

PIKE'S MEANING (USE) OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

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By

David E. Amstutz, KCCH

**Valley of Richmond
Orient of Virginia**

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In addressing the meaning of righteousness to Albert Pike, we first examine what righteousness means today, what it meant many years ago, and the notion of judges ruling in righteousness. These subjects provide some useful background and insights; each is discussed briefly.

Righteous is a word seldom used today. One is hard pressed to recall the word's use in modern books, newspapers or in general conversation. More often than not we read and speak today using righteous as an adjective, but meaning the more often used word, self-righteous. In both cases righteous is used to describe a person who is convinced of his own righteousness. Dictionaries equate this use of self-righteous with pharisaic or the hypocritically self-righteous. (Britannica)

Righteous means: to conform in both disposition and conduct to a standard of right and justice; upright; virtuous; blameless; morally right; equitable; right thinking. Synonyms: good, innocent, just, moral, virtuous. Synonyms for righteousness: duty, justice, virtue. (Britannica)

Word references state that the word righteous had its origin in Old English in the word rihtivis, which they say derives from (right+wise). A closer look reveals some interesting and useful information.

The word righteousness is said to be the translation of a Hebrew word as determined by William Tyndale (1494-1536) in his monumental effort to translate the Bible to common English. (Wikipedia, 5.19.07) Because there was no English word equating with the Hebrew word, Tyndale coined the word righteous from rihtivis.

William Tyndale's translation of the Bible was made widely available because of invention of the printing press. Tyndale was paid for his work by being tried, strangled and burnt at the stake. In any event, Tyndale's work survives through the King James Version of the Bible, which is said to be based primarily on his translation. Incidentally, William Tyndale is also credited with coining the phrase: "Let there be light." (Wikipedia, 5.21.07)

The notion of ruling or judging in righteousness as stated in the 16th Degree (Pike, p.242) presumably means using right means when determining the application of rules or judging a case of law. Regarding Morals and Dogma and the lessons taught by Pike, we notice that justice is a focus of the 7th Degree and also, though to a lesser extent, in the 31st Degree. But when we review these chapters the word righteous is not apparent.

In the 7th Degree truth and fact are to be relied upon and all judgments should be considered uprightly and impartially, without personal consideration of the power of the mighty, or the bribe of the rich, or the needs of the poor. (Pike, p.126) Pike expands this

discussion to address: prejudice, patience, presumption of fraud, and proven facts. And, the 7th Degree lecture closes with the admonition to heed in judging what we might call the golden rule. The 31st Degree states the chief duties of a judge to hear patiently, weigh deliberately and dispassionately and decide impartially.

What then does Pike mean by his statement in the 16th Degree: "Let those who have power rule in righteousness, and Princes in judgment. Walk ye righteously and speak uprightly; let not your hands be defiled with bribes; stop not your ears against the cries of the oppressed, nor shut your eyes that you may not see the crimes of the great; let not your hearts be turned away from the righteous." (Pike, p.242) The only significant difference between his counsel in the 7th and 31st Degrees and the 16th Degree seems to be inclusion of the word "righteousness" in the latter. We need only look to the next paragraph of the 16th Degree, where we read: "Forget not the precepts of the old Law. And there lies our clue; the old Law must refer to the teachings of the Old Testament."

There are numerous citations in the Old Testament to "righteousness and judgment under law." Three examples:

Deuteronomy 25:1 "If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, and the judges judge them; then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked."

Leviticus 19:35 "Ye shall do no unrighteous judgment in the measures of length, of weight or of quantity."

Proverbs 8:20 "I walk in the way of righteousness in the midst of the paths of justice." (Holy Bible)

Thus it would seem that righteousness pertains to our upright behavior and, in the Hebrew Bible this upright behavior was mandatory for those sitting in judgment. Righteousness is used in the Old Testament in a legal sense. And, this uprightness (righteousness) of course was also considered a characteristic of God. Hutchens (1995) states this in his discussion of the 31st Degree: "righteous human justice is a reflection of that which is eternal." (Hutchens, p.304) Reading ahead to the 17th Degree in Morals and Dogma, Pike states: "They (the Essenes) passed righteous judgments." And, he continues: "; for they observed the law of Moses with scrupulous fidelity." In the 16th Degree, Pike is using the word "righteousness" only to establish his admonitions in the framework of the Old Testament. Pike uses "righteousness" as a type of "collective adjective" to indicate a standard of right and justice.

Returning to the 7th Degree, Provost and Judge: Pike does not call for a righteous judgment; he cites all of the requirements for sound and correct judgment but doesn't cloak these words in righteousness. For good reason a justice must be neutral of religion, because justice is deserved by all persons, not just those who value and obey the Old Testament. Judges can rule in righteousness by applying the criteria of the 7th Degree, while at the same time recognizing "righteousness" for what it is a summary word for upright and correct behavior a word derived from and unique to the Bible.

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