

THE REQUIREMENT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

Last week we spent a considerable amount of time looking at what the Bible has to say about Abraham's nephew Lot. God through Peter called Lot a "righteous" man 3 times, but when we looked at his life as recorded in Genesis, we didn't see much in the way of **godly living**. In fact, if it weren't for God's declaration in the NT that Lot was righteous, we probably would not have guessed that he was. He not only lived in the wicked city of Sodom, he "sat in the gate"—meaning he had a place of prominence in the city. Pretty safe to say that he did not get this place of importance by faithfully and frequently reminding them about their sin! On top of that, he referred to the men of the city as "brethren" and was even willing to give up his own daughters to be abused by them!

There was a "disconnect," wasn't there, between what God *said* of Lot and how Lot **lived**. Did it matter that Lot did not live like a man of God? After all, the Lord knoweth them that are His and He will rightly sort it all out at the end. Isn't that all that really matters?

No; it matters how we live and we noticed last week that there were consequences for the way Lot lived. Lot's sons in law **perished** when the city was destroyed because they did not believe Lot when he warned them of God's coming judgment. Lot's two daughters and wife did leave the city, but his wife turned back—and became a pillar of salt—because her love for Sodom was greater than her love for God. And I can't help but think that Lot was haunted by the fact that there were people he knew besides his sons in law that he failed to influence and they, too, were destroyed.

I don't want to be misunderstood so listen carefully—I'm not suggesting that you or I can "save" anyone from God's judgment because we can't. But God **expects** His children to live a certain way and reminds us of that throughout His Word. Here are just a few of those reminders:

Ephesians 4:1 "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye **walk worthy** of the vocation wherewith ye are called,"

Titus 2:11-12 "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, **we should live soberly, righteously, and godly**, in this present world;

I Peter 1:15-16 "But as he which hath called you is holy, so **be ye holy in all manner of conversation**;

¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

Although Lot didn't live a godly and holy life, God still called him *righteous*. Why is that? On what basis did God call him righteous? Since we spent so much time on Lot's background last week, I want to dig into these questions a little bit more this morning.

1. The reality of our unrighteousness

Please take your Bibles and turn to Romans 3, beginning with verse 9. Notice first, this is a...

A. Description of all (vs 9-18)

--v 9 "proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are **all** under sin"

Physically speaking, there are two people groups in God's mind—those who trace their ancestry back to Abraham and those who don't. If you can trace your ancestry back to Abraham you are a Jew; everyone else is a Gentile. Both groups are under sin—they are sinful in the sight of God.

--v 10 "None righteous, no, not one." Everyone is sinful—there are no exceptions!

--v 11 "None that understand; none that seeketh God." Some of you might be thinking, 'Wait a minute, I'm seeking God.' If you are seeking God it is because God is *seeking you* and drawing you to Himself or it is because you are a child of God and God the HS is in you.

--v 12 "They are all gone out of the way..." "there is NONE that doeth good, no, not one."

--v 13 (middle) "with their tongues they have used deceit..." What does that mean? It means they have told lies. Who has told lies? All Jews and all Gentiles; in other words, everyone. Remember that for later... --v 23 says it again "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Make no mistake—God's description of us is that every one of us is a sinner in His sight and we all fall short—we fail to reach—the standard that He requires of us!

B. Declaration of judgment upon all (v 19)

Not only have all sinned, all will face the **judgment of God** because of that sin. Notice the middle of verse 19 "...that **every** mouth may be stopped, and **all the world** may become guilty before God." All the world—all sinners—are subject to the judgment of God. Much could be said about the judgment of God; notice **Revelation 20:12-13** "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the **dead were judged** out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works**.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and **they were judged every man according to their works**."

The reality of our unrighteousness is this: we are all declared to be sinners that will face the judgment of God. If that is not bad enough, consider....

2. The necessity for us to be righteous

What is required for us to enter heaven? In a nutshell—**sinless perfection**. In other words, we have to be as righteous—as perfect—as God is! Does it say that in the Bible? It certainly does! Notice on your sheet:

Habakkuk 1:13 "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:"

God is perfect and God and sin don't mix; they can't dwell together; they can't be in the same place.

Revelation 21:8 "But the fearful, and **unbelieving**, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and **all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Revelation 21:27 "And there shall in **no wise** enter into it **any thing** that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or **maketh a lie**: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

If we have lied once, we are a liar—and no liars are allowed entrance into heaven. Lying, of course, is not the only sin that disqualifies us from heaven. Any sin—even if we only committed one—keeps us out of heaven.

James 2:10 says "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Consider this sobering thought: to be righteous in the sight of God means we would have to figure out a way to "un-do"—or pay for—all of the past sins we've done and **never, ever** add anymore new ones.

Maybe this illustration will help. Last summer (and fall and almost winter 😊), we put beautiful white siding on half of our building and—if all goes as planned—the other half of the building will be done yet this fall. Why white? Did we intentionally pick white because it shows dirt the most? No; we chose white because it is more "church-like." Why is white more "church-like?" Because white is the best representation of the perfection and purity of Christ.

Now, suppose the state of Wisconsin decided to have a "White as Snow" competition among all the white church buildings. Their goal was simple—inspect all the white church buildings in the state of Wisconsin and determine which ones were as "white as snow." If **we** were to enter the competition, there would be two obstacles:

- 1) How to get all the existing dirt off the siding and make it as clean as it was when we took it out of the box

- 2) How to keep it from getting dirty once we got it perfectly clean

Would anyone in their right minds even want to participate in such a competition? I certainly wouldn't! Why? Because it is hard to make siding as white as snow? No; it's not hard—it is **impossible!**

God's requirement for entrance into heaven is that **we be as perfect as He is**, as white as snow. Imagine being given a box with a brand new, perfectly white robe. On the outside of the box you read these words: 'To enter heaven, you must wear this robe—and keep it perfectly white.' As you open the box and pull the robe out, a small white piece of paper falls to the ground. You put on the robe and stand before the mirror to admire it, but to your dismay black specks start appearing on your spotless robe. You grab the small piece of paper that had fallen to the ground and read these words: 'All your past sins will show up as specks on your robe. You must remove them—and not get anymore new ones—in order to get into heaven.'

