

Lesson 8: Righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21)

Imagine, you are standing before God and God sees you as a person who never sinned. How would you feel? You would never be afraid of God. You would enjoy the time with God. You would approach God with assurance, and talk to him boldly. You would have confidence that God is on your side.

However, Satan, our enemy speaks lies into our mind. "God always looks at you as a law-breaker. He will blame you. He will reprove you. He is disappointed with you. He is angry with you. Actually he doesn't like you, because you have broken the law." Unfortunately, many Christians believe Satan's lies.

The Bible says "The truth will set you free. (John 8:32)" When we study the Word of God, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will understand the truth (John 16:13). When we understand the truth, we can reject Satan's lies, now we can be set free.

Today we will study about righteousness.

God is righteousness. God always thinks and acts in a way that is just, right, and good.¹ For man, "righteousness" is "the right standing position before God". It's about the relationship with God.

1. New husband: Jesus

Rom. 7:1-4

¹ Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? ² For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³ So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

What does it mean here? Let's imagine a situation like this.

There was a lady. Let's call her Rose. Rose married Moses. Moses always pointed out her mistakes. He never overlooked any small mistakes of hers and told her what she was supposed to do. He was happy only when she followed his instructions. What was painful for her was that he not only always said the right

¹ *Children's Ministry Resource Bible*, p.1675

things, but also always did the right things. He never made mistakes. So, she had no chance to blame him. We can call it a life in hell.

Rose decided to leave Moses, and she met Mark. Mark also, not only always said the right things, but also always did the right things, just as Moses did. But there was a big difference between Moses and Mark. Mark loved Rose, took care of her, listened to her, comforted her, and encouraged her. She married Mark.

But Rose was still Rose. She repeated the same mistakes. But Mark still loved her, took care of her, listened to her, comforted her, and encouraged her. So, she felt so sorry for him. She thought she had to do something about it. "What should I do? How can I change myself? How can I please my new husband?" She got one good idea. She packed her suitcase and left the house.

Mark noticed Rose was not at home, he called her and tried to find her. But he couldn't find her. He worried about her so much.

One week later, Mark got a phone call from Rose. He said, "Honey, where are you? I've been worried about you. I miss you so much." Rose said, "I'm sorry, Mark. I'm not a good wife for you. But I wanted to please you. So, I decided to go back to my old-husband and listen to his opinion. I've just finished his one-week training 'How to be a good wife.' Next week I'm taking an advanced seminar 'How to be a better wife.' I love you, Mark."

The first husband is the law. By nature, man is sinner, bounded by the law. The law is always right, never makes a mistake. The law always points out your mistake. But the law cannot change you. The law cannot make you righteous. And the law never dies. Therefore, you will never be released from the law.

But, when you died on the cross with Jesus, your relationship with the law ended. You rose from death with Jesus, now you are a new free person, and married to a new husband, Jesus. He is the truth (John 14:6). He is the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). And he is love (1 John 4:16), full of grace (John 1:14). And he is the gospel, the power which can save us and transform us into his-likeness (Rom. 1:16).

Through faith, just by trusting in him, submitting to him we started a new life with him. It doesn't mean we suddenly become perfect. We may sin, make mistakes. But the new husband, Jesus always loves us, takes care of us, listens to us, comforts us, encourages us, and transforms us.

So the Bible says "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

We often seek the blessing of God, love of God and guidance of God. Then, do we seek the righteousness of God? Do we seek the kingdom of God to be revealed through us?

2. Righteousness by our own way

Reality is that many people seek their own way of righteousness. People try to be righteous by their own way.

I've met one lady and she said "I used to be a chain smoker and an alcoholic. But I stopped smoking and drinking. Now, if I can stop coffee, I'll be really holy." This sounds like a joke, but it's a true story.

How about these people? "I'm not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. Thank you, God. I'm so righteous." "I read the Bible and pray every day. I attend Sunday service every week. I never missed communion. So, God will look at me as righteous." "I stopped going to Karaoke, and I am listening to Christian music. I stopped watching Occult movies, and I am watching Christian programs. So, God should look at me as righteous." "I try to avoid eating or drinking whatever is not good for my health. I try to do whatever that benefits me and also the society. So, God must look at me as righteous."

Righteousness by observing the law sounds all right. But we have a problem.

Heb. 10:1-4

¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

In the OT time and Jesus' time, people offered the sacrifices according to the law every year. Why did they do that? Because they knew they sinned. Each time they offered the sacrifices, they remembered they were sinners. It never ends.

The law gives us a guilty feeling and a sense of incomplete task. The law shows what is right to do. But we must understand that the law is not able to change us, it doesn't have power to transform us. The law shows you are a sinner. That's all.

So we are hopeless. But there is good news. God did an amazing thing for us.

3. Great exchange

2 Cor. 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

At the cross of Jesus a great exchange took place.

Jesus is the true God (1 John 5:20). He has perfect holiness, righteousness and goodness. Of course he never sins nor disobeys God. He has perfect harmony and love relationship with the Father. Let's look at what he did for us:

Heb. 9:12

¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Heb. 10:14

¹⁴ ... by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Jesus became the sacrifice for sinners, you and me. It happened on the cross. On the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matt. 27:46)." Jesus was forsaken by God on our behalf. The cross is not the sign of Christianity, or popular design for church building, or jewellery. It is a death penalty tool.

