

Welcome to the "Path to Righteousness"

(Adapted from *Path to Righteousness* by Linda Poitras)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

When we speak of a "path" to anything, we usually refer to the road or means used to arrive at that place. The "Path to Righteousness" then, must be talking about the "road leading to righteousness." But where is righteousness? What is it?

Over 500 times in God's Word the term "righteous or righteousness" is used. Since it is mentioned frequently, we need to know what it means and has to do with us.

What Does It Mean?

The Revell Bible Dictionary says this word has different meanings, depending on whether or not one is reading a scripture from the Old or New Testament.

In the Old Testament:

- ☞ Righteousness was first used to talk about something like God, Who always acts in harmony with His moral nature (Psalm 4:1; Jeremiah 12:1).
- ☞ This word was also used when speaking about obedience to or the following of the moral and ethical norms revealed in God's law, as given to Moses (Deuteronomy 6:25; Psalm 119:121).

These Old Testament definitions went beyond the theory of being without sin to mean rather acting in harmony with man's obligations to God and other people (1 Samuel 24:17). This same sense of righteousness is found in the Gospels, as when Matthew describes Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary (Matthew 1:19), or when Mark speaks of the character of John the Baptist (Mark 6:20).

In the New Testament the word "righteous" or "righteousness" was used to speak about:

- ☞ Imputed (something put on or added) righteousness: the declaration by God that a person is righteous in God's sight, not by virtue of his acts but by his faith in Jesus (Romans 1:17, 3:21).
- ☞ Actual righteousness: the inner moral conformity of one's character to the character of God, and the acts that flow from a righteous moral character (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 4:24).

What Does This Have to do With Me?

Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (besides Jesus Christ) wrote about this “righteousness” at least seventy-four times in his book of Proverbs. In chapter twelve, verse twenty-eight, one of the greatest benefits of living a righteous life is given: *“In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.”* Does this mean the righteous will never die? Yes! Those who live a life of righteousness will:

- 📖 Be blessed (Psalm 5:12)
- 📖 Be upheld (Psalm 37:17)
- 📖 Flourish (Psalm 92:12), and
- 📖 Be remembered (Psalm 112:6).

Their lives on earth will be happy, with a hope of living eternally with God, the Righteous One.

David spoke of this “Path to Righteousness” in his special Shepherd’s Psalm. *“The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”* (Psalm 23:1-3).

From the book *A Shepherd Looks at the Twenty-Third Psalm* we learn a lot about sheep – things David already knew. He understood that sheep are creatures of habit.

- Sheep follow the same paths and eat from the same hills until the paths become ruts and the hills desert wastes.
- David knew his sheep would pollute their ground until it was full of disease and parasites.
- Many people think sheep can “get along anywhere.” David knew this was not true. As a watchful shepherd, David knew to lead his sheep to new feeding places with clear running streams and fresh green grass.
- The greatest safeguard a shepherd has is to keep his flock on the move. David knew there must be a predetermined plan of action, rotating grazing grounds in line with proper principles of sound management. David’s name and reputation depended on how effectively and efficiently he kept his sheep moving on to wholesome, fresh grass.

David compared himself to his sheep, and his Lord to a good, diligent, watchful shepherd.

The Bible makes a comparison to us as “sheep”: *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way”* (Isaiah 53:6). We deliberately hurt ourselves. But praise the Lord, we have a Shepherd. Jesus said,

- 📖 *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6).

☞ *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

The Good Shepherd came to lead us down the "Path to Righteousness," but most do not follow. We do not want to be led down new paths where grass is green and water flows freely with sparkling freshness. We prefer our own way of probable trouble. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12).

Refusing to follow the "Path to Righteousness" produces pitiful, sickly sheep on ruined land. Many sheep around us have broken homes and hearts. Their lives of greed and selfishness leave nothing behind but ruin and remorse. They have no hope and refuse the help of their Shepherd. *"...Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels"* (Mark 8:34-38).

Most people charged with this failure to follow the Lord will claim they are doing everything He has said. They say, *"We are following Him. We are being 'led of the Lord'."* Too many are going their own way. Few "sheep" are following their Shepherd as He leads them down the "Path to Righteousness."

Remember it is the Good Shepherd leading us. He will not lead us in a bad, harmful path. He will lead us to heaven, the place He is preparing for those who love Him.

In talking about David, where do I fit in, almost two thousand years after his time? In the early days of the 20th century, when the Lord poured out His Spirit once again, He was leading into "new pastures." As our shepherd, He provided "living water" man could drink and never thirst again (John 7:37-39).

God spoke through one of His saints at the Azusa Street Mission in a prophecy that still resounds today. He said that in the end time church there would be three problems that would be seen worldwide:

- People would be more interested in *praises* than *prayer*.
- They would care more for *power* than the *lordship of Jesus* in their lives.
- Everybody would want a *blessing*, but few would seek after *repentance*.

This prophecy is true today. We need to earnestly seek the face of God to be sure we are not a part of these problems. We must seek after the lordship of Jesus in our lives as we pray and humbly follow His leading with repentance in our hearts. He wants to show us the “Path to Righteousness.”

Study Questions

1. Given these Old Testament Scripture references, what is the meaning of the word “righteous/righteousness” in each?

1) Psalm 119:121 _____

2) 1Samuel 24:17 _____

3) Jeremiah 12:1 _____

2. In these New Testament Scripture references, what was the word “righteous/righteousness” used to speak about?

1) Matthew 1:19 _____

2) Romans 1:17 _____

3) Mark 6:20 _____

4) Ephesians 4:24 _____

3. How many times did Solomon write about this “righteousness” in the book of Proverbs?

4. List at least five (5) rewards for those who live a life of righteousness. Give Scripture reference to support each.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

5. Explain how Proverbs 14:12 relates to us as “sheep,” and to Jesus as our “Good Shepherd.” _____

