

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Lesson 5 – Amazing Righteousness, How Sweet The Sound (Galatians 3:1-9)

In Lesson 4 which was based on Galatians 2:11-21, we discussed how individuals, you and I, are justified in God's sight. In those verses, Paul states plainly that we are not justified before God by works of the law but rather by our faith in Christ Jesus. Based on Paul's teaching in these verses, we also discussed that our efforts to justify ourselves before God, that is to influence, manipulate, pacify, placate, or appease God are unnecessary, futile, and often counterproductive. **God is the One who justifies. We are the ones who are justified; and Paul in another of his writings tells us we are, in fact, justified freely by God's grace (Rom. 3:24).**

As Christians, we speak and sing often of God's amazing grace. By definition, grace is something we can only accept. It is never earned. But in the last verse of Chapter 2, Paul mentions another word which is central to the gospel—righteousness. We speak and sing of God's righteousness far less often than we do grace, and perhaps we understand and appreciate God's righteousness far less than we do His grace. How can a righteous God enjoy fellowship with unrighteous humans? As we continue our study into Galatians 3, Paul will give us insight into how that is possible; but perhaps we should take a few minutes to look at some Old Testament passages concerning God's righteousness to ensure we have the proper background before going forward into Chapter 3.

In the Old Testament, God is praised for His righteousness perhaps more than for any other of His wonderful attributes. As a sampling, and only a sampling, Psalms 71:19 tells us that His righteousness reaches the heavens, that He has done great things, and that no one is like Him. The psalms also tell us that righteousness and justice comprise the foundation of God's throne (Ps. 89:14, 97:2), that His right hand is full of righteousness (Ps 48:10), and that He is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds (Ps. 145:17). **Because we are not righteous, we may be tempted to view God's righteousness as a barrier that stands between us and Him, but the psalms see God's righteousness differently.** They appeal to God and His righteousness for refuge and deliverance in times of trouble (Ps. 31:1, 143:11), and they see righteousness as the reason God shows special concern for those who are oppressed (Ps. 9:9, 103:6). David could even see his deliverance from the guilt of bloodshed as a cause for praising God's righteousness (Ps. 51:14). **God in the midst of an unrighteous world filled with unrighteous people can be counted on to be right, to do what is right, and to make right what is wrong.** Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is power of God to save everyone who believes and that in it (i.e., in the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom. 1:16-17). Yes, it is not just God's grace that moves Him to save us from this present evil age (Gal. 1:3-4). **God can be counted on to always do the right thing, and Paul has come to view the gift of Jesus and the resulting gospel message as the ultimate expressions of God's righteousness toward each of us who are oppressed by our own sin and the sins of others.**

As we enter Galatians 3, Paul, after having told the Galatians in Chapter 2 that they were justified by faith in Christ Jesus, asks the Galatians whether they received God's Holy Spirit through works of the law

or by hearing with faith (Gal. 3:2). No doubt, Paul considers this to be a rhetorical question, the answer to which would be obvious to the Galatians. Paul will have much more to say about the Spirit in Chapter 5, and we will reserve that discussion for later in our study.

Paul then in Gal.3:6-9 turns to a story about Abraham that is recorded in Genesis 15 to illustrate how a righteous God chooses to deal with unrighteous humans. In that story, the word of the Lord came to Abraham and told him not to worry as God would be a shield to him. Abraham expressed dismay that he was childless and had no heir. God took Abraham outside and showed him the stars and then told him that the number of Abraham's descendants would be as the stars in the heavens. Genesis then simply reports that Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned or credited to Abraham as righteousness. Paul's point by using the story is that "those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Gal 3:9). To those who were placing their trust in their ability to keep the law of Moses, Paul's use of this incident in Abraham's life was designed to show that a man could be considered righteous in God's eyes long before the law was given by God to Moses. **To us as sinful, "not-right" humans, the story demonstrates what God, who is right, does right, and makes right, expects of us in a relationship with Him. He wants us to believe in Him and His Son, to take Him at His word, and to trust Him; and He accepts that faith and counts us as righteous even though we are not. In other words, God in His righteousness has moved through His Son to make us righteous in His eyes; and in that sense, righteousness, like grace, is something we receive from God and not something we achieve through our efforts.**

Abraham's faith in God and His promise was evident in the way he lived his life from that point forward, and Paul will tell us as we continue in Chapter 3 in our next lesson that we, too, must learn to live by faith. Of course, we all have faith in something or someone, but wouldn't it make more sense to place our faith in Someone who has the desire, ability, and righteousness to actually deliver what He has promised?

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January, 2016