

The Believers (at LSU)

Campus Meeting

September 17, 2009

Crucial Points of the Truth in Romans

The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. – 1:16-17

RIGHTEOUSNESS—THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

We have seen that the book of Romans is the gospel of sonship. However, in this book another important matter is covered, and that is the matter of righteousness. In 1:16 and 17 Paul says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes, because the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. In this message we shall see why righteousness is the power of the gospel and why righteousness is necessary in order for God to produce many sons through the gospel.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS FULFILLED BY CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS

In eternity past God predestinated us to be His sons. However, although we were the predestinated ones, we became fallen and involved with sin. This brings in the matter of God's righteousness. If we had not fallen, we would not need to be concerned with righteousness. But because we are fallen, God must deal with us according to His righteousness. What should God do with those He has predestinated to become His sons? Some may say that because God loves us, He cannot cast us all into the lake of fire. Yes, God loves us, but He hates sin. God does not desire to give us up or to cast us into the lake of fire. However, He cannot forgive us unless His righteousness has been satisfied. If God would forgive us in a light manner, He would place Himself in a position of being unrighteous. As a righteous God and a just God, He cannot forgive sinful people without meeting the demands of His righteousness.

In order that God might be able to forgive us, Christ, the Son of God, became flesh. As 8:3 says, God sent His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin. By incarnation, the Lord took upon Himself the likeness of the flesh of sin and became identified with sinners in the flesh. For the sake of God's righteousness, the Lord Jesus was put to death on the cross. There, on the cross, He was made sin for us, and God condemned sin in the flesh. By dying on our behalf the Lord accomplished redemption and fulfilled all of God's righteous requirements. Now God has the position righteously to forgive us. In fact, He not only can forgive us, but, for the sake of His righteousness, He must forgive us. God forgives not primarily because He loves us, but because He is bound by His righteousness to do so.

John 3:16 says that because God loved us, He gave His only begotten Son so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. This verse indicates that God saves us because He loves us. Furthermore, in Ephesians 2:5 and 8 we are told that we are saved by grace. The book of Romans, however, reveals that we are saved not by grace nor by love, but by righteousness. Neither love nor grace is a legal matter. You cannot claim that, according to law, a person is required to love you or to show grace to you. Only with those things which are related to righteousness do we have the position to claim something in a legal way.

For example, suppose you are a landlord and I am one of your tenants. Each month I am required to pay you a certain amount of money as rent. If I fail to pay rent for two months, you have the position to righteously claim from me the payment of the rent. On my part, I must pay the rent, not out of love nor out of grace, but out of righteousness. I am legally obligated to pay the rent. If I pay it, I am righteous. But if I do not pay it, I am not righteous.

In one sense, the Lord Jesus was put to death by the Jews and Romans. But in another sense, He was put to death by God. The Lord was on the cross for six hours. During the first three hours, He suffered the persecution of men, who did many evil things to Him. But during the last three hours, God laid all our sins upon Him, and then He judged Him, punished Him, and put Him to death. This is proved by Isaiah 53. God put Christ to death because, during the last three hours on the cross, Christ took our place. Through Christ's death, God's righteous requirements were fulfilled. Therefore, the Lord could utter the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30). By saying this, the Lord was indicating that the work of redemption was accomplished. As proof of this, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). Furthermore, the entire scene surrounding the place of Christ's death became serene and peaceful. A wealthy man asked for the body of Jesus and buried Him in a tomb (John 19:38). Thus, with His suffering over, the Lord rested in the tomb. The requirements of

God's righteousness had been fulfilled by Christ's death, and God was satisfied. Three days later, as proof of this satisfaction, God raised Christ from among the dead. Hence, the resurrection of Christ is the proof that God is satisfied with His death on our behalf.

Before Christ died on the cross, it was still possible for God to change His mind about forgiving us of our sins. He could righteously have cast us all aside. But after Christ's death on the cross under the judgment of God, God cannot do this.

IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO CHANGE HIS MIND

Now that Christ has died and has been raised from among the dead, it is impossible for God to change His mind about forgiving us. Rather, we have the ground to say to Him, "O God, whether You love me or not, You must forgive me. Before Christ died on the cross, You could have changed Your mind. But because He has died and because You have raised Him from among the dead, You have no legal standing to refuse to forgive me. O God, You must forgive me now, for You have no right to change in this matter. You are bound by Your righteousness." In this way, righteousness is the power of the gospel.

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR SALVATION

Both love and grace may change, but righteousness is solid and steadfast. God is free either to love us or not to love us. However, He is bound by His righteousness. Now that Christ has died to fulfill God's righteous requirements, God has put Himself into a position where He is legally bound. Whether He loves us or not, He is bound by His own righteousness to forgive us. Thus, the foundation of our salvation is righteousness, not love or grace. Psalm 89:14 says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne" (Heb.). The very foundation of God's throne is also the foundation of our salvation. Can the foundation of God's throne be shaken? Certainly not. Likewise, the foundation of our salvation cannot be shaken, for this foundation is not love nor grace, but righteousness.

