



AN UNSURPASSED GIFT

Quest Lesson A-9

The Problem: Without any doubt the Bible teaches that only righteous people will have a part in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said that the wicked will be destroyed forever, but the righteous will go "into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46). We are not left in any uncertainty as to the kind of people who will inherit the kingdom of God. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). Sin is alien to heaven. People who cherish sin would be very unhappy in heaven, A man who travels in a foreign country and cannot buy the kind of food he enjoys is usually quite unhappy. He is glad when the time comes to return home. Likewise a person who loves sin would never adjust to the sinless environment of heaven.

The book of Hebrews speaks of "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Holiness is righteousness. It is purity of heart and conduct. Jesus explained righteousness in the sermon on the mount. He said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). Then He proceeded to illustrate what He meant. It is not enough to refrain from killing; we must not harbor hate or bitterness (Matthew 5:21-22). It is not enough to refrain from overt acts of immorality. Lustful looking upon the opposite sex is sin (Matthew 5:28). So righteousness, as Jesus defined "Hep is a pure attitude of mind that manifests itself in outward acts acceptable to God. Righteousness is the opposite of sin. Paul wrote, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God" (1 Corinthians 15:34). Since sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), righteousness is obedience to His law. Paul taught that Christ died, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:3-4).

Peter exclaims, "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). The Greek of the passage means, "If a righteous person is saved with difficulty," how will it fare for the ungodly person? The qualification for salvation is righteousness, but how in this world, in which sin of one shade or another is so prevalent, can a person ever reach that standard?

We are told that the "righteousness of God" is revealed by the Gospel (Romans 1:16-17), but what good does that do us? How can a knowledge of the fact that God is righteous help us? Even the demons know that, and they remain totally evil (James 2:19). The Psalmist wrote, "Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape" (Psalm 71:2). But how can God's righteousness ever deliver us? He is righteous; we are unrighteous. We all admit that; but how can that knowledge ever save us? The vital question is, how can we be righteous, and so qualified for eternal life? The most exciting thing is that the Bible answers that question with delightful positiveness and simplicity so that no-one needs to be in any doubt.

Objectives

First, we will answer the question: What is the Gospel?

Second, we will see how the righteousness of God is "revealed" in the Gospel.

Third, the important question must be considered: Is the believer in Christ righteous?

Fourth, how is the righteousness of God bestowed upon us?

Fifth, we will look at the dual nature of the believing Christian.

I. What Is the Gospel?

The word "Gospel" is a translation of the Greek word (euaggelion) that means "good news." The Gospel in the New Testament incorporates quite a number of things. The good news is really quite comprehensive. Our concern is to read those passages which speak of the very heart of the Gospel message. What are the most important aspects of the Gospel for the person who wants to be saved?

The Word

1. What did Paul regard as of first importance in the Gospel? 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:8.
2. What was the Gospel that Paul preached among the "Gentiles"? Galatians 2:2, 16
3. What kind of power did Paul find in the Gospel? Romans 1:16-17.

Explanation: The heart of the Gospel message is the fact that Christ died for our sins and rose again to be our living Savior. But those historical facts do no-one any good unless he has faith. It is not enough to believe about Jesus in the same way you believe about other historical figures.

Paul urges that "justification" is possible only by faith. The kind of faith of which he is speaking is total commitment to Christ. You have faith when you can honestly say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). Then the Gospel becomes a power to you, and you enjoy the blessings of salvation.

The Gospel is the source of the power to be righteous. When you have that power (Romans 1:16) you are a justified person and saved. The Greek verb "to justify" (dikaioo) used in Galatians 2:16 is the verb which corresponds; to the noun "righteousness" (dikaiosune) and the adjective "righteous" (dikaios). We can illustrate the relationship between these words by noting the relationship between the English words, "to beautify" (verb), "beauty" (noun), "beautiful" (adjective). When you beautify your garden you give it beauty, so that it is now beautiful. Just so, when God justifies us, He gives us righteousness, so that we are righteous. Then we have power and enjoy present salvation in Christ. Isn't that good news!

Relevance: You can have the experience of justification, not by your efforts to earn it, but by believing in Jesus and receiving His gift.

II. How Is the Righteousness of God Revealed in the Gospel?

Romans 1:16-17 says that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," because in it is "the righteousness of God revealed." The verb "to reveal" (Greek apokalupto) means "to show, disclose, bring to light, to uncover." Often in the New Testament it refers to the light of truth, the knowledge of God revealed to minds and hearts by the Holy Spirit. Such revealed divine knowledge is not mere factual information; it is a spiritual experience by which truth becomes part of a life; it is a bestowal of spiritual power which the believer experiences. The Gospel is the power of God to the believer because he experiences the righteousness of God. He does not just know that God is righteous; he takes into his life the transforming power of God's righteousness.

The Word

4. How did Paul explain that divine knowledge is "revealed" to us? 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.
5. According to Jesus, how can humble people have wisdom exceeding that of the world's great minds? Matthew 11: 25-27.
6. Who was revealed in Paul's life so that he had the grace or power to preach the Gospel? Galatians 1:15-16.
7. What (Who) was "revealed," making justification possible? Galatians 3:23-24.
8. Who reveals the mystery of salvation through Christ? What did this revelation do for Paul? What does it do for us? Ephesians 3:1-7.

