

## ***“The Distinction between the Righteous and the Wicked”***

If you've forgotten that we are living in the Last Days, it's time to wake up! The signs are all around us – wars and rumors of war, earthquakes and famines and pestilence. The day of our Lord's return draws near – but in these last days – what we see is a pattern that repeats itself, over and over again.

What the prophet Malachi says fits hand in glove with our world today. “As it was in the beginning, is now ...” The arrogant are called blessed, and the evildoers prosper. So, what's the point – why even try to live as a Christian? It seems the thing to do is to live whatever way seems best to us.

It is into the midst of this spiritual depression, and deception, that the Word of the Lord comes today. The Lord says that there IS a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. You DON'T SEE it now – but on the Last Day you WILL SEE it – when Jesus comes again to “judge the living and the dead.”

What you WILL SEE is not what you SEE right NOW – just as it was in Malachi's day. In those days, God's own people said: “It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts?”

In other words – why, what's the use – what's in it for me? Why live as a child of God when the arrogant are “blessed” – the evildoers “prosper” – and those who test God “escape”?

Again, that's how it LOOKS to human eyes – that there is no difference between the righteous and the wicked – between those who serve God, and those who do not. It seems that it makes no difference if one is a believer or an unbeliever.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ – you are those who “fear the Lord” – and yet, you do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Just because you believe in Christ, doesn't mean that there is no wickedness to be found in you – that you are without evil – that you are never arrogant, or challenge God.

You live in these last days as one who is simultaneously a saint, and a sinner. Like everyone else, you are by nature spiritually dead, blind, and an enemy of God. You are inherently UNrighteous. You have gone astray.

So, if we are going to try to distinguish between people on the basis of who they are BY NATURE – or, by what they DO, or DO NOT do – then we cannot make a distinction. For all people are the same. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And yet, the Lord says there is a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. What distinguishes the child of God from the wicked is that your righteousness is not YOUR righteousness – that is, it doesn't come from you! It is an external righteousness – it comes from outside of you – one that is given to you – from the One who alone is Righteous, Jesus Christ your righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

So that you may be righteous in God's eyes, the Son of God came from heaven to earth – He took on your human flesh and blood – in order to take your place under God's Law – to live the life God desires that you should live. Jesus does all that the Father commanded you to do – and He refrained from doing what the Lord forbids you to do.

All this Jesus has done. "It is finished," He declares. Jesus IS righteous in God's eyes. He is innocent, pure, holy, without sin.

Those who "fear the Lord" do not flaunt their own pseudo-righteousness. Rather, they confess their unrighteousness, their unworthiness – and trust in Jesus alone for their standing with God.

They trust that Jesus stands with them before the heavenly Father – and that for Jesus' sake – God the Father is merciful to them – forgiving all their wickedness, because of Jesus Christ alone.

That is the distinction between the righteous and the wicked – it is a distinction of FAITH. Those who live in Christ by faith, are adorned with the robe of His righteousness. Those who live apart from Christ, are clothed in their own Unrighteousness.

And since faith cannot be seen – we cannot see the distinction. We can only listen to their confession. What do they believe? Do they look to Christ alone, or do they trust in something else, for their standing with God?

Dearly beloved, what you cannot see today – will be seen on the Last Day. On that day – you will see who the righteous are, and who the wicked are – in God’s eyes.

For today, and these last days, we listen to God’s Word and believe what He says. “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.” To Rowen, and to all the baptized living in the turmoil of these days – Jesus clothes you with His righteousness – declaring, “you are mine.”

And to you He promises to come again – to gather you and all believers in Christ – to live with Him in glory, a life without end. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.