

2017 Q4 The Book of Romans - Lesson 4

Justification By Faith

To be perfectly honest, I have found this quarterly to be a challenge thus far...and I found this week's lesson to be a challenge. And one of the reasons I feel so strongly about this is illustrated by this letter the ministry recently received:

"Dear Dr. Jennings, Just finishing reading The God-Shaped Heart and have such a sense of relief on the one hand and a sense of being cheated by our church for 77 years not knowing the real character of God. The importance was always placed on a checklist instead of His character. What a relief to know the TRUTH! I'm sharing information about the book with others."

I relate to so much of this - the relief and gratitude and sense of being cheated and sadness for many missed opportunities.

"There is something wrong in Christianity. God's law of love - his design protocols on which reality is built to operate - has been replaced with a fallen human-law construct, and god has been falsely presented as a punishing dictator...and one who needs to be appeased, at the worst, even with the blood of his own son in order to survive His wrath. This idea, above all others, is at the root of Christianity's impotence, its inability to connect to the power of God for real healing and transformation of the heart." *The God-Shaped Heart* (Jennings, 2017).

And if you had any doubts about if or how deep this infection runs in Christianity, and even in our own denomination...this lesson and this quarterly should provide some evidence.

And if you think this is something new or that the church didn't used to teach how this false law construct and penal substitution theology hardens hearts and prevents real heart transformation from taking place (having a form of godliness but no power), one of the founders of our church describes it this way:

"Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth. The stirring testimonies of reproof and warning do not arouse them to repentance. The sweetest melodies that come from God through human lips—**justification by faith**, and the righteousness of Christ—do not call forth from them a response of love and gratitude. Though the heavenly Merchantman displays before them the richest jewels of faith and love, though He invites them to buy of Him “gold tried in the fire,” and white raiment” that they may be clothed, and “eye salve” that they may see, they steel their hearts against Him, and fail to exchange their lukewarmness for love and zeal. While

making a profession, they deny the power of godliness. If they continue in this state, God will reject them. They are unfitting themselves to be members of His family. {CCh 67.3}

The memory text is a familiar one from Romans 3:28:

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

What does it mean to be “justified”?

- 1) Having a good, legitimate reason for something,
- 2) show that something is reasonable, right, or true,
- 3) printed on a page so that the letters at the right or left edge form a straight line,
- 4) **declared** or made righteous in the sight God.

In fact, this is from www.biblestudytools.com:

“Justification is the declaring of a person to be just or righteous. It is a legal term signifying acquittal...”

Accordingly it is not surprising that salvation is often viewed in legal terms. Justification points to the acquittal of one who is tried before God. And in Scripture it is not too much to say that righteousness is basically a legal term. The law that mattered was, of course, the law of God, so that righteousness signified conformity to the law of God...which, of course, it does - but ONLY if you correctly understand God’s law. We’ll talk more about the possible meanings of justify in Tuesday’s lesson.

What about the reference to “the law” in our memory text - which law?

I believe this is talking about the actual, codified moral law - the MRI-ish diagnostic instrument designed to reveal/highlight/pinpoint our disease, but has no power to heal or save.

Why was this Justification by Faith concept so revolutionary - both in Christ’s day and in Martin Luther’s Reformation?

Compared to the Jewish leadership’s corrupt temple practices in Christ’s day and the Catholic Church’s corrupt practices of indulgences in Luther’s day...of course the concept of justification by faith and trust in God alone was revolutionary!

These paragraphs in Saturday’s lesson kind of set the tone for this week’s lesson and kind of give you an idea of where we’re headed:

“The phrase [justification by faith] itself is a figure based on law. The transgressor of the law comes before a judge and is condemned to death for his transgressions. But a substitute appears and takes the transgressor’s crimes upon himself, thus clearing the criminal. By accepting the substitute, the criminal now stands before the judge, not only cleared of his guilt but also

regarded as never having committed the crimes for which he was first brought into court. And that's because the substitute—who has a perfect record—offers the pardoned criminal his own perfect law keeping. In the plan of salvation, each of us is the criminal. The Substitute, Jesus, has a perfect record, and He stands in the court in our stead—His righteousness accepted in place of our unrighteousness. Hence, we are justified before God, not because of our works but because of Jesus, whose righteousness becomes ours when we accept it “by faith.”

Talk about good news! In fact, the news can't get any better than that.

