

## Understanding Biblical Righteousness in Connect with God's Grace

### INTRODUCTION:

1. In my sermon last week, I mentioned that Noah found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord **because he was righteous** (Gen. 6:5-9).
2. That statement creates problems in the thinking of many because...
  - A. As Christians we understand that *sinners* are saved and *made righteous* by God's *grace*. So, if Noah was *righteous*, why would he need to *find God's grace* to be saved?
  - B. Calvinism dominate modern religious thinking which cannot perceive of *totally depraved* Noah *being righteous* in any way without having already experienced God's grace to miraculously change his heart and **make him righteous, separate from anything** Noah may have done.
3. So, how do we harmonize the reality that Noah **was righteousness in God's eyes**, while also acknowledging that Noah was saved because he **found grace** in the eyes of God?
  - A. Well, that is the subject of today's lesson—understanding biblical righteousness in connection with God's grace.
  - B. In looking at this I hope to explain the Bible's use of righteousness in order to...
    - i. Help us better understand certain passages of scripture that might be confusing otherwise.
    - ii. Help us better understand our responsibilities when it comes to salvation through God's grace.
4. To accomplish this goal we must 1) understand the two foundations upon which man's relationship with God is built so that we can 2) understand the Bible's applications of righteousness to the work of God and actions of those who seek God's salvation.

### BODY:

#### **I. Foundation of our relationship with God:**

##### **A. Foundation 1 – Individual accountability before God:**

1. Long ago God established that we live or die by our *own* sinfulness or righteousness.
  - a. Ezek. 18:20-21 – “The **soul who sins shall die**. The **son shall not bear the guilt of the father**, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The **righteousness of the righteous** shall be upon himself, and the **wickedness of the wicked** shall be upon himself.”
  - b. He explains that if a wicked man *turns* from sin and obeys God, doing “what is lawful and **right**...because of the **righteousness** which **he has done**, he shall live.” (18:21-22).
  - c. But if a man “turns away from **his righteousness** and commits iniquity...**All the righteousness which he has done** shall not be remembered;...he shall die.” (18:24).
2. The principle of personal accountability continues today in Christ.
  - a. Righteousness or wickedness is determined by one choices and deeds (1 John 3:7, 10 – “Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous**...<sup>10</sup> In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God**, nor is he who does not love his brother.”).
    - i. If you DO righteousness, you are righteous like Christ. YOUR actions determine this.
    - ii. If you DO NOT DO righteousness, YOU are not righteous and have no relationship with God.
  - b. That being the case, we will be individually judged to be righteous or wicked, saved or lost, based on what we have chosen to do, how we have chosen to live.
    - i. Rom. 14:10, 12 – “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...<sup>12</sup> So then each of us shall **give account of himself** to God.”

- ii. 2 Cor. 5:10 – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one** may receive the things done in the body, **according to what he has done**, whether good or bad.”
- 3. What conclusions can we draw from these verses:
  - a. The sinfulness or righteousness of a person only applies to that person and cannot be transferred to another. This is one of the serious problems I have with Calvinism.
    - i. If I am considered a condemned sinner because I inherit **Adam’s sin** and guilt, then...
      - i) *The son does bear the guilt of the fathers’ sins and the wickedness of the wicked is NOT upon himself*, but instead is received from *others*.
      - ii) I must *give account for Adam’s sin*, his deeds, not my own!
    - ii. The idea of inheriting Adam’s sin/guilt is contrary to plain Bible teaching.
  - b. We will face judgement with no one to blame for our choices/actions but ourselves.
    - i. Contrary to Calvinism, the Bible doesn’t say a word about us being judged based on Adam’s sin or Christ’s righteousness.
    - ii. In the Judgement God will no more look at us and sees the wicked actions of Adam than He will look at us and see the righteous acts of Christ.
      - i) Neither Adam’s wickedness nor Christ’s righteousness can be transferred to us.
      - ii) We will stand or fall before God based on what **we choose to do**—for our own righteousness/unrighteousness. Judgment means **personal accountability!**
- B. Foundation 2: God’s *justifying* work in Christ!
  - 1. Although we are held accountable before God to live righteously, we are dependent upon God to *justify* us (Rom. 8:33 – “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who **justifies**.”).
    - a. Understand that to *justify* means to make *righteous*.
      - i. Two words and their derivatives, O.T. (tsedeq) and N.T. (dikē), are the root of basically all words like justify, justification, just, right, righteous, and righteousness.
      - ii. These words’ basic concept is *rightness*, or what constitutes and makes one right.
    - b. Whether the N.T. says you *do* righteousness, or *are* righteous, or *are justified* by God, it is from the same word (dikē) meaning *rightness*, or what is right before God.
  - 2. We must understand that when the Bible says God *justifies* us by His grace, it is saying that by God *pronounces us righteous* by His grace (Titus 3:4-7 – “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, <sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His **mercy He saved us**, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> that having been **justified by His grace** we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”).
    - a. Note that justification comes “not by works of righteousness which we have done.”
    - b. Instead, it is by God mercy and grace that we are saved, are justified, for eternal life!
  - 3. So, how do we harmonize ...
    - a. Bible statements that say one *lives by the righteousness he has done* and that the one *who does righteousness is righteous* with...
    - b. Those that say we are *not justified by works of righteousness* and that *justification, or righteous, comes by God’s grace and mercy?*

## II. Understanding and applying biblical righteousness:

- A. The two-fold foundation of our relationship with God should lead us to recognize that there are two ways that the concept of righteousness is used in Scripture.
  - 1. There is righteousness, or rightness, regarding *behavior* that is *right* before God.
  - 2. There is righteousness, or rightness, regarding one’s *legal status* before God.