The Bible does not say that love is the power of the gospel; neither does it say that grace is the power of the gospel. But it does reveal that the righteousness of God is the power of the gospel. If we consider ourselves, we shall realize that we are not lovable nor worthy of God's grace. We simply do not deserve anything from God. But God is righteous. He put Christ to death on our behalf, and He has recognized the death of Christ as the full payment of our debt. Furthermore, the resurrected Christ sitting at God's right hand is the receipt of payment. Since God has already issued this receipt, how could He righteously claim payment again from us? If He would do so, we could point Him to Christ and remind Him that He must take care of His righteous position, even the foundation of His throne.

We can boldly tell God, "If You don't deal with me according to Your righteousness, Your throne will be shaken. The important issue is not whether I shall be saved or perish; it is whether or not You will allow the foundation of Your throne to be shaken. God, for me to perish is a secondary matter. The primary matter is the righteous foundation of Your throne. God, I remind You of Your righteousness. Christ has died for my sins, and He is now at Your right hand as proof that You have received His payment of all my debts. According to Your righteousness, You have no choice except to save me. Christ has died, You have accepted His death and have resurrected Him from among the dead, and now You are legally bound to forgive me. By resurrecting Christ You indicated that You were satisfied with His payment and You issued a receipt of payment. O God, if You were not satisfied with Christ, then You should have allowed Him to remain in the tomb. O Father God, I appreciate Your love and Your grace. But now I stand before You not so much in love or in grace, but in Your righteousness. Now, no matter what my condition is, You must forgive me."

Have you ever prayed to God in such a way? It pleases Him whenever someone prays like this. This is a prayer that appeals to God according to His righteousness. The gospel of Christ is the power of God because the righteousness of God is revealed in it.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS MANIFESTED AND SHOWN FORTH

In 3:21 Paul speaks a further word about righteousness: "But now without law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." To say that the righteousness of God has been manifested without the law means that the righteousness of God is not based on our doing; that is, it is not based upon our keeping the law.

God's righteousness is shown forth, in the forbearance of God, in His passing by of the sins that occurred before (3:25). This means that in view of the redemption of Christ that was to come, God passed by the sins of many saints in the Old Testament, such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and David. During the Old Testament age, God neither condemned ones such as these to the lake of fire, nor did He forgive their sins. Rather, He passed by their sins. Their sins still existed, but they were covered by the type, by the blood of the sacrifices which typified the sacrifice of Christ. The Old Testament type in this matter may be likened to a promissory note. The type was not the actual payment of debt, but a sure promise that full payment would be made. Because Christ had not yet come to die on the cross, God gave sinners in the Old Testament a promissory note. The propitiatory or expiatory sacrifice, which foreshadowed Christ,

satisfied all the requirements of God's righteousness. Hence, He could pass by the people's sin that occurred in the Old Testament age. Furthermore, in order to show forth His righteousness, He had to do this.

This is what 3:25 refers to. This verse reveals that the Lord Jesus is the propitiation place, the propitiation-cover, whom God set forth for showing forth His righteousness in passing by the sins of the Old Testament saints; for, as the propitiatory sacrifice, He has made the full propitiation on the cross for their sins and has fully satisfied the requirements of God's righteousness. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled all the types of His sacrificial and redemptive death. At that time, the promissory note was replaced by the actual payment.

By forgiving us God shows forth His righteousness. He makes a declaration to the whole universe that because He is righteous, He must forgive us of our sins. Because His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was put to death by Him on the cross on our behalf, He is legally obligated to forgive us. Whether He is happy with us or not, He must forgive us according to His righteousness. God knows that whenever a person points to the resurrected and ascended Christ as the receipt for the payment for sin, God must forgive that one. In this matter, God has no choice.

LOOKING AT THE ASCENDED CHRIST

We should not look at ourselves, but look at the ascended Christ. Hebrews 1:3 says that after Christ made purification for sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. The ascended Christ seated at the right hand of God is the receipt for the payment for our forgiveness. This is a matter of tremendous significance, for it is the foundation of our salvation. Whenever our conscience condemns us because of our failures, we need to remember to stand upon the foundation of God's righteousness. You may be fervent for the Lord today. But in the future, you may fail Him and therefore become very disappointed with yourself, unable to believe that God could ever forgive you. If you remain under this feeling of condemnation and disappointment, you will not be able to rise up. Instead, you may become subject to the subtlety and deception of the enemy. At such a time you need to praise God for His righteousness. Tell Him that no matter how much you have failed, Christ is still at His right hand as the receipt for payment for all your debts. Our experience may fluctuate, but God remains righteous. Whenever we claim the blood of Jesus and appeal to God's righteousness, God has no choice except to forgive us (1 John 1:9).