Explanation: When Paul wrote that the Gospel is power for the believer because in it is "the righteousness of God revealed," he meant that God's righteousness is bestowed upon you when you accept Christ. Christ is not asking you

merely to admire His personal righteousness. He is inviting you to take it into your heart. The divine revelation of righteousness to the heart of the believer is the power which transforms him from an habitual sinner to an habitual servant of Christ. This is the power that qualifies a person for heaven. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), but Christ's righteousness is faultless. (See Psalm 145:17). This is why Jeremiah referred to Him as "the Lord our Righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:6). This is why Paul craved to "be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

If you yield your heart to Christ, the right 1 be bestowed upon you as the power which will save you and qualify you for the kingdom of heaven.

III. Is the Believer in Christ Righteous?

If by this question you mean: "Is the believer independently righteous in soul, so that now he can go it alone without total dependence on Christ for victory over sin and the daily power to live for God?" the answer is an emphatic, "No!"

On the other hand, if you mean: "Is the believer righteous because Christ is righteous, and Christ is daily bestowing His righteousness upon him," the answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

The Word

9. What did Paul call the person who is living by faith? Romans 1:17 (last phrase).
10. Who has the ability to do righteousness? 1 John 2:29.
11. In what sense is the person righteous who does righteousness? 1 John 3:7; Galatians 2:20.
12. Of what is the Christian believer a servant (or slave)? Romans 6:17-22.

Explanation: The Greek of Romans 1:17 (last phrase) reads literally, "The righteous person shall live by faith." Because Christ is living in the believer's heart, he has the gift of Christ's righteousness. Thus he has the power to do works that are acceptable to God. Such righteous works were possible to Paul because he could say, "I live yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). Never is the Christian righteous independently of Christ's indwelling. Christ is righteous, and He comes to live in our hearts. In this sense we have righteousness. It is always His, but it is also ours because we believe in Him and He has become ours.

Relevance: You can be a righteous person in the sight of God only if you have Christ living out His life through you.

IV. How Is the Righteousness of God Bestowed upon Us?

In the light of what we have already said, we could ask the question this way: How does Jesus bestow Himself upon us? This is the most thrilling experience possible to the Christian, God does not rain some intangible quality upon our hearts. What does He do? We will let Him speak for Himself through the Word.

The Word

13. What did Jesus say He would do after He had returned to heaven? John 14:16-18, 23.
14. How does Jesus save (or justify) us? Titus 3:5-7.
15. Who and what does the Holy Spirit bring to our hearts? Romans 8:9-10.

Explanation: Here is the unsurpassed gift from Christ to the believer. Jesus comes to us Himself! He comes by the Holy Spirit, so that when you are indwelt by the Spirit, you are indwelt by Christ. This indwelling is righteousness in your heart. Such an experience cannot be explained biologically or psychologically. It is a spiritual experience that comes to every person who responds to Jesus' love by inviting Him to come in (Revelation 3:20). Christ saves us (or justifies us) by pouring the Holy Spirit upon us. Thus He bestows His righteous Presence upon us, and we are qualified to live for Him, and to live with Him.

W. W. Prescott explains this Biblical truth beautifully in his little book, *Victory in Christ*: "At infinite cost to Himself, but without money and without price, He imparts to me the riches of heaven, the most precious treasure in the universe, His own righteousness. This He does by giving Himself to me. He Himself becomes my righteousness. His righteousness, His life, Himself, are inseparable. This increases my joyful wonder. He does not divest Himself of what He bestows upon me. He Himself is the gift. He asks me to give myself to Him in order that He may give Himself to me.

"The righteousness of Jesus is not a theological creed, but a living experience. It not only changes my standing with God, but it also determines my conduct. The gift of His righteousness is not an entry on the credit side of my ledger account in the books of heaven to balance a troublesome account, a transaction entirely devoid of any personal touch with me. It has to do with my inmost being. It purifies the current of my life, and sweetens my thinking, my speaking, and my doing. It makes me a new creature in Christ Jesus." (pp. 21-22).

Relevance: Your greatest joy is to be found in having Jesus come and dwell within. He will be your "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30).

V. The Dual Nature of the Believing Christian

What kind of people are we after having received Christ's gift of His righteousness by the Holy, Spirit?

The Word

16. What constant struggle did Paul have after Christ came into his life? 1 Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:16-18.
17. Even though we are still fallen, what constant expjence is ours because we are living the life of faith? Romans 10:6-10 (compare Deuteronomy 30:11-14); 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; (compare Romans 8:3-4).

Explanation: The person in whose heart Christ dwells by the Holy Spirit is still a fallen human being with propensities to sin. Sin is not reigning in his life any more (Romans 6:11-12). But his fallen self is still open to Satan's temptations. Hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, played upon by Satan, strive for the mastery over the indwelling Holy Spirit. As long as Christ reigns within, sin cannot (1 John 3:9). The daily struggle described in Galatians 5:17 does not have to end in defeat, because when we "walk in the Spirit" we "shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (verse 16). The life of faith is a life of victory. Now we are slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18), instead of slaves to sin. Now God's law is written upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and we believe "unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10). "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ bore our sin precisely so that at the moment of belief "we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Relevance: Will you ask Jesus now to come into your heart by the Holy Spirit and be your indwelling righteousness?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The Gospel is only a matter of history.
 - b. God reveals His righteousness by bestowing it upon us by the Holy Spirit.
 - c. The believer is righteous in and of himself apart from any divine indwelling.
 - d. The believer still has a sinful nature in the sense of the old evil habits ruling in his life.
2. Discuss: Did the thief who was crucified with Jesus have the gift of righteousness when he accepted the Savior? Was he thoroughly qualified for heaven at that point?