

Has the Church Traded Righteousness for Relevance?

An often-overlooked scriptural promise offers a key to transforming America

No one doubts that America has turned its back on God. Neither is there any debate whether our nation now revels in ungodly principles, beliefs, laws and actions. We are an unrighteous people who love our sinfulness, yet those of us who have experienced the redemption of Jesus in our lives still cling to a hope that the heart of America may still yet be turned back to Him.

That hope has taken serious hits recently, to the extent that many Christians have given up praying for a nation that continues to voice—and vote—its ungodly values. None of us knows when America will officially fall from God's mercy into His judgment. But we can cling to a biblical prophecy that not only has lasted thousands of years, it also offers a key to transforming *any* nation, no matter how far steeped in godlessness.

In the final chapters of the book of Daniel, buried amid end-time prophecies on everything from the Antichrist to Armageddon, the angel Gabriel delivers this promise: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (12:3, NIV).

The American church isn't exactly shining like the heavens right now, and I believe part of this dimming is because of how much we downplay or even ignore righteousness. Like *holiness* or *discipline*, righteousness has become an archaic term, trampled by our greater concern with staying relevant and garnering the right to speak into the secular American

culture.

Don't get me wrong: Staying relevant is key for leading unbelievers to Christ. (Paul said he'd become "all things to all men" to win souls [1 Cor. 9:19-23]). But righteousness doesn't care about being culturally relevant. In fact, righteousness is surprisingly absolute and black and white, which is anything but popular today. Regardless, God's message to Daniel directly linked wisdom and righteousness with being a blinding light amid darkness.

So if we hope to shine brightly during these dark times, we must make leading people to righteousness a priority. How do we do this? It goes beyond evangelism, discipleship, signs and wonders, crusades or any other element we associate with leading people to Christ. The truth is, you can tell people about Jesus without ever leading them into a lifestyle of righteousness. We lead others to righteousness by modeling it, not by merely talking about it, preaching it or turning it into some evangelistic tool. And we can't expect a nation to suddenly become righteous if its saints don't walk in righteousness themselves.

As believers, we understand that "there is none righteous" (Rom. 3:10), yet through Jesus we have "become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Fully grasping this revelation keeps us in the posture of redeemed servant-saints. And just as Christ changed the world by first entering it as a servant, we must mimic His servant's heart if we hope to change nations, regions, cities or even neighborhoods.

Jesus called us the "light of the world" and a "city set on a hill" (Matt. 5:14). His desire is for us to shine like stars in the darkness of this present time, and the greatest power of influence we have is His righteousness, which stands in direct opposition to the ruling powers of this world. Let's not forget this end-times call amid our prayer gatherings, evangelistic crusades and everyday life, no matter what

direction the world says our nation is headed.

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