Paul wrote,

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Since God is the righteous judge (2 Timothy 4:8), and all men will stand before Him in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10), let us all strive to live righteous even as He is righteous (1 John 3:7).