SUNDAY

The Deeds of the Law

Sunday's lesson takes a bit of an about face here with what I believe is some very accurate and well-stated analysis of the moral law's functional role and what it was designed to do:

“To be under the law means to be under its jurisdiction – [what is the jurisdiction of the law of love]? The law, however, reveals a person's shortcomings and guilt before God. The law cannot remove that guilt; what it can do is lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it. This [moral] law can't save us any more than the system of Judaism could save the Jews. To save a sinner is not the moral law's function. Its function is to reveal God's character and to show people wherein they fall short of reflecting that character - it is a diagnostic instrument. The law can no more save us than the symptoms of a disease can cure the disease. The symptoms don't cure; they point out the need for the cure. That's how the [moral] law functions.”

YES!!

MONDAY

The Righteousness of God

At first appearance, Monday's lesson appears to take bit of a sharp turn back toward the penal model, but I want to dig into the Selected Messages quote in the middle of the page. Did this quote give anyone else more than a moment's pause? It says,

“Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the merits of Christ, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.” —Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 367.

Then the lesson asks, “How can you learn to accept this wonderful truth for yourself?”

Well, that one kinda threw me for a loop! I'm thinking wait a sec...that sounded like straight-up penal substitution...and I'm thinking wow that does not fit in or coincide with lots of other stuff I've read written by this same author.

So, you know that this ministry has never, ever wanted to tell folks what to think, but simply wants to get people TO think and to learn how to think for themselves. You may also remember a couple of times in this class when Dr. Jennings has walked us step-by-step through the process he goes through when trying to unpack a tough scripture or a tough quote like this. Well, apparently I need a couple more lessons, because when I was preparing for this lesson and read this quote, I sent Tim an email with the subject line that read simply, "HELP!!!" and asked him for some advice on how to walk through this quote using the natural law/healing remedy model instead of the penal model. I found this methodology so helpful, I thought maybe it would be useful for you too, so I want to share with you what he shared with me.

- The first thing to do when confronted with such a quote is to go to the source and read it in context (which makes perfect sense), so here is the quarterly's quote expanded for context:

"Without the grace of Christ, the sinner is in a hopeless condition; nothing can be done for him; but through divine grace, supernatural power is imparted to the man, and works in mind and heart and character. It is through the impartation of the grace of Christ that sin is discerned in its hateful nature, and finally **driven *from the soul temple***. It is through grace that we are brought into fellowship with Christ, to be associated with Him in the work of salvation. Faith is the condition upon which God has seen fit to promise pardon to sinners; not that there is any virtue in faith whereby salvation is merited, but because faith can lay hold of the merits of Christ, the remedy provided for sin. Faith can present Christ's perfect obedience instead of the sinner's transgression and defection. When the sinner believes that Christ is his personal Saviour, then, according to His unfailing promises, God pardons his sin, and justifies him freely. The repentant soul realizes that his justification comes because Christ, as his substitute and surety, has died for him, is his atonement and righteousness. {1SM 366.3} Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:3-5). Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law; but he is incapable of rendering it (this should remind you of another familiar quote...we'll look at it in a sec). The only way in which he can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can bring to God the **merits of Christ**, and the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the **sinner's account**. [Keep some of these key terms in mind so we can define and decode them here in a bit] Christ's righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and God receives, pardons, justifies, the repentant, believing soul, treats him as though he were

righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son. This is how faith is accounted righteousness; and the pardoned soul goes on from grace to grace, from light to a greater light. He can say with rejoicing, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). {1SM 367.1}

It already sounds better when read in context, right?

Several points—

- God communicates to people where they are
 - just as you would speak and communicate differently to your two-year-old child than you would to your teenage child, right?

Understanding the limits of cognitive abilities, comprehension, and maturity impact what and how we communicate - just as does when dealing with spiritual matters.

- There is one truth, but there are many ways to express it
 - and people at different moral levels are spoken to differently. EGW here is speaking to people here who are still stuck in the false law thinking. Yet she is trying to lead them out of it. Jesus used similar techniques in many of His parables. This all becomes clear when we “decode” some of the key words.
- What are the “**merits of Christ**”?
 - These are the traits of character, i.e. the *perfect* character Christ has developed (as stated in DA 762). His new, perfect, human character is the remedy - the character He has promised to reproduce in us! Did you notice early in the quote where sin is being driven from? Not from record books, but from the **soul temple**, but how? By the application of the merits (which is the character) of Christ! Yet later the quote mentions merits being placed to the **sinners account**?

Okay, in heaven what is it that's being recorded in the heavenly records? All of our sinful deeds?

