

None is Righteous...Really?

Sunday, October 11, 2009

Text: Romans 3:9-18

Introduction

We are taking a break this week from our covenant history series in order to follow up on something that we dealt with last week.

Last week we looked at Paul's letter to Titus, and we saw how Paul's purpose in the letter was to urge Titus to insist upon the importance of God's people doing good works.

Jesus Christ...gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:14).

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work (Tit. 3:1).

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works (Tit. 3:8).

And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works (Tit. 3:14).

We want to follow up on this for two reasons. In the first place, we want to clear up a common misunderstanding. It is often the case that in their zeal to maintain the Scriptural truth that our salvation is due to God's grace—and is not a result of the merit of our works—evangelicals have tended to *minimize* the importance of good works.

At times faith and works have been presented as though they were opposites, rather than *complements*—opposing, rather than complementary principles. The fact of the matter is that faith and works (or faith and obedience) go hand in hand. They are two sides of the same coin. Let's say it this way: Obedience is the *face* of faith. It's what faith *looks* like. Do you want to see someone who believes in God? Then look at the man who lives in obedience to God's commands, and in his obedience you will see faith.

Secondly, and this is very much related to what I have just said, in our zeal to uphold the gracious nature of our salvation by demonstrating the insufficiency of the merit of our works to save us, we have often fundamentally misread the Scriptures as teaching that there is no one who is in any sense righteous; that there is no one who is in any sense pleasing to God; even more, there are those who say that even our best works, our most holy acts, our purest devotion is nothing but so much putrid garbage in God's sight.

And those who say such things seem to have some passages in their favor. They bring forward, for instance, Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, no, not one." And they quote Isaiah 64:6, "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."

So there you go. I mean it says it right here: none is righteous, no, not one; and even what we think of as righteous acts is nothing but filth.

I suggest to you that this is not the way to understand these passages (and others like them); and even more importantly, this is not the way to read Scripture.

Now why is this a concern? Because if we really think that no matter what we do, we can never really please God, then it kills, destroys, *crushes* every motivation to even attempt to do so.

"Here, Lord, I lay my life before you in faithful service as a thank-offering for all that you have done for me."

And the Lord says, "Get your stinking works out of my face. Don't you know that all your righteous deeds are like a polluted garment to me?"

Not exactly an encouragement, is it? In Hebrews Paul says, "Consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). But how exactly are we going to do that if even our best works are tainted with sin and therefore repugnant to him?

On the other hand, if the good works of God's people really are pleasing to him, if he finds pleasure in their obedience, if God delights in the righteousness of his people, isn't that, like, oh I don't know...*the greatest possible motive to obedience and to good works?*

Think about it. Isn't it true that we try to *please* those whom we love? But if our acts of love are rebuffed, rejected, thrown back in our face, it tends to be a bit discouraging. A young man buys some flowers for a young lady, and she says, "I hate your flowers. Get them out of here." He buys her some chocolates; and she says I don't like your chocolate. He offers to take her out to eat and to a movie, and she says, "I'd sooner have a root canal." How long is it going to be before he becomes discouraged and gives up? How long before he realizes that he's wasting his time?

Or maybe a better example is this: a little girl wants to do something to help her mom, and so while mom is downstairs doing laundry, she scoots a chair up to the kitchen sink and does the dishes—washes them, dries them, and puts them away. Mom comes upstairs and the little girl says, "Look, mommy, I did the dishes for you." Mom is curious. She opens the cabinet to inspect the dishes, and it's just as she thought. And she says, "Look at this! The dishes are still dirty! And the dishes in the cabinet you stacked them on now are dirty. Now I've got to find all the dishes you washed and get them out and wash them all over again. You've just made more work for me."

Is that how a wise and loving mother would handle the situation? Of course not! Instead she'll scoop up her little girl and hug her and kiss her and thank her and tell her what a good little girl she is and will make a big deal out of it when daddy gets home; and *he'll* praise her, too. And then, later that night, after mom tucks her little girl into bed, she'll get the dishes out and wash them herself.

