

May 5, 2019

## Lesson 10: Called to Righteousness

Scripture: Romans 3: 21-31

### **Context:**

For the month of May, our series dives into a book of the New Testament. The book of Romans is one of the most prolific when it comes to the theology of many Christian leaders and Christianity today. It is from Romans that we learn about faith, the atonement, and grace. It is not usually associated with the word “call,” but as we will discover, there are parts that speak to understanding our call from God.

Today’s lesson comes from chapter three and focuses on the sinful nature of humanity and the acceptance of God’s forgiving grace. As Paul moves deeper into his letter, he moves to a point that is to be repeated throughout Romans. There is a universal significance that no person can exempt themselves from the need for God’s generous restoration of his gracious lordship in Christ; not the Jews as a history of a chosen nation or the Gentiles of their undoubted moral accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> Whoever understands themselves as sinners understands that grace is the only means by which they are saved.

It is made clear through this pericope that one will have to have a position relationship with God on God’s terms. This means that bragging and using the law to flaunt our superiority is to be thrown out the window. We are reminded that humans do not get to make the rules for human living. We learn that human idolatry has no place in our relationship with God. The only way to God is through giving up our attempt to prove our worth by what we ourselves can accomplish in the matter of creating divinity.<sup>2</sup> We cannot achieve salvation on our own.

Paul speaks very eloquently that faith is what makes a person righteous. The point is driven home that the place of origin or background does not make a person righteous. Our passage from Romans gives the content by which we are to live our lives: namely we are to trust in God’s faithful goodness to us as his creatures.<sup>3</sup> All of us have been forgiven by God and we are allowed to always be in fellowship with God.

Paul closes with a line about circumcision to help connect with those circumcised that God is the one who makes people righteous. The Law is confirmed by faith and does not precede it. Paul is trying to make the point that trust in God precedes any other act that we think brings us closer to God.

### **Application**

As we read this passage, we are reminded that Paul is writing to a world that is complex. With the rise of the Roman Empire that overtook multiple countries and groups

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Romans,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1985), 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

of people, there were sure to be those who thought that their culture was the best. The beliefs they had were the best one and people were sure to let others know where they stood.

As you can tell, Paul's world and audience is not too different from the world we live in today. We live in a world that delights in people hurting one another and believing that their beliefs are superior to others. It does not matter one's profession, education level, socio-economic background, gender, or political affiliation. Everyone to a degree thinks their way of being or believing is superior to others. We are all sinners. Sometimes we all need a good spiritual check-up. If we find ourselves thinking that we are superior to someone else or speaking up about someone else's sin more than our own, we need to take a look in the mirror.

This passage in Romans makes it pretty clear that all of us are sinners and that we have all fallen short of God's glory. None of our achievements or backgrounds exempts us from that fact. Jesus is the one who paid for all of our sins and displayed the ultimate act of love. He showed us what it means to be righteous.

This passage reminds us that the forgiving grace of our Lord should inspire us to be humble. I have come to find in my own experiences that pride can often lead to our downfalls as well as that of others. When we think that we are somehow superior to others or that even our faith makes us somewhat better than others, we have completely misunderstood the Gospel. Mature disciples understand that following Jesus is not just an experience in which you realize certain things and that makes you a master. A mature disciple understands that every day is an opportunity to grow and that all of us have something to learn.

We are also reminded of the gift of faith. Faith is a gift that reminds us that we cannot achieve or earn God's love. As we have faith we are reminded that all the others things fade away. We don't see God as an ATM and we don't see the Law as something that protects us from the bad things in life. The Law, if we pay attention to the true measure of it, helps us understand how to respond in faith. For example, when Jesus says to love your neighbor, we trust that as we follow it in faith, God will do great things.

How do you see yourself as a sinner? Who do you find yourself thinking that you are better than in your world? How do you understand the word righteous? How do you feel God's grace in your life? When do you give yourself a spiritual check-up to see where you are in how you relate to God and to others? What helps you to remember about the gift of faith? How do you practice humility in your walk with Christ?

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