

Sonship

Lesson Two

The Righteousness which comes through faith in Christ

Romans 1:16 ~ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

Philippians 3:7 ~ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith - ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The promise of God to bring about his salvation of the world, and of a people for himself from among all the nations, and of us individually, is rooted in his covenanted, faithful commitment to bring righteousness to the world. Another way of saying this is that God has promised and determined "to set all things right."

The way he has fulfilled / is fulfilling that commitment is by sending his Son, Jesus the Messiah, as the faithful, righteous servant of the Lord who is the one who was resurrected from the dead and has defeated all unrighteousness and death and is now, as Lord (King/Ruler) of all, bringing God's righteousness to expression in the world through all who put their faith in him [*Romans 1:1-5*].

The "gospel," the "good news," is not narrowly defined as God coming to "forgive our sins and give us a place in heaven through faith in Jesus." Certainly, forgiveness of sins is at the very center of the message; without that, we could go nowhere. But it is forgiveness set in the greater context and the richness of the good news that God has come to set all things right through the establishment of his kingdom, and that you and I are qualified to be obedient sons and daughters who manifest the righteousness of that kingdom through faith in Christ [*Col 1:9-14*].

Our continued growth in confidently embracing and being fruitful in God's kingdom is connected to a deepened understanding of all the things God has given through our union with Christ so that more and more we can see sin defeated and in its place righteousness established -- both in our lives personally and corporately, as well as in the world around us.

In Romans 8, Paul notes five major areas of God's covenanted commitment and gifts to us in Christ that will bring our sonship/adoption to expression. Each one contributes to the fulfillment of the righteousness of God's kingdom in and through us as his people.

- 1) Sanctification / the Spirit [*Romans 8:1-16*] -- God's practical commitment to empower us through the presence of the Spirit to actually defeat sin and live out righteousness, flowing out of our family fellowship with the Father and Son
- 2) Predestination [*Romans 8:28-30*] – God's Sovereign determination to make sure that absolutely everything in our lives and in the world around us will work toward the end purpose of establishing his righteousness
- 3) Calling [*Romans 8:28-30*] – God's sovereign determination to faithfully keep leading us back to, and into, our purpose in life of being his agents of restoration, righteousness and healing in this world
- 4) Justification [*Romans 8:28-30*] – God's definitive act of vindicating us, declaring us to be righteous in his sight, through our faith in Christ
- 5) Glorification [*Romans 8:15-16, 29-30*] – God's certain commitment to bring us into the final place of eternal resurrection in the re-created, eternal new heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness forever

Over the next several weeks we will unpack each of these promises. Each of these five areas of God's commitment to us is equally ours as a gift in Christ, and is equally critical to God's fulfillment of his purposes for us. The protestant tradition, since the Reformation, and especially within the last 20+ years in American evangelicalism, has highlighted the issue of justification to a status all its own and in some ways has lost the holistic value of all the other promises. We want to see justification for the glorious truth it contains, and see it perspective with all the rest of God's commitments to us in Christ.

JUSTIFICATION

- A. One of the key ways God has purposed to bring about righteousness in this world and specifically in and through us is to give us a standing and declaration of being “righteous” in his sight, because of our union with the Messiah. He makes this pronouncement over us as the Judge of all the earth and he does so because of our faith in Jesus [*Romans 3:21-26*].

The word we translate as an action verb, “to justify” is actually from the same Greek word (*dikaioo*) which means “righteousness.” A good translation, though not very kind to our ears, would be to say that in Christ, God “righteous-fies” us.

When the Scriptures speak about “justification” – God declaring things righteous -- there are at least 4 major areas where this word is used.