Or suppose a little boy draws a picture for his dad. And after working on it very carefully he proudly presents it to him and says, "Here you go daddy, I drew this for you." And the dad says, "This is terrible! It's a mess! Do it over, and don't bring it back until you get it right!"

Is that what a father is going to do? No, he's going to say, "Hey, that's my boy. This is great! Good job! Let's post it on the fridge!"

If our obedience and good works are really hateful to God—like a soiled garment; and if it's really true that none is righteous, no, not one—despite all our efforts to live uprightly before God—then how long is it going to be before we just throw our hands up in desperation, and say, "What's the use?"

I submit to you that God really is pleased with his people when they obey him. And he really does regard those who obey him as "righteous."

The Problem of Verses

What about these verses, then, that seem to imply otherwise? Well, I suggest to you that these verses are very frequently misunderstood. And a BIG part of the problem is in *how* we read the Bible. For the most part it's something we are not even aware of, but it has a profound affect on how we understand the Scriptures. I'm talking about the division of the Bible into chapters and verses,

especially verses. You do understand, don't you, that the chapter and verse divisions were not a part of the originally inspired text? They were added later in the 15th and 16th centuries. And in many ways these chapter and verse divisions have been a great blessing. They have facilitated study, so that we can easily locate a passage. *But that help has come at a price.* And the price is the way in which we look at the flow of Scripture.

We have a tendency to view the Bible as a collection of *verses*—a collection of *independent* propositions that exist in isolation from one another—rather than seeing a given verse as an organic part of the book to which it belongs, and even as a part of the Bible as a whole.

These chapter and verse divisions control our conception of Scripture. We have a tendency to view the Bible, not as it was given, in an organic way, but as chopped up in little pieces—as a collection of independent propositions that have a life and meaning of their own.

This is perhaps most evident in the traditional King James Version where each verse is formatted on the page as an individual paragraph, and the number of the verse is in a font as large as the text itself.

Some of the early printings of more modern translations have done the same thing. Fortunately, some later editions have been printed in a format with greater appreciation for the natural divisions of the text and are set off in more proper paragraphs.

But even so, we still have to contend with the conceptual framework that the chapter and verse divisions create in our minds and the confusion that comes with them—a confusion that often leads us to think that each verse is a complete unit, or a complete thought, *in itself*, as if it has an independent existence, as if each verse contains a proposition that can stand alone.

THE FIRST BOOK OF MOSES, CALLED
Genesis

1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
5 And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
6 And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
7 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.
8 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
9 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
10 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was to be like itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
11 And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was to be like itself, and God saw that it was good.
12 And the evening and the morning were the third day.
13 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:
14 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
15 And God made two great lights; the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night: and he set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth:
16 And God ordained the signs, and the seasons, and the days, and the years:
17 And he set the sun in the firmament of the heaven to govern the day, and the moon to govern the night: and the stars to give light upon the earth: and God saw that it was good.
18 And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.
19 And God said, Let the waters be filled with living creatures, and let the fowl be filled with living creatures upon the earth.
20 And God created great whales, and every living creature that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
21 And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.
22 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.
23 Therefore God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them: and he blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.
24 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.
25 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
26 And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them: and he blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.
28 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, to you it shall be for meat.
29 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.
30 And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the seventh day.
31 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.
32 These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.
33 And every plant of the field before it grew, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.
34 And there went a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.
35 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

Now, this has led to a number of problems, not the least of which is the problem of proof-texting—that is, simply finding a verse to prove whatever we want the Bible to say without regard to context. We often find a verse that suits our purpose without paying attention to how its context determines its meaning.

For example, you can wrench certain verses from their context to make it appear that the Bible teaches atheism. Did you know that the Bible actually says, “There is no God”? Really, it does. In fact, it says it three times (Ps. 10:4; 14:1; 53:1). But what is the *context* of these statements? *Who* makes them? *Why* do they make them? What is God’s opinion of those who make them?

The first time the statement appears is in the 10th Psalm:

In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;
all his thoughts are, “There is no God” (Ps. 10:4).

It is also found in the first verse of both the 14th and the 53rd Psalm.