“Remember, your character is being daguerreotyped [photographed] by the great Master Artist in the record books of heaven, as minutely as the face is reproduced upon the polished plate of the artist. What do the books of heaven say in your case? Are you conforming your character to the Pattern, Jesus Christ? Are you washing your robes of character and making them white in the blood of the Lamb? "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" [Revelation 22:12]. . . . {TSB}

62.1}

So, when we have faith (trust) in Jesus and open the heart, the Holy Spirit takes what Christ achieved (His merits—His perfect character) and writes or applies it to our hearts and minds (Heb 8 - I will write my law on your hearts and minds).

It is then (and only then) placed to our sinners account - because the only way the records in heaven change is by **changing our characters on earth.**

Now combine this quote with one of our favorites from DA 762

“The law requires...righteousness, a righteous life, a perfect character; and this man has not to give. He cannot meet the claims of God’s holy law. But Christ, coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a **perfect character**. These (merits!) He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty. Thus the very righteousness of the law is fulfilled in the believer in Christ. God can ‘be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus’.”

- Combine these quotes and you realize that we have remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God—not through some legal action, thus the ***pardon*** mentioned in the original quote is not a legal court action, but the reality that God doesn’t hold our sins against us and never has.
- But our minds have feared this, like Adam running and hiding in Eden - and thus we needed to be reassured that God is not holding it against us and therefore we are told that God pardons us, but only if we are truly healed, because if we refuse to be healed He doesn’t say, “the laws upon which I have constructed life to operate are suspended and you in your fear and selfishness are going to be healthy anyway - **he can’t do that!**”

Oh my word, I love every bit of that analysis! How much differently does that quote read now?

TUESDAY

By His Grace

The quarterly points out that the word “justify” is built on the same Greek word as “righteousness” - interesting, right? Is it reasonable that a term that means “being set right or right-i-fied” and a term that means “doing right because it is right” could come from the same Greek root word?

The lesson says,

“Hence, there is a close connection between ‘justification’ and ‘righteousness’”, but maybe not for the reasons stated in the quarterly. “We are justified when we are ‘declared righteous’ by God.”

Why do you think the lesson put “declared righteous” in quotes?

In my mind, the account of Abraham’s conversion tells a different story, and we heard a bit of it in the quotes we just read. Abraham trusted or believed God, and it was counted/accounted/imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Look at the order of events! Was he justified or set right when or because God declared him righteous? Or was his natural heart actually converted from distrust (or at enmity) toward God to a heart that trusts and is open to God - as it was originally designed.

And once his heart had been set right...or justified...then - and only then - did God declare him righteous - because he WAS! And because this is a ***REAL*** state, not a wink-wink-nudge-nudge “state” - an actual change of heart takes place - it’s not a “declaration”, it’s a real transformation...and because God is not a liar...He will not declare us to be righteous even though we are not.

He will not declare us to be healed and well even though we are still terminal.

Sadly, the quarterly doesn’t stop there:

“Before this justification a person is unrighteous and thus unacceptable to God; after justification he or she is regarded as righteous (whether it’s true or not) and thus acceptable to Him.”

What did God do after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden?

Is a sick patient “unacceptable” to a physician? Or is the disease or illness unacceptable to a physician?

WEDNESDAY

The Righteousness of Christ

Paul further expounds on the great news of salvation in Romans 3:25, using the fancy word “Propitiation”.

What is your first, reflex reaction when you hear the word propitiation?

Although I have now come to believe that the Bible does NOT teach penal substitution, is there any doubt why and how there is so much confusion with all the legal language and terminology used -

particularly in Romans and most of Paul's writings?

When you read the Bible, what language do you read it in?

If you read the Bible in English, then there is a translation bias toward legal language. When Constantine converted, Christianity accepted a change in the way it viewed God's law, away from the construction protocols for life and accepted the idea that God's law functions just like laws did in Imperial Rome.

Thus Christianity began seeing God as a legal dictator. ALL BIBLE TRANSLATIONS have been done AFTER Constantine converted. This means the translators, while sincere, all had preconceived ideas about the law being imposed and therefore, when they translated they projected legal language that was not in the original text.

This passage in Romans 3 is a classic example and is a favorite of the penal proponents. Listen to verses 23-25 in the KJV:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;"

Do you hear how this could sound like a legal problem and solution, with words like justification, atonement, justice, propitiation etc? Of course! This is because of the fact that the translations occurred after the infection of imposed law into Christianity, and also because in English our legal language has a Latin basis. But the Bible doesn't actually present a legal problem with a legal solution, it presents a problem of our actual terminal condition with a healing solution.