What do you do? Sadly, here's what many people do—they make a decision to “turn over a new leaf” and stop sinning, then set out to do whatever they can in the way of “good works” in hopes of getting rid of their past sins. Does that work? It doesn't, does it? How do we know? Because God's Word says that it doesn't!

Let's consider that very thing, ...

3. The futility of trying to obtain our own righteousness

How futile—how pointless and impossible—is it to try to get rid of our past sins and prevent future ones? As pointless as it is to attempt to make our building as white as snow!

This past Monday, several of us were here making flower gardens out of railroad ties. Our goal was to cover up some of the foundation that doesn't look so nice by hiding it with dirt and flowers. One of our dilemmas was where we wanted the rain to land when it dripped off the roof—on the railroad tie, outside the railroad tie, or on the dirt inside the railroad tie. After some discussion, we decided to have the rain land on the dirt inside tie w/the thought that when the flowers come up, it will stop the dirt from splashing up onto the siding.

We planted flowers on Monday—and it rained on Tuesday! What stopped the dirt from splashing up onto the siding when the rain landed on it? **Absolutely nothing!** So on Wednesday I asked the deacons what they thought of getting some of the stone that had been offered and lay it on the inside edge of the railroad ties where the rain would land on it. They agreed so on Friday I went and got some and made about a 6-inch border of stone along the inside edge of the ties. It looks really nice and hopefully will do what it is supposed to—stop dirt from splashing up onto the white siding. Even if it “does the trick” and keeps the siding from getting dirty in the future, it didn't do anything to clean the already-dirty siding.

So I got buckets of water—and a brush—and attempted to wash the dirt off the siding. I tried a variety of methods and did get it looking significantly better than how it was when I started. There were some frustrations, though.

--I would scrub with the brush and pour water down the side, only to have some dirt splash back up.

--Then I would get the brush too low and get dirt on it and put dirt on the siding.

--And then I saw “old” dirt that was obviously on the siding before the last rain and tried to get that off.

--I even noticed some old smudge prints that we probably got on the siding when we were nailing it on! I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but if you were to go outside right now and inspect my work, how many of you would expect to find a perfectly clean building with *no* dirt spots whatsoever? None of you would expect that, would you? Why? Because we already know that perfectly white siding is not possible!

How hard would it be to “clean up” our own lives to get rid of our past sins and stop ourselves from committing new ones? As impossible as it is to keep our building spotlessly white!

Proverbs 20:9 “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”

Notice Romans 3:20 “Therefore by the **deeds of the law** there shall **no flesh** be justified in His sight...”

Let's recap. We are sinful; God is perfectly sinless. Since God and sin don't mix, people must get rid of their sin in order to get into heaven. But they can't—no matter how good they are or how hard they try. So what do we do? If it was as *unimportant* as a "White as Snow" church building contest, we would simply say 'Count me out; I don't want to participate.'

But the destiny of our eternal souls is at stake and we are participating whether we realize it or not. **We will stand before God and we will be judged.** Hebrews 9:27 says "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." To "withdraw" from the competition and think God will ignore our sin is as foolish as thinking the church inspectors won't notice the dirt if we don't clean it off. So what are we to do? How can we "clean up our robe," so to speak?

4. *The availability of God's righteousness*

Notice Romans 10:3 "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."

We see here two things we shouldn't do—and one that we should do.

A. Two "don'ts"

i. Don't be ignorant of God's righteousness

Don't be ignorant of God's standard for righteousness—perfection—and don't be ignorant of God's **way** to become righteous (blameless; sinless).

ii. Don't try to establish your own way of being righteous

In other words, don't try to get your own robe clean—it is pointless because it is impossible!

B. The "do"

"Submit yourself"—agree to and obey—the righteousness of God; God's way to become righteous. What is God's way for us to become blameless and spotless and perfectly white?

Notice Romans 3:21. "But now the righteousness of God without the law" means apart from the law. God's way to be righteous—to have this spotless robe—has nothing to do with the law.

Verse 22 "Even the righteousness of God which is **by the faith** of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all of them that believe..." God's way to be right with Him—to be considered blameless and spotless and acceptable for entrance into heaven—comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 28 "There for we conclude that a man is justified"—the same as being declared righteous—"by faith without (apart from) the deeds of the law."

Can it be any plainer? We are not made blameless by what **we do**; we can be declared blameless by accepting what **Jesus did** for us. Notice **Isaiah 1:18** "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

How does God do that? When we come to God in child-like faith and ask Jesus to forgive us and save us, God takes our sin-marred black and white robe off of us and replaces it with the perfectness of Christ. **Isaiah 61:10b** "...for He hath clothes me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness..."

How about you? Are you trying to make your own robe clean? It's impossible so stop trying. Instead, come to Jesus in child-like faith and ask Him to save you. He will forgive you and save you and give you His spotless robe of righteousness.

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS:

1. Is your robe spotless? The only way it can be is if it is Jesus' robe.
2. Child of God, the world is full of people who are ignorant of God's way to be righteous and are trying to establish their own way. Are we burdened for them and praying for them and trying to show them that the only way they can be righteous is through Jesus?