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

If we take this statement out of context we can make it appear that Bible teaches atheism. But of course this is silly. What it actually teaches is that atheism is a wicked and foolish enterprise. “All the thoughts of the *wicked* are, ‘There is no God.’ ” “The *fool* has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” It’s illegitimate to lift a verse or a statement out of its context.

This is kind of a silly example, and rather easy to detect as an error, but this is often the kind of thing that is done on a more serious note and rather unconsciously when we make the mistake of thinking that verses have an independent existence and can stand alone—that

is, when we think of Scripture simply as a collection of isolated propositions.

My point in all of this is that we must develop the discipline of reading Scripture as if the chapter and verse divisions were not there. We must learn to ignore them. We must read to understand the flow, the movement, the line of argumentation, the line of reasoning a Biblical writer uses. This, frankly, is one of the dangers of reading only a verse or two at a time. You read a few propositions; you read statements without regard to context. This is also one of the dangers of reading collections of Scripture verses arranged according to topic—a pocket promise book, for example. Such a book has its place, but the promises of God—like all of Scripture—must be understood in their context or a great deal of confusion can result. To whom are the promises made? What are the conditions for them to be fulfilled? What are the opposite consequences for not fulfilling them? We must have context.

Are there really none who are Righteous?

The same is true with Romans 3:10. If you lift it out of its context, it sounds like a universal negative proposition. “None is righteous, no, not one.” But what is said before it? What comes afterward? What’s the point that Paul is making? What’s the flow of his argument? Does he qualify the statement? Are there any opposing statements or contrary texts?

Is it Paul’s intention to teach that there really is no one whom God considers righteous? Is there no one who does what is right and is pleasing to God? Let’s look at the context.

Romans 3 is found in the midst of an argument demonstrating that sin is a universal problem—a problem for both Gentiles *and* Jews.

In Romans 1 Paul focuses his attention on the Gentile world, describing it as having forsaken God and embracing idolatry and sensuality and all sorts of other evil things.

Then in chapter two he turns his attention to the Jews, and he says, "You think the Gentiles are bad, but you Jews are worse because you know better; you have the Law, yet you do the same things the Gentiles do."

And then in chapter three he sets out to demonstrate this point by quoting the Law. His rationale here is that "whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law" (Rom. 3:19). The Law and the Prophets were given to the Jews so that when God spoke in the Law and the Prophets of the people being wicked he was speaking of wicked *Jewish* people; and if there can be wicked Jewish people, then you cannot be made right with God simply by being Jewish. *This* is what he intends to prove in Romans 3, and this is what he *does* prove.

The Jews took great pride in the fact that they were Jews—that they were descended from Abraham—that they possessed the Law. But Paul tells them, "Wait a minute. Don't you realize that the very Law in which you boast as the unique possession of the Jews, nevertheless indicts Jews for wrongdoing?" And then he quotes several passages from the O.T. to make his point—several passages written, of course, to the Jews at different points in their history, pointing out their sin and rebellion against God.

Consider, for instance, Romans 3:10-12.

As it is written:

None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.

Paul is quoting **Psalm 14:1-3**. But let's read a little further in the Psalm.

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers
who eat up my people as they eat bread
and do not call upon the LORD?
There they are in great terror,
for God is with the generation of the righteous (vv. 4-5)

Now, wait a minute! Hold on here! What's he talking about? What righteous? Didn't he just get through telling us, "there is none righteous, no, not one"? Then who's he talking about here, just a few verses later, when he says, "God is with the generation of the *righteous*"? And when Paul quoted this Psalm in Romans, did he forget about verse 5 that mentions God being with the righteous? What's going on here?

Well, in the first place, when the Psalmist says, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "There is none righteous, no, not one," he's using a figure of speech known as hyperbole—overstatement. It was obviously a time in which evil prevailed. But it was not the case that there was absolutely *none* who were righteous. It was just that there were relatively very few.

