

Lesson #3 – The Principles Related to a Correct View of Righteousness

Introduction

- A. This great subject of spiritual growth is Biblically based on a number of important truths. Probably the first in that list would be the deep concern God has for each of us. There is no question but that He seeks to lead us into a growing experience of spiritual progress.
 - B. We all understand that this growth is not automatic. There are spiritual principles which must be understood and implemented by the choices of faith and love. Spiritual progress is a by-product which accompanies our obedience. It is a manifestation of God's blessing upon us.
 - C. This is not to imply that this is easy. Too often we do not want to do the will of God. Many times we are seemingly, unable to obey. All of us have problems from our past that make it difficult to live the way we should. All of us fail, in some way, to understand the Biblical life of faith. We should not allow ourselves to be hindered by these factors. We must make the right choices, we must pray, seek the truth found in the Bible, be willing to change, be willing to receive help from one another, and most of all we must be willing to work at this continually and do it patiently.
 - D. In this lesson before us we wish to consider a very important principle related to spiritual growth. Our theme is related to the believer's commitment to righteousness.
- I. The Description of the Spiritual Believer.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

A. The righteousness of the spiritual believer.

1. His gift of imputed righteousness.

- a. Before receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior all of us were totally without any righteous standing before God.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags Isaiah 64:6

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.
Romans 3:10

Observation: Because we are sinners before God and the effects of sin has permeated into all that we do - it is absolutely impossible for the non-Christian to perform any acts of righteousness which would cause him to merit the grace or salvation of God.

b. God has provided righteousness for us in Jesus Christ.

For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Romans 8:3,4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Romans 10:4

Observation: Because we did not and could not keep the law of God (be perfectly obedient), Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law of God for us (Matt. 5:17). In His life of obedience (Romans 5:19) and His death under the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) He obtained full and complete righteousness and pardon for all who believe upon Him (Gal. 4:4,5). When the Bible speaks of "justification" that term indicates all of this provision of the Lord Jesus that has been freely given to every believer. We now stand before God as having completely paid for our transgressions of the law and having lived in complete obedience to the law. This, in part, is what Paul meant when he described us as "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10).

2. His life of righteousness.

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you.

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. Romans 6:17,18

Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. Titus 2:12

If ye know that He (Jesus Christ) is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him. I John 2:29

Observation: In the new birth the believer received the ability to obey God and thereby live a life characterized by righteousness. In all simplicity this means to "do what is right". When we seek to honor God in our daily life and choose to obey His Word and do the "right" we know we are pleasing God. The importance of living this way cannot be overemphasized. It is this daily righteousness that the Lord Jesus had in mind when He spoke of it so highly in the last beatitude.

B. The motivation and goal of the spiritual believer.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

1. These verses explain why the spiritual believer lives the way he does. To do what is "right" and thereby be "righteous" in a given situation is more important than anything he could gain in that circumstance by being "unrighteous". Even more motivating and compelling than his commitment to righteousness is doing what is "right" because of the Lord Jesus Christ. The persecution which may come to this person is because of his adherence to the Lord Jesus and His teaching.
 2. When an individual is motivated by righteousness and has the goal in his life to live for the Lord Jesus Christ - it is an indication of a basic reversal of character.
 - a. The clearest manifestation of the Fall of Man is seen in the constant, persistent, all-pervasive, commitment to a selfish, self-centered manner of life. The non-Christian, even in his better moments of humanitarianism, is a person dedicated to the belief that he is his own authority, motivation, and goal.
 - b. Instead of living for himself - the spiritual believer will live a righteous life - for the sake of Jesus Christ. All of this is a manifestation of the power of the new birth.
- C. The meaning of righteousness for the spiritual believer.
1. This eighth beatitude should be looked upon as a summary explanation of the other seven. It is an illustration of how each beatitude exemplifies what it means to "do what is right".
 2. The explanation, by the Lord Jesus Christ, of what it means to be a righteous person.
 - a. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by arrogance, self-sufficiency, and self-exaltation he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to be "poor in spirit".
 - b. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by a calloused indifference to truth, the feelings and needs of others, and there is a rejoicing in that which is evil - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to "mourn".
 - c. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by pride, haughtiness, and self-centeredness - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to be "meek".
 - d. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by wrong priorities, false goals, and self-centered lust - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to "hunger and thirst after righteousness".
 - e. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by the lack of compassion, grudges, bitterness, and the planned manipulation of people - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to be "merciful".

- f. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by the deceitfulness of unholy temptation and selfish lust - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to be "pure in heart".
 - g. When the spiritual believer is faced with a situation in life which is characterized by the conflict between people, by enmity, gossip, bitterness, and planned revenge - he will manifest the attitude and actions which indicate that he understands what it means to be a "peacemaker".
3. These seven "life-situations" are presented to us as our pattern of life and to explain the meaning of "righteousness".
- a. All too often our "righteousness" has never gotten beyond the talking stage. We must repent and renounce this way of living.
 - b. We must ask if this pattern of righteousness is in any way an explanation of our own life?