The Greek translated as either "sacrifice of atonement" or "propitiation" is the word hilasterion, which is the same word used for the lid to the ark of the covenant. Notice, this is not a legal word, it is a noun - the place of reconciliation - so, Jesus is the means and place of reconciliation or restoration to unity with God.

But when the translators interpreted the word they projected onto it what *THEY* believed happened at the mercy seat. And what did they believe happened? A legal process of expiation of sin by the sprinkling of blood.

In other words, they already had false ideas about God's law and what the plan of salvation is; believing in an imposed law, they falsely believed the plan was to take care of legal requirements, thus when they interpreted the word they added legal ideas not actually in the text. When one realizes God's law is not imperial, not imposed, but the protocols upon which life is built to operate, then one realizes that humankind is not in legal trouble, but suffering from a condition, a state of being, that is

terminal, out of harmony with God's design.

In this light one realizes God's plan of salvation is to heal and restore. Thus, the sprinkling of blood was not for the purpose of taking care of legal penalties, but for the purpose of cleansing and restoring, regenerating and recreating in righteousness.

The lesson couldn't be more obvious – according to Leviticus the life is in the blood— and thus in sprinkling the blood the priests were symbolically sharing the LIFE of Christ. The application of the blood is the pure life, or character of Christ, partaken of by the believer, which regenerates and transforms us.

Here is how this passage in Romans reads in Dr. Jennings' The Remedy paraphrase:

"3:21 But now God has revealed, a healthy state of being – a character that is right and perfect in every way, that did not come from the written code, but is exactly what the Scriptures and the 10 Commandments were pointing your minds toward. 22 This perfect state of being comes from Christ and is created within us by God when we trust him. Our trust in him is established by the evidence given through Jesus Christ of his supreme trustworthiness. There is no difference amongst any ethnic group, 23 for all humanity is infected with the same disease of distrust, fear and selfishness, and are deformed in character and fall far short of God's glorious ideal for mankind. 24 Yet all, who are willing, are healed freely by God's gracious Remedy that has been provided by Jesus Christ. 25 God presented Jesus as the way and means of restoration. Now, through trust established by the evidence of God's character revealed when Christ died, we may partake of the Remedy procured by Christ. God did this to demonstrate he is right and good, because in his forbearance he suspended, for a time, the ultimate consequence of being out of harmony with how he designed life to exist and has been falsely accused of being unfair. 26 So, he did it to demonstrate how right and good he is at the present time, so he would be seen as being right when he heals those who trust in Jesus."

Can you hear the difference in these two versions of the same scripture?

[Pink Box] Satan, likely, expected God to destroy the world after it sinned; instead, God sent Jesus to save it. What does that tell us about the character of God? How should our knowledge of His character impact how we live?

THURSDAY

Without the Deeds of the Law

Apparently Ellen G. White was asked the question, "What is justification by faith?" She gave an interesting answer when she wrote:

“It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 456.

Paul’s point is that although obedience to the law is not the means of justification, the person who is justified by faith still keeps the law of God and, in fact, is the only one who can keep the law.

An unregenerate person who has not been justified can never fulfill the requirements of the law. Which law?

Again, the order of events is this: the kindness of God leads us to repentance - the truth about his character of love and His trustworthiness wins us back to trust. When we are won back to trust, our hearts are set right - back to His original design (justification by faith!) - then we open our hearts to him and He pours out his Holy Spirit and we get a heart transplant - He reproduces the perfect character Christ achieved through His life, death, and resurrection in us.

“By His perfect obedience He has made it possible for every human being to obey God's commandments. When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah. {COL 311.4}

[REPEATED] And if you wonder if or how this false law construct and penal substitution theology hardens hearts and prevents real heart transformation from taking place (having a form of godliness but no power), one of the founders of our church describes it this way:

“Today a large part of those who compose our congregations are dead in trespasses and sins. They come and go like the door upon its hinges. For years they have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not put them in practice. Therefore they are less and less sensible of the preciousness of truth. The stirring testimonies of reproof and warning do not arouse them to repentance. The sweetest melodies that come from God through human lips—**justification by faith**, and the righteousness of Christ—do not call forth from them a response of love and gratitude. Though the heavenly Merchantman displays before them the richest jewels of faith and love, though He invites them to buy of Him “gold tried in the fire,” and white raiment” that they may be clothed, and “eyesalve” that they may see, they steel their hearts against Him, and fail to exchange their lukewarmness for love and zeal. While making a profession, they deny the power of godliness. If they continue in this state, God will reject them. They are unfitting themselves to be members of His family. {CCh 67.3}