- 1) God speaks about Jesus himself being “justified” or (same greek word) “vindicated”

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory,” 1 Timothy 3:16 [*cf Romans 1:4*]

- 2) God speaks about every believer being justified in Christ [*Romans 3:21-26*]

- 3) God speaks about justification through Christ as the basis of reconciliation and inclusion in the family of God [*Galatians 3:23-29; Romans 4*]

- 4) God speaks about bringing his righteousness (justice/justification/setting things right) through Christ in terms of the entire creation [*Col 1:15-23; Romans 5:12-19, cf 8:18ff*]

- B. The importance of being “declared righteous” by God

1. People can try to justify themselves, but in the end, it is always self-deceptive and destructive because the genuine righteousness of the Law is left unfulfilled

- a. The parable of the Good Samaritan, and the lawyer who, “desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘and who is my neighbor?’” Luke 10:29
- b. The Jews and Judaizers who wanted to justify themselves by keeping certain cultural aspects of the Mosaic law – feast days, circumcision, Sabbaths, food laws, not eating with gentiles [*Gal 2:15-17; Col 2:16-19*] -- and wanted to measure the acceptance of others into fellowship based on the same outward forms of justification

- c. Galatians 3:7-14 -- the contrast between self-justification of keeping a few, reduced, external laws, and the righteousness / justification that comes by faith as a gift
- 2. The glory, beauty and amazing grace of God's gift of salvation is that he justifies us through faith in Christ alone. How can he do that?
 - a. Christ is our Corporate Head; our legal, actual, real representative in the same way Adam was. And in Adam, as our head, sin and death came into the lives of all his descendants. In the same way, in Christ, righteousness and life have come into the lives of all his descendants *[Romans 5:12-20]*
 - b. Do not mistake the legal, courtroom type language of being "declared righteous" as something distant or impersonal. The very personal, real, vital impact could not be greater. What a judge decides about your guilt or innocence (good standing) has a complete and total impact on your life. When he declares you righteous, it completely changes your life
- This standing before God as a gift is meant to give us freedom and confidence to know that God completely accepts us into his family, despite our past, present or future struggles with sin. We are reconciled, forgiven and profoundly, declared to be righteous in his sight. He now takes absolute delight in us and loves us and will never condemn us, even when we struggle with sin, because our standing is one of secured acceptance. Our guilty consciences are now free. We are righteous, because Christ is righteous, and we are in him and nothing can separate us from his love *[Romans 7:25-8:4; Romans 8:31ff]*
- Because this acceptance and standing is not based on any righteousness of our own that we bring to God, but is based exclusively on Christ's righteousness being credited to us as a gift, it is something that we can never lose and will never be taken away. When we put our faith in Christ, he binds himself and the fulfillment of his righteousness to us -- we are united with Christ

We are confronted with the need for the confidence that we are indeed accepted and that God will indeed bring his blessings of righteousness to us and through us to this world, both because of the opposition of the world *[Habakkuk 2:4]*, the opposition of our own remaining sin *[Gal 5:16-18; Romans 6:12-14]*, and the opposition of Satan *[Revelation 12:10-11]*

- This standing of righteousness in Christ is the basis of our confidence to freely ask for the presence and the power of the Spirit to do God's will [*Gal 3:1-5; Romans 6; Gal 5*]
- This standing of righteousness gives us the freedom to see others as "righteous" and live with hope for them, and completely accept them into the family as equal members of the body [*II Corinthians 5:16 ff*]
- This standing of righteousness gives us a secure hope for the future, that more grace and blessing is on its way [*Romans 5:1-11*]

We are not just forgiven and given repeated chances to get things right; we are actually declared to be completely righteous in God's sight. You will never be declared more righteous in the sight of God than you are at this moment, because the righteous standing you possess is Christ's standing. That does not mean you won't grow in walking in holiness and righteousness increasing in and through you - we will spend the rest of our lives doing so. It does mean you will not be more acceptable to God later on than you are now.

Your entire Christian life -- your maturing in following Christ, your obedience, your confidence for God's blessings, your experience of seeing the Holy Spirit's power at work in your life and the lives of others, the redemption of the world, your joy, your freedom to forgive and enter into the love of God -- is meant to be nourished, fed and increased, and flow out of a constant and ever deepening focus of faith on Christ Jesus and His gift of salvation. The application of the Gospel to the believer -- Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1Peter -- is not presented as a presumptive principle, but a living fountain of grace.