We talk like this all the time, don't we? I have said before, things like, "No one cares about the truth anymore." Do I mean *literally* no one? No, I mean *by comparison* with those who do, it seems like *no one* cares about the truth anymore. It seems like people only believe what they want to believe. It seems that everyone has their own personal and political agenda, and they don't want to be bothered by the facts. And they're very selective about the evidence they will accept, the facts they are willing to receive, and the studies they will regard as legitimate. If it doesn't reinforce what they want to believe,

they just discount it. They reject it. They don't care about the truth; they just want what they want. But I don't mean it literally that *no one* cares about the truth.

This is what David was saying in Psalm 14. The book of Psalms is *not* a systematic theology. And chapter 14 is not the locus on the nature of man and the effects of the fall. It's David's observation (guided by the Holy Spirit, of course) about the world around him.

And these observations were useful to Paul in his argument in Romans 3. In Romans 3 Paul was making the point that the Jews could not trust in their Jewishness to save them. Do you remember what John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to check him out? He said,

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

By the way, this was before the advent of the seeker-sensitive church-growth movement.

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, "*We have Abraham as our father...*" (Matt. 3:7-9)

Now why would he tell them not to say to themselves, "We have Abraham as our father"? *Because that's what they were saying to themselves!* They put their trust in the fact that they were descended from Abraham. They put their trust in their identity as Jews. They were guilty of one of the most common sins of the people of God: covenant presumption. And in order to show them the folly of this, he tells them in Romans, "Look, don't you even read your own Scriptures? When David said, 'There is none righteous, no, not one', who was he talking about? Gentiles? *No!* He was writing about his own people. He

was writing about the Jews. He was saying, "It's obvious that being Jewish doesn't make a person righteous, because here are some Jews, in fact a large portion of the nation of Israel in the time of David, who were *unrighteous*. So don't say, 'I don't need this Jesus stuff because I'm a Jew, as if being a Jew automatically makes you righteous. It doesn't. And the Scriptures prove it when they condemn the unlawful behavior of Jews in previous generations."

*Are all our Righteous Deeds
really like a "Polluted Garment"?*

Now what about when it says in Isaiah, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment"? What is he saying? Is he saying that a selfless act of kindness done in the name of Jesus Christ is a loathsome and detestable thing in God's sight? Is he saying that your faithfulness to your wife is sinful? Does he mean that your honesty and integrity are disgusting to Him? Does he mean that he hates your prayers and worship? What does he mean, "All our righteousness deeds are like a polluted garment"?

This was said during a time when Israel was in apostasy. They were given to idolatry; they were given to violence and self-indulgence; but just to make sure they were covering all their bases, they continued to worship the Lord by bringing their sacrifices to the temple and singing festive songs and doing a number of other things the Lord required. But it was a farce; it was all hypocritical. It was *those* acts of righteousness, done in hypocrisy, that were as a polluted garment in the sight of God. He was not talking about the righteous acts of a devout man, a man sincere in his worship of God. He was talking about a hypocrite.

He's describing the sort of thing we find in **Isaiah 1:10-17**.

It is this kind of thing the Lord has in mind when he says, "All our righteous deeds are as filthy rags." Jeremiah speaks of this, too, when he says:

Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD... Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—only to go on doing all these abominations (Jer. 7:4, 8-10).

It is about this kind of thing Isaiah says, "All our righteous deeds are as filthy rags."

Is Anyone Righteous?

Is it really so that no one is righteous, not in any sense? Let Scripture answer.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as *righteous*, God commending him by accepting his gifts (Heb. 11:4).

We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's [were] *righteous* (1 Jn. 3:12).

Noah was a *righteous man, blameless* in his generation. Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that *you are righteous* before me in this generation (Gen. 7:1).

He rescued *righteous* Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that *righteous man* lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard) (2 Pet. 2:8).

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was *blameless and upright*, one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job 1:1).

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And *they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly* in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord (Lk. 1:5-6).

And her husband Joseph, being a just [righteous] man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:19)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, *and this man was righteous and devout*, waiting for the consolation of Israel... (Lk. 2:25).

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, *a good and righteous man* (Lk. 23:50).

