

Lesson for August 16, 2009

Review of Our Spiritual Assets

Righteousness and Justification

Righteousness

The word “righteousness” is translated from the Greek word “dikaiosune.” Righteousness is an attribute of God that denotes His perfect character. Originally it was spelled “rightwiseness,” which clearly expresses its meaning. It also means “right action,” which in the case of God means that He always does the right thing.

In order to fully understand righteousness we must go back to the etymology of the word. Interestingly, the meaning of many words evolved into more complex and abstract meanings as the great thinkers of Athens sought to expand their thinking beyond the accepted norm of the day. This is exactly what happened to the Greek word for righteousness. There were two words originally: one a noun (dike) and the other an adjective (dikaos). Those thinkers of Athens simply added a suffix to change the meaning slightly (-sune). At the time of the writing of the New Testament “dikaiosune” (righteousness) no longer meant simply being “good,” but rather a principle that would lead one to the correct thought and action based on a standard (God’s integrity or holiness). In other words, righteousness in the New Testament means adjusting to God’s integrity, first in thought then followed by action.

Righteousness is one half of God’s holiness and justice is the other half. Many times in the Scriptures God’s righteousness and justice are interchangeable because they are so closely associated. Righteousness is the standard or principle of God’s integrity and justice is the function or action of God’s integrity. Because God is righteous, he must condemn sin wherever it is found. God’s justice carries out that condemnation. And God always does the right thing, whether condemning sin or providing salvation in the Person of Jesus Christ. Justification is the theological term for declaring the believer to be righteous before God. Christ was condemned in our place. God’s righteousness was satisfied (propitiated) on the Cross, as His justice carried out the sentence of spiritual death. (Romans 3:26-27)

Jesus Christ is the personification of God’s perfect righteousness and the Gospel reveals this perfect righteousness. Prior to Christ coming to earth, God’s perfect standard of righteousness was the Law. Christ, of course, fulfilled the Law by keeping it perfectly (the only human being that ever has). By fulfilling the Law, Christ in sinless perfection reveals God’s standard of holiness. Christ is the standard to which the Church Age believer compares himself.

Page 2, Righteousness and Justification

When a person believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, God the Holy Spirit imputes (credits) God's own righteousness to that person. The Greek word for impute is "logizomai" and it means "to reckon" or "to take into account." "Credit to one's account" is another good rendering of the word from the Greek. God's righteousness is never achieved as a result of human effort and is completely undeserved. God does not credit His righteousness to the believer because he has earned it or because he deserves it. Like eternal life, God's righteousness is a gift.

It was the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ Who completely satisfied the righteousness of God by means of His substitutionary spiritual death on the Cross. In His humanity, under the control of the Holy Spirit, He was able not to sin and He fulfilled the righteous standard of the Mosaic Law. Christ, a sinless Person, willingly became sin for us, taking our place, being judged in our stead. He is now sitting in *the* place of honor at the right hand of the Father, which signifies that God is satisfied with Christ's death on our behalf.

Man's righteous works fall well short of God's righteousness. Man's concept of righteousness is relative. For example, one person may think that his sin is not as bad as the next person's sin. Therefore, he is more righteous (in his opinion). Normally this thinking falls into one of the two trends of the sin nature: self-righteousness or lasciviousness. Both, of course, are wrong. Mankind is minus the righteousness necessary to enter Heaven and no amount of human effort can produce this righteousness.

God's view of man's righteousness is that he is minus absolute righteousness. God's view of man's *viewpoint* of his own righteousness is that it does not measure up to the absolute righteousness of God. The Bible declares that "there is none righteous" and that "man's righteousness is as filthy rags." (Isaiah 64:6)

Because of the lack of absolute righteousness mankind cannot enter Heaven (a holy place) based on his own righteousness. God cannot have fellowship with that which is sinful or falls short of His righteous character. Mankind, therefore, needs God's righteousness in order to have a relationship with Him and to live forever in the holy place known as Heaven.

Justification

The Greek word for justification is "dikaiosin" and means "to declare righteous" or "to be acquitted from guilt." Justification is one half of God's holiness (integrity), righteousness being the other half. Justification is the function or action of God's integrity and righteousness is the principle or standard of God's integrity. God's justice carries out the judicial sentences pronounced by God's righteousness.