Isaiah 53:3-6

³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

On the cross, Jesus received all God's wrath. The cost of our sin was paid completely. The demand of the law was satisfied perfectly.

How can it happen to us? Through faith in him, we receive the righteousness of God.

Rom. 3:22

²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.

When God looks at a man who is in Christ Jesus, He sees the righteousness that Jesus had -- the absolute, perfect and complete righteousness of God Himself. Thereby man is acceptable in God's sight. God does not see him as a sinner but as a 100% righteous man who has fulfilled all of the holy law of God without falling short in any point.

We can stand before God because the price for sin has been completely paid by Jesus. We are seen as innocent and righteous before the throne of God. When He looks on us, God sees the righteousness of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

The cross of Jesus makes us a person who is at the right standing position before God. Our righteousness depends on his cross. We receive righteousness by faith.

4. The righteous lives by faith

Gal. 3:11

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

It's clear that the righteous will live by faith, not by observing the law, because by the law everybody is equally a sinner before God. The righteous lives by faith. A person who believes what the Bible says, what God had done on the cross, and lives his life trusting in God, is the righteous before God.

God wants us to live with him. It's his desire to have close relationship with us. But without righteousness, we can't do that. That's why God paid the cost of our sin. He took the initiative for reconciliation. He took the action, not we, for our salvation. God the Father sent his only Son, Jesus as our Saviour who died on the cross for our sin. Jesus, God himself became human and came to us. He called us back to him, invited us to his kingdom as his people.

Actually we had no way to come back to him. No way to be forgiven. So Jesus became our salvation, because it's his desire to have close relationship with us.

For us, humans the relationship with God is very important.

No. 1. We are created as relational beings. God created human in his image. God is Trinity: God the Father, the Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God has relationship in Trinity. We were created in his image. We are created as relational beings.

No. 2, Without love, we can't live, we can't be human.

Relationship is about love. We learn about love through our relationship, between parents and children, between husband and wife, between friends, so on so. But the problem is all of us are perfectly imperfect. In the relationship, we learn about love and about hurt.

God is love. He is perfect love. Only in the relationship with God, we can experience true love, pure love, experience to be loved unconditionally. As a response to his love, we love him. Then, we will learn to love.

In human relationships, we experience not only love but also hurt. But we continue to have the relationship with others because we know we are loved by God. We know our love is growing. "The righteous will live by faith." We have faith that God loves me perfectly. I have the right relationship with him because of Jesus. "The righteous will live by faith."

Some people might think this way, "To believe Jesus is the starting point of a Christian life. After that, whether I achieve righteousness or not, all depend on my hard work." I don't know how they got this idea, but I know it's not in the Bible, because the Bible says "The righteous will live by faith." We can't do anything for our salvation. Moreover, the salvation is completed on the cross. There is nothing we should add for our salvation.

To try to achieve righteousness by observing the law means to fall away from grace, Jesus (Gal. 5:4). If you fall away from Jesus, how can you have relationship with him? It's impossible to remain in him while you are away from him. God wants us to believe in him, entrust him and come close to him through faith in him. (Heb. 10:22)

Through the Word of God, receiving the work of the Holy Spirit, we can understand our actual situation. And it guides us to the real hope. We will come into grace by faith.

We will experience his perfect love daily. We receive his love, we learn his love, and his love will be formed in us. And his love will flow out through us, among us.

We came into his love by faith. We have the relationship with him by faith. We will live this new life by faith. In the relationship with him, our broken parts will be restored, our hurt will be healed, our immature emotion will be mature, and our small love will grow. The kingdom of God will be revealed through us, and among us. It's all the work of God. "The righteous will live by faith."

5. Abide in Jesus' love

John 15:9 (NASB)

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

The Father loves Jesus by his perfect love. Jesus loves us in the same way the Father loves him. It's not about the future. It has started already and will never fade away.

And we are told "Abide in My love." It's not to study about God's love intellectually. It's to stay in his love, to be in his love and receive his love, to keep the love relationship and experience his love.

When does he love us? Dose he say "After you do this and that, I will love you."? Or, dose he say "If you become a person like this or that, I may love you."? No. He said "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you." He loves us, you and me even while we were sinners, when we were weak and the enemy of God (Rom. 6:6-10). He always loves us.

How does Jesus love us? He loves us just as the Father loves Jesus. That means, he loves us in perfect, complete, glorious, eternal love. It's a ridiculous idea to go back to the law, the old husband, in order to please Jesus, a new husband. Actually there is nothing we can do in order to gain his love for us. All we can do is to abide in his love.

The Triune God has perfect unity and love relationship. It is the sovereignty of God. The Church, all assembly of believers, is going to be welcomed into that perfect unity and love relationship for eternity as his bride.

It's a quite risky idea because all humans are sinners. Their relationships are broken. They hurt each other. They don't know how to reconcile. If they joined the relationship of the Triune God, that perfect unity and harmony might become messy. Why does God want human to come into the relationship? That is because He loves us!

This is the plan of the sovereign God, and humans need to respond to Him because it is the love relationship between bride and groom.

Righteousness is the matter of relationship. It's not just relationship between you single person and God, but it is your relationship with others and with yourself. If you don't understand about righteousness, you can't have healthy relationship with God, with others, and with yourself.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21)"

"The righteous will live by faith. (Gal. 3:11)"

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. (John 15:9, NASB)"