

## The Three Levels of Righteousness

Happy Sabbath to all.

Tonight's study is called "The Three Levels of Righteousness." The topic crossed my mind when I was reading this verse from Isaiah earlier in the week, "With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early; for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isa 26:9)

There are several things that impressed me about this verse, but before I go into them in particular, I'd like to talk about its overall meaning.

The way that it is structured, the verse might seem a bit difficult to understand. It appears as if the prophet is saying, "I have decided to seek Yahweh early, because when His judgments appear in the land, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." If read just that way, however, that doesn't seem to make all that much sense. One might say that Isaiah wishes to learn of Yahweh before others so that he can help to teach them... but the world's education appears to be connected to the judgments rather than the example of the saints.

In fact, the phrase "judgments in the earth" is referring in this verse to the just punishment of the unrighteous, for the passage continues, "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of Yahweh.

Yah, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them." (verses 10, 11)

What Isaiah says of the wicked is that those who are intent on evil will not learn from either a good example or righteous teachings. It is not until the destruction that they have earned befalls them that they will be ashamed of their sins, and understand the consequences of wrongdoing.

It is the instruction, therefore, to the people of Israel – and to us in this day – to "Seek ye Yahweh while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." (Isa 55:6)

Now, the Church's members might say, "I have already sought and found righteousness. I am joined to the Body of Christ." But even so, this is not the only way we should seek righteousness. In fact, this is not the only way we are commanded to seek out righteousness, and this leads me to what I want to talk about tonight.

Isaiah indicates that he, as an individual, will seek Yah and His righteousness. He sets himself apart from the world in this way, knowing that when the wicked learn righteousness, it is because they are seeing it in its destructive form, being outside the glory of the Most High.

We further know that Isaiah was an Israelite with a mission. He had a ministry, a burden to bear to Judah and Jerusalem, and a message to deliver for the sake of his people. It is in the context of this ministry that he gives this testimony of his desire for Yah's righteousness.

I should be clear, because I do not want the title to be misunderstood, that there are no "levels" of righteousness in terms of goals to attain, or an increase over time. There is no such thing, in the Scriptures, as "a little righteousness" or "a lot of righteousness" when it comes to our relationship with Yahweh. Righteousness, like faith, either IS, or it IS NOT. Yahshua says, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed [that is, the smallest possible amount], ye shall say unto this mountain, 'Remove hence to yonder place,' and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." (Mat 17:20)

John, likewise, says, "Little children, let no man deceive you – he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." (1John 3:7)

Now, to the world and its mindset this is a most hateful, divisive, intolerant, uncompromising, and narrow-minded doctrine. In this age the worst of sins are excused as "weaknesses," or "diseases," or "flaws" that people are expected to be treated for, but not cured – to be working on, but never to be finished working. It is not that the Christian is unsympathetic to those who are caught in the snares of Satan. Of all men we are the most loving, the most understanding of the destruction that sin causes, having seen it from both the inside and out – but we know that no one has ever been turned to righteousness by excusing evil, just as no one has ever been made clean by having a friend sit down with him in the mud.

So it is not that the Christian is without sympathy or affection for the ones struggling with transgressions, but we know that there is a cure, an answer, a Savior, that will bring even the most crooked of men to a straight and narrow way. We long to introduce Him to those who fight their losing battles, but the world has no respect for those who speak of a true end to suffering, only for those who say that things will evolve, and grow a little better, a little easier (perhaps), over time.

Nevertheless, we speak of cures, and rest, and an end to sin, and we speak of righteousness. And there is but one level of righteousness – Yah's level, Yahshua's level – for anything less than this is an illusion by men or demons to counterfeit the Sabbath rest with complacency and spiritual laziness. So what is it I mean, then, when I speak of levels of righteousness?

Based upon the verse from Isaiah, it may be shown that there are different levels at which righteousness must be displayed for mankind to be ultimately saved.

First, there is the individual level. Next, there is a community level. Finally, there is a "national" level that may be expanded to encompass all of mankind.