Page 3, Righteousness and Justification

At the moment of salvation, a person is justified by God because His righteousness is credited to his account. Justification means vindication. Because of the substitutionary spiritual death of Christ, the believer is vindicated or set free from all charges against him. The penalty for personal sins and Adam's original sin was paid by Jesus Christ so that the believer's debt is now paid in full. The obligation that God's righteousness (the standard of God's integrity) demanded, with regard to sin, was satisfied by the justice of God (the action of God's integrity) at the Cross. (Romans 3:28, 5:1; Galatians 3:24)

The Work of Christ

It was the work of Christ on the Cross that completely satisfied (propitiated) the justice and the righteousness of God. Once God's justice and righteousness were satisfied, He was justified in declaring anyone who believed in Christ to be righteous. At faith in Christ, the believer is said to be "freely justified by His grace." Justification, like righteousness, is a grace function of God, which means we cannot earn it nor do we deserve it. (Romans 5:8-9; 9:30-32; I John 2:2)

Justification is the provision by God to solve the problem of man's sinful condition. God's justice had to find a way to deal with sin without compromising His perfect character. God's love provided the answer in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Since Christ had no sin of His own to pay for, He was qualified to pay the penalty of sin (spiritual death) for the entire human race. (II Corinthians 5:21)

It is the imputation of God's righteousness to the believer that guarantees him an eternal relationship with God and qualifies him to spend eternity in Heaven. Imputation means that God credits to your account something that properly belongs to another. In this case, God credits the righteousness of Christ to your account because at salvation you were justified and placed in union with Him (baptism of the Holy Spirit). (Romans 3:22; II Corinthians 5:21)

Post-Salvation Justification

As a believer in Christ, your outward production justifies you before the unbeliever. The Book of James is the view of the believer as seen through the eyes of the unbeliever. As Christ's representative on earth, the world judges us by what we say and what we do. It is through divine production that we vindicate ourselves before others. The verse from the Book of James, "Faith without works is dead" means that faith in Christ without divine production is useless or vain in the eyes of the world. Only through producing the character of Jesus Christ (divine production) can a believer be justified before man.

Page 4, Righteousness and Justification

It is the responsibility of each one of us to properly represent our Savior. We must all ask ourselves, "What kind of representative am I?" There is a great deal of information with regard to proper representation in the Bible. James, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us a clear picture of our responsibilities as ambassadors for Christ.

Proper representation of Christ to the world begins with Divine Viewpoint Thinking (thinking the thoughts of Christ). Others cannot see our thinking. However, they **can** see the **results** of our thinking. Our thinking is evident in both what we say, our attitudes and how we act. "Out of the abundance of the heart (mind) the mouth speaketh" and "As a man thinketh in his heart (mind) so is he." In Romans 12:1-2 we are commanded to change our thinking from human viewpoint to divine viewpoint by presenting ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. Sacrificial living means setting aside anything in your life that would distract you or keep you from the execution of the Christian Way of Life. God says that this is your reasonable or logical service. Why? Because you cannot be the kind of representative of Jesus Christ that God wants you to be until *you are motivated* to do what He commands. (Matthew 12:33-37; Proverbs 23:7)

The context throughout the Book of James is directed to those who lack mercy toward others, are judgmental of others and are "respecters of persons." For Christians who exhibit these characteristics, their faith is useless because it has not transformed their thinking. Only faith that is **exercised** will transform the believers thinking, attitudes and actions. Exercising your faith means making the truth of God's Word a part of your consciousness, your frame of reference and your norms and standards.

"When we as Christians stand up and tell the world that we have a faith that will set them free, lift them up, transform their thoughts and actions, give them hope, joy and peace, it's fair for them to ask: Have you? Does it? Can it? If they fail to see these things in our lives, they most likely will not believe us. None of us is neutral when it comes to our effect upon people's opinion of the faith we profess. You can be the best or the worst illustration of the truth of God's Word by your words and your deeds." (A quote from Rev. Buddy Dano)