"None is righteous, no, not one"? What do we do with all these people and many others like them in Scripture who are described as being righteous? Who are commended for being righteous? Could it be that we have misunderstood what Paul meant in Romans 3? Could it be that he was using hyperbole for rhetorical effect? Could it be that

he was making an overstatement to emphasize his point? Could it be that we haven't followed his line of argument very well?

Paul himself recognizes that there are indeed people who are righteous. How does he address his letters?

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the *saints* who are in the whole of Achaia... (2 Cor. 1:1).

To the *saints* who are in Ephesus, and *are faithful* in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:1)

To all the *saints* in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi (Phil. 1:1)

To the *saints and faithful brothers* in Christ at Colossae (Col. 1:1)

"None is righteous, no not one"?

Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did, when he offered Isaac on the altar (Jas. 2:21)?

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous (1 Jn. 3:7).

You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers (1 Thes. 2:10).

But didn't St. Paul think of himself as "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15)? Here is yet another verse that is frequently taken out of context and misused in the same way.

Some regard this as teaching that Paul thought of himself as a moral wretch—that even he failed to live uprightly and in a manner so as to please God. But what is the context?

1 Timothy 1:12-16

He has something concrete and historical in mind, namely, his former persecution of the church. It was not that Paul considered himself a horrible and vile sinner *at the time* he wrote First Timothy, but that he considered he had formerly been a horrible sinner in persecuting the church (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9).

But what did he say about himself since his conversion? What account did he give of himself as a Christian?

Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day (Acts 23:1).

For our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity (2 Cor. 1:12a).

You know what kind of men we proved to be among you... You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct (1 Thes. 1:5b; 2:10).

We could go on citing example after example.

Not everyone on earth is equally wicked. Indeed, not everyone is wicked, period. To suggest otherwise is to come very near to insulting the Lord. His whole purpose in sending Jesus into the world was to redeem a people for himself—to make holy those who were once sinful, to write his law on their hearts that they might walk uprightly before him. Has he failed? Is it possible for him to fail?

Beloved, know this: You *are* the people of God. You have been redeemed by the precious blood of his dear Son. He has washed away the guilt of all your sins. He calls you his own dear child. He loves you. He has given you his Holy Spirit and written his law on your heart, and your obedience is really and truly pleasing to him. He takes pleasure in your uprightness.

The LORD knows [loves] the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish (Ps. 1:6)

You bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield (Ps. 5:12).

For the LORD is righteous;
he loves righteous deeds;
the upright shall behold his face (Ps. 11:7).

He promises to answer the prayers of the righteous

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
And his ears toward their cry
[But] the face of the LORD is against those who do evil...
When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles (Ps. 34:15-17).

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (Jas. 4:16).

Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,
for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds (Isa. 3:10)

David says in the 146th Psalm, "The LORD loves the righteous" (v. 8). Do you walk uprightly before Him? The Lord loves you. He loves your righteous deeds. He takes pleasure in you. He takes delight in your obedience.

Is your righteousness perfect? Is it the righteousness of an unfallen man? No. But he is nevertheless pleased with it. If your little child brings you a picture he's drawn and you see that it's less than perfect, what do you do? Do you say, "Get that stinking picture out of my sight! You've colored outside the lines. The head is too large for the body. There are six fingers on the left hand. Throw that piece of garbage away"? Is that what you say? No. You say, "It's beautiful." And you hang it on the refrigerator. And you tell your guests, my boy did that; Isn't it great!?

This is what God did with Job, isn't it? "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" (Job 1:8). Was his righteousness perfect? No. But the Lord was pleased with him. He bragged on Job. He said, "That's my boy!"

What does the Lord think of your righteous deeds? Filthy rags? If you are a hypocrite, just offering a sop to the Lord, like the people the prophets condemned, then yes. All your righteous deeds are like filthy rags. But if you know and love the Lord and sincerely strive to please Him, your righteous deeds are like fine linen, bright and pure.

"Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and
pure"—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19:7-8)

This is how the Lord regards your righteous deeds—like fine linen, bright and pure.

Jesus said, "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

You are the people of God. Go and shine like the sun. And know that the Lord loves your righteous deeds.

Finis

