

Romans 10 & 11 – The Righteousness of God

One of the main themes of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, is that of the Righteousness of God being revealed. So it is that Romans chapter 3 describes how that the Righteousness of God is revealed outside the scope of the Law of Moses:

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God **without the law** is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Rom. 3:21).

From these words, we find that a person cannot earn salvation by works of law. As the Apostle goes on to say: “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (verse 23). No man can boast of their works before the Almighty, for there is no man who can justify himself by the deeds of the Law. As the Apostle declared elsewhere:

“a man is not justified through the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall not flesh be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

Abraham is a case in point: the Scripture testified of him that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). He was considered righteous not because of his works, but because of his faith, or belief in the promises that had been made to him.

LAW AND FAITH

Sometimes Law and Faith are seen as contradictory principles. Those who advocate that we are under some aspect of law are dubbed “legalists”, as distinct from those who believe in the gift of Grace. However, this is not how Scripture presents the case. According to the Bible, Faith is not something different to Law – in fact, it was a part of the Law under Moses. So our Master taught concerning the scribes and Pharisees: “ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, Judgment, Mercy, **and Faith**: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mat. 23:23). Faith, then, is something inherent in Divine Law – indeed, it is one of its “weightier matters”, according to Messiah. Again, the inspired Apostle concurs, saying in Romans chapter 3 (cited above) that “but now the righteousness of God **without the law** is manifested, being **witnessed by the law** and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Rom. 3:22).

So it is that God’s righteousness is extended to men outside of the confines of the Law – and it is this fact that the law itself witnessed to. The principles and ordinances of that Law all pointed forward to Messiah, and the salvation that would come through faith in him: “wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, **that** we might be justified through faith” (Gal. 3:24).

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS OF FAITH

Coming to consider our readings for today, in Romans chapters 10 and 11, we see the Righteousness of God in relation to Israel. Rather than to declare God’s righteousness, they sought to establish their own righteousness by good works: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about **to establish their own righteousness**, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3). They did not know God’s righteousness, and could not know it because of the hardness of their hearts.

There is an interesting description of the voice of unbelief in Job chapter 11. Here, the speaker is Zophar the Naamathite, who asked the rhetorical question: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven: what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know" (Job. 11:7-8). Here is the reasoning of men concerning the things of God: it is too deep to fathom, or too high above us to comprehend. But according to our reading in Romans 10, the voice of faith is very different:

"... the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart Who shall ascend into heaven? (That is, to bring Christ down from above:). Or who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:6-8).

In other words, we have no excuse not to believe. The understanding God is not something remote that we cannot attain to: "the word is nigh thee", and should be in our mouths and our hearts, so that we can glorify our Maker: "let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am Yahweh which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Yahweh" (Jer. 9:23-24).

The Word of life then, is "nigh" us, for us to believe (hearts) and confess (mouths) for the purposes of salvation. The faith that justifies comes through hearing that Word, but the difficulty is that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). But the Apostle continues to say in the next verse that "he that is spiritual judgeth all things ..." (1 Cor. 2:15). The question is, therefore, how can an ignorant natural man become a spiritual man who discerns the things of the spirit of God? The answer, we believe, is in Romans chapter 10:

"So then faith comes by hearing, **and hearing by the Word of God**" (Rom. 10:17)

This verse is often quoted to show how that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. But whilst, of course, that is true, that is not quite what these words say. The phrase is: "and hearing by the word of God". In other words, faith is a consequence of hearing – but hearing itself is something that comes from the Word of God. The ability to hear divine things itself comes "by the word of God". As the wise man Solomon has it:

"the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, **Yahweh hath made** even both of them" (Prov. 20:12).

The ability to transform a natural man who cannot receive Divine Truths into a spiritual man who discerns those things is invested in the Word itself. The more a person studies the Word, the more they learn, and the more their minds become attuned to Divine things. Yahweh opens the ear and the eye to perceive spiritual things by the means of the Word itself: i.e. hearing comes by the Word of God.

These principles come together in the Apocalypse:

"he that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7, see also verse 17).

Those who have developed a listening ear will be able to discern the meaning of the words of Scripture, and so become equipped to walk after the spirit and not the flesh.

BRANCHES BROKEN OFF

Romans chapter 11 continues to describe how that Israel, who were ignorant of the Righteousness of God – and therefore, did not have the faith that saves – were like branches of an olive tree, cut off from the main rootstock. Before we look at the principles behind their fall, and their restoration to Divine favour, we need to look at a background to this metaphor in Jeremiah chapter 11:

“Yahweh called thy name A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken” (Jer. 26:16).

Israel as a nation were like an olive tree, with prosperous branches yielding good fruit. And due to their lack of faith, the branches were broken off, and consumed in the fire. But the Olive Tree was not destroyed altogether: rather, more branches were grafted in to that tree, from another, wild olive tree. It might be said that the branches were broken off, that we, as wild olives, might be grafted in, and that we, therefore, are better than they. But the Apostle cautions us against this frame of mind:

“boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou barest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom. 11:18-22).

There are those who boast against the branches, claiming that Gentiles replace the Jews in the purpose of God. That than they are better than that nation, and that the Divine Purpose has ended with the Jews, and recommenced with the Gentiles instead. This is a philosophy called “replacement theology”, which denies the future involvement of the natural seed of Abraham in the promises that were made to him. But the Apostle who was in chains for “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20) affirms otherwise. According to his gospel, Israel shall be grafted back into the olive tree:

“... they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, ***shall be grafted in***; for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, ***until*** the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so ***all Israel shall be saved***: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob ...”(Rom. 11:23-26).

Israel shall be saved with an everlasting salvation (Isa. 45:17), and it is that fact which grants us Gentiles such a wonderful hope. Becoming part of the Israelitish rootstock, we become joined into the holy nation, and have a hope of being part of their restoration. As the Apostle again declares:

“... if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, ***but life from the dead?***” (Rom. 11:15).

So it will be that when the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, blind Israel will be caused to see, and be grafted back into the rootstock of their Olive Tree.

THE OFFERING UP OF MESSIAH

When we consider the declaration, or manifestation of the Righteousness of God, we would be very negligent if we did not consider the offering up of Messiah. He is the one of whom it was said that:

“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; **To declare**, I say, at this time **his righteousness**: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25-26).

In Jesus crucified, we see the righteousness of God declared, as the basis upon which our sins might be forgiven. But not just ours: the sins of Israel of old also: “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4), and so the Master is “the mediator of the new testament that by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament**, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

Even those who lived under the Mosaic code did not have their sins taken away by the offering up of bulls and goats. The efficacy of Messiahs’ offering up extends backwards as well as forwards in time, and so holy men of old were forgiven upon the basis of what Jesus would accomplish in his sacrifice in the future.

In declaring Yahweh’s Righteousness, Messiah fulfilled the spirit of Christ in the Psalmist:

“they that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: **then I restored that which I took not away**” (Psa. 69:4).

The righteousness of God was restored by Messiah, forming a basis for the forgiveness of our sins. When we consider the suffering saviour, we see in him an example for us to follow: an example of one who was altogether righteous in all his ways. Let us therefore heed that example, and look to him as the extension of Yahweh’s grace and mercy. Not seeking our own righteousness, we look to better days to come, when all the earth will ultimately be filled with the glory of Yahweh even as the waters cover the sea.

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