THE FOUNDATION OF OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

Our experience of Christ rests upon the foundation of God's righteousness. We should never have confidence in ourselves, thinking that we cannot backslide or fail the Lord. Do not be like Peter who said that he would be faithful to the Lord, even though everyone else might deny Him. The foundation is not our fervency or victory; it is God's righteousness, the unshakable foundation of God's throne. God has shown forth His righteousness by passing over the sins of the Old Testament saints and by forgiving us of our sins in the New Testament age. By doing these things God has proved that He is righteous. Now this very righteousness is our foundation. The work of being designated sons of God is built upon this foundation. However, we must be clear that the foundation is not the process of designation; it is the righteousness of God.

CHRIST, THE END OF THE LAW UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 10:3 and 4 say, "For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, did not submit to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one who believes." Here we see that the Israelites made the mistake of seeking to establish their own righteousness. If we do this today, we also are wrong. Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness. He is the end of the law so that we may gain the righteousness of God.

CONSTITUTED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be constituted the righteousness of God in him" (Gk.). According to this verse, we are not only righteous in God's eyes, but we are being constituted righteousness. In Christ, we are becoming the very righteousness of God. This experience is subjective and rather deep. In 1 Corinthians we have the matter of objective righteousness, but in 2 Corinthians, subjective righteousness. This means that we are not only righteous before God, but that we are God's very righteousness.

This takes place through the work of transformation. God is in the process of transforming us with Christ. The more we are transformed by God in this way, the more we become the righteousness of God. As sons of Adam, we were sin. But as the members of Christ, Christ is being wrought into us to transform us gradually from sin into righteousness.

Righteousness means to be right with God in every way. It means that in no matter are you wrong or unfair in the eyes of God. Every part of your being is right according to God. You are as righteous, just, and fair as God is. This is not firstly a matter of outward behavior, character, or conduct, but a matter of our inward being. In the eyes of others, you may be quite good. But as you stand before God, you will realize that you are not good at all. You may be better than others, but certainly you are not as good as God is. To be justified by God means to be the same as He is. When we were saved, we were covered by Christ as our garment of righteousness. This is objective righteousness. But now God is working to make our person, our being, the righteousness of God. This is not merely a garment put upon us objectively; it is the very element of Christ wrought into us subjectively. In this way we have not only the foundation, but also the building.

Becoming the righteousness of God inwardly and subjectively is also related to designation. The more we are designated the sons of God, the more we become the righteousness of God. This is a matter of Christ wrought into our nature, our element, our being, our substance. This is not a matter of something imputed to us objectively, but a matter of subjective transformation. Praise the Lord that we, the believers in Christ, are on the foundation of God's righteousness. Now this righteousness is being wrought into us to constitute us the very righteousness of God.

Concerning righteousness, there is a difference between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Christ is our righteousness objectively, whereas 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Christ is being wrought into us to make us the righteousness of God subjectively. Concerning objective righteousness, from the time of our salvation we all are righteous already. But concerning subjective righteousness, we are under a process. In other words, positionally we are righteous in the eyes of God, but dispositionally we are not yet the righteousness of God.

STANDING ON GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Nevertheless, we must praise the Lord for our righteous position. No matter how poor our disposition may be, we still have the position of righteousness. Because we have this position and foundation, we have the boldness to tell God that He has no right to forsake us. We can say, "Father God, even if You don't like me, You must still accept me. You put the Lord Jesus on the cross and judged Him on my behalf. Furthermore, You have raised Him from the dead and caused Him to sit at Your right hand as proof that You have received His death as payment for my sins. I believe that You love me, but even if You don't love me, You still must receive me according to Your righteousness."

We have been saved by God's love and by His grace, but especially we have been saved by God's righteousness. God's love and grace may change in relation to us, but it is impossible for God's righteousness to change. Before Christ died on the cross, God could have changed His mind about us. At the last minute, He could have decided to let us all perish and to create a new human race for the fulfillment of His purpose. But as we have pointed out, now that Christ has died for our sins and has been resurrected for our justification, God cannot change His mind. God has signed the will, and He is legally bound by it. Therefore, for our salvation, we stand not on God's love nor on God's grace, but on God's righteousness.

The book of Romans speaks both of God's love and of His grace. However, Romans does not say that either love or grace is the power of the gospel. Rather, in this book Paul clearly declares that the power of the gospel is the righteousness of God. I am deeply grateful to God for His love and grace. But my standing is upon His righteousness, the foundation of His throne. His righteousness cannot be shaken. If we would be designated the sons of God for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, we all must know this unshakable foundation and stand firmly upon it.

Many Christians praise God for His love and grace, but not many praise Him for His righteousness. Praise Him that the foundation of our salvation is His righteousness! We also praise Him that He is transforming us in Christ into His very righteousness. Eventually, God will be able to say, "Satan, look at My children. They are not only righteous before Me, but they have become My righteousness." Once we have been saved according to God's righteousness, we cannot be lost. If we are clear concerning God's righteousness in the gospel, we shall be at rest knowing that the righteousness of God is our eternal security. (*Life Study of Romans*, Chapter 57, Living Stream Ministry, Anaheim, California)