3. It is very important that we understand this distinction in order to properly interpret scripture.
- B. Sin destroys our claim to a *right/righteous legal status* before God.
1. This is true of all, both Jews and Greeks (Rom. 3:9-10, 23 – “What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.”<sup>10</sup> As it is written: “There is **none righteous**, no, not one;...<sup>23</sup> for all have **sinned** and fall short of the glory of God”).
    - a. Sin causes our legal status to be compromised before God and there is nothing that we can do on our own to regain it.
    - b. It can only be regained if God justifies us by forgiving our sin we have committed.
  2. Because of our sin brings deserving condemnation, saving **justification**, or being made **legally right**, or righteous, before God must be...
    - a. By God’s **grace**, being *unearned* on our part.
      - i. Titus 3:7 – “that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
      - ii. As sinners *we can’t earn a right legal status* before God, seeing our sin means God’s law condemns us as law breakers, requiring grace!
    - b. According to **faith**, seeing we must trust in the sinless, perfect sacrifice of God’s Son and the grace it bestows upon sinners, to be justified through Christ before God.
      - i. Rom. 3:24-26 – “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, **through faith**, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,<sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the **justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.”
      - ii. Rom. 5:1 – “Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”
- C. Yet, God demands that we do righteousness, or obey the *right things He commands*, in order to be justified, or pronounced righteous, by His grace through faith.
1. It has always been that one who does the things God commands, the righteous deeds of God, is counted as righteous before God...and receives His grace.
    - a. Noah (Gen. 6:9, 22-7:1 – “This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a **just man, perfect in his generations**. Noah **walked with God**...<sup>22</sup> Thus Noah did; **according to all that God commanded him, so he did**.<sup>1</sup> Then the Lord said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are **righteous** before Me in this generation.”
      - i. Noah was righteous and walked with God because he did what God said.
      - ii. His obedience made him just, or righteous, before God, and resulted in Him receiving grace from God in entering the ark for his salvation.
    - b. 1 John 3:7 – “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who **practices righteousness** is **righteous**, just as He is righteous.”
  2. When one does the right things of God...
    - a. One does only his/her *duty* before God, *earning nothing* (Lk. 17:10 – “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’”; Isa. 64:6 – “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our **righteous deeds are like a filthy garment**; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”)
    - b. That person may be counted as **righteous** before God because he/she has done these right things, while not (in and of itself) establishing one *legal rightness* before God.

- i. Legal rightness can only come to sinners by God's grace.
  - ii. Yet, like Noah, both personal and legal righteousness are involved in our salvation!
- D. Only when we understand these two distinct ways that *righteousness* is used by the Holy Spirit in scripture can we...
  - 1. Understand that there is no contradiction when God declares "there is none righteous" (because we are sinners), while one lives/saved by "doing what is lawful and right" or "the righteousness he has done" (obeying God's will).
  - 2. Understand that **only God's grace can justify sinners** or make them righteous through **forgiving them of their sins**, while like with Noah also **requiring righteousness** (obeying his will) as a condition to receive His grace.
    - a. God justifies sinners (Rom. 5:8-9 – "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.").
    - b. Yet, sinners must do their duty, or do *right* by obeying God's commands in faith to be recipients of God's grace.
      - i. Heb. 5:8-9 – "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. <sup>9</sup> And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey** Him."
      - ii. Rom. 6:16-18 – "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to **obey**, you are that one's slaves whom you **obey**, whether of **sin leading to death**, or of **obedience leading to righteousness**? <sup>17</sup> But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, **yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine** to which you were delivered. <sup>18</sup> And **having been set free from sin**, you became slaves of righteousness."
      - iii. Acts 2:37-38 – "Now when they heard **this** [how Christ is the Savior and how God seeks to justify sinners through Him], they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, **what shall we do?**" [or what must be do to please God, to do what is right] <sup>38</sup> Then Peter said to them, "**Repent**, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ [obey God's command, or you duty, to repent/baptized in Christ's name] **for the remission of sins** [so that *God* will *justify you through forgiveness*]; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
      - iv. If you are unsure of this, consider Noah (Heb. 11:7 – "**By faith Noah**, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, **moved** with godly fear, **prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which** he condemned the world and **became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.**"

#### CONCLUSION:

- 1. So, my friends, that is how it is: We are required, held personally accountable, by God to **obey Him in faith**, to do what is right, to do our duty, in order to be justified by His grace.
- 2. So, if you want to be justified by God, to be made righteous by God, you are going to have to act righteously in faith by obeying God's commands to repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for your forgiveness and the saving of your soul.