The individual level of righteousness is the one that we have perhaps spoken the most about. It involves personal victory, and may be tied to the first angel's message. As individuals we are told, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things [the other things that you need] shall be added unto you." (Mat 6:33) And again, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Mat 5:48)

Most in the world, even just about everyone who calls himself a "Christian," believes that we cannot be perfect in righteousness. And yet, because Yahshua has directed us to do exactly this, we know it is quite possible. Those who deny this are simply not healed, for what if the man who was paralyzed had heard Yahshua's blessing, "Take up your bed and walk," and instead of simply trusting and obeying, had said, "That is impossible. Nobody can walk if he is paralyzed?"

But true, personal faith believes all things are possible through Christ, and He has said to us in His Word, "Go, and sin no more." Believing this, and accepting it as a message to us individually, this is the first, individual level of righteousness.

The second level of righteousness is the community level, and this involves the corporate display of righteousness involved with the Church and its various congregations. It may be tied to the second angel's message, which speaks about an end to confusion, to Babylon, as it relates to the saints.

At this level, we are members of the assembly of saints, holy and pure unto Yahweh. We are the Bride of Christ, and faithful to Him in all things. Now again, at this level, Satan has inspired unbelief, and even rebellion. Few believe that there is "one true and perfect Church," or that there is only one legitimate Bride of Yahshua. Few enough believe that there is even a NEED for such a thing as this, but that personal worship, and perhaps casual, occasional association is sufficient to fulfill the teachings of the Savior, and the example of the Apostles, who continued daily in intimate fellowship in service of Yah.

The second level of righteousness is sought through having a spiritual camp that is clean, a Church that is free from unrighteousness in its members and is overall testimony. This is accomplished by means of Church ordinances, such as the way that voting is conducted, Gospel order being maintained among members for the settling of disagreements, and the eventual action of disfellowship against those who are unrepentantly sinful or who attempt to justify their failure to walk in conformity with the Gospel. In this way the congregation seeks righteousness corporately, as a "tribe" of Spiritual Israel.

The final level of righteousness involves national righteousness. It is at this point that righteousness is tied to the third angel, because it is only a people who desire national righteousness, and righteousness among all men, who will truly become Protestants, who will advocate justice for all, and freedom of conscience (thus, freedom from the Beast and its Image) as a right given to all humanity by its Creator.

This third level of righteousness is sought through evangelism, through a Church that seeks to find faith amongst the general population of mankind, and to seal the souls found this way to the Father and Son through baptism and covenant membership. The third level of righteousness is sought through the voice of protest, through our work as ministers of the Gospel to warn people about the snares of this present age, including the Trademark Law, and the corrupted teachings of false science and secular philosophies. It is demonstrated in a display of love for mankind, to save them from “learn[ing] righteousness” through Yah’s judgment, and not through His mercy. It is evidence of unity with Yahshua, who spoke of mankind’s righteousness by asking, “When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) Few may be found, for few indeed find the Way of everlasting life, but it is the Spirit and the Bride who call them, saying, “Come.” This occurs when the Bride, composed of individually righteous saints (the first level), and pure collectively (the second level), reaches out to the general population of earth (the third level).

Consider that we are called as individuals, sealed as tribes, and glorified as a spiritual nation. This requires righteousness at each stage, and it is important that we consider, that we be reminded, how this righteousness is attained at each. This is a foundational doctrine, but it is worth repeating: that at no level is righteousness “earned.”

At no levels do works cause us to be, or to become, righteous. Individual acts of faith do not justify us, but they are the results of a faithful life. We speak of righteousness by faith, not faith as a result of righteousness. Similarly, going through the “motions” of being Church members does not result in a pure Bride. This only results from a group of personally victorious saints who are committed to agape love for one another, and unity of spirit and doctrinal principles. Merely protesting global evil does not make us righteous as a nation. We must act according to the love that we hold toward mankind because we are in agreement with the Father and Son. Because we are of Them, and in unity with Them, we share in their love for humanity, we seek worldwide righteousness, and we “sigh and cry” for those who were raised up to be messengers before us, but have instead become the very cause of much of mankind’s present sins.

The Righteousness of Yah is a principle that, if accepted, affects human beings at every level of their lives – individually, in their communities, and in how they interact with the world around them. The Christian, the saint of Yah, is one who has sought righteousness, and found it where it may be found, and then joins in the work of finding others who are seeking righteousness, so that it will be fulfilled as it was written of us, “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3)