Psalms 103:10-12

Praise for the Lord's Mercies

"The Lord has not dealt with us after our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth so great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

Acts 15, Established Patterns, and God's Authorized Silence

Studying the book of Acts chapter by chapter leads one to understand that salvation is attained by hearing the gospel, believing