II. The Occasion of this Pronounced Blessing upon the Spiritual Believer.

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their*s is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

A. The spiritual believer may be persecuted for "righteousness¹ sake".

1. The real cause of persecution may not be the virtue of the believer as he lives according to truth, love, and holiness. Such a life would be acceptable even to the non-Christian.
2. The Apostle John reminded us that "... men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). When such a person lives in the presence of one who loves truth and whose life is characterized by righteousness - the lover of darkness will be irritated with and will rise up against the lover of light.
3. We must never forget that the most evil person has a knowledge of right and wrong (Romans 2:14,15) and is under some sense of conviction concerning his life (John 16:8-11). This causes him to dislike the one who lives a life of righteousness.
4. In this regard the Bible reminds us that people can be easily motivated by Satan himself to speak against and to attack those who are a threat to his kingdom of darkness. (Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 12:10,11)
5. One very evident reason why the righteous are persecuted is that they are "different". The spiritual believer does not live in harmony with the culture of this world nor does he enjoy its entertainment. He is not a part of this world system.

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. John 15:19

6. We must make very sure that we are not rejected because of our bigotry, our obnoxious ways, our pride, our self-righteousness, or our offensive evangelism.

B. The spiritual believer may be persecuted for the "sake" of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The non-Christian is described in the Bible as being in a state of thinking and life in which he is at "enmity with God". Romans 8:7. While such a person may applaud the virtue and example of the Lord Jesus - his whole manner of life would lead him to reject the Savior and all who believe upon Him.

2. This is the basic reason for persecution. The kingdom of this world is dead set against the kingdom of Heaven. All true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must be willing to endure the enmity which is aimed at the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The Apostle Paul stated this truth clearly.

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. Phil. 1:29

III. The Promised Blessing of the Spiritual Believer.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

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Rejoice, and he exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

A. The promised blessing stated: "Blessed".

1. This pronouncement of divine favor upon those persecuted for righteousness and their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is an indication of what great value exists in the life of the spiritual believer. Nothing is more important than the new birth and the life it produces. Such a person lives with the hand of God upon him.

2. This study in the Bible of the blessing of- God is very encouraging for the spiritual believer. God has pronounced His blessing upon all those facets of life which are in harmony with His character and will.

3. When a believer will choose to live according to truth, love, and holiness and do the will of God it is evident that his life will manifest the "blessed attitudes" in the passage before us. He will thereby inherit all the "blessing" God has pronounced upon these virtues.

4. Everyone will recognize the profound implications of this promise. What could be more valuable, more important, more worthwhile than to be a person upon whom God has pronounced His blessing? This would mean that God intended To be merciful, gracious, and protective toward that individual. It would mean that his endeavors would be successful. Assurance, certainty, comfort, and enablement would characterize his life.

5. To some degree every believer lives under the "blessing" of God. But it is evident from life and particularly the Bible that many Christians lack the manifestations of this divine blessedness. We must ask whether we understand what it means to be "poor in spirit", to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" and to seek the will of God so that it will make a difference in how we live.

B. The promised blessing explained.

1. The first explanation is to the effect that the "kingdom of heaven" belongs to those who are "*persecuted for righteousness' sake*".
 - a. What an assurance to know that we are a member of that kingdom which is not a part of this world.
 - b. This means that the resources of the kingdom of heaven, its future, its subjects, its promises, its protection, its duration are inseparably related to what it means for us to exist.
 - c. It is highly significant that the Lord Jesus stated their's is the kingdom of heaven". This goes beyond the mere announcement of membership, as great as that is, it is a clear expression of the great truth that the kingdom belongs to the spiritual believer. He has a right to its resources.
2. The second explanation of this promised blessing is found in the words, "*... great is your reward in heaven*".
 - a. This passage states a clear Biblical truth - the Christian who chooses to do what is "right" according to the Word of God is one who will be rewarded for such a life when he gets to heaven.
 - b. Many verses in the Bible testify to this interesting subject.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. II Cor. 5:10.
 - c. This comforting promise of reward comes to the spiritual believer as an added reminder that he has learned to live a life that God Himself counts important - so important that He promises reward.
 - d. It may be difficult to know what is meant by a "great reward". However, for God to call this "great" and to provide the gift for the believer that would be in harmony with his life of righteousness can only lead us to believe the "reward" will far surpass any expectation that we could imagine here.
 - e. Sometimes the earnest believer wonders if the serious attempt to live for God - in the midst of 'the' problems and pressures of life - is really worth it. All of these verses testify to the great truth that - it is worth it. God is worth it. His will is worth it. We must also say - we are worth it.

Conclusion: Note the divinely ordained relationship of the spiritual believer to the world.

A. He is the "salt of the earth". By his righteous life evil is checked and restricted. Matthew 5:13

B. He is the "light of the world". By his righteous life the truth is made known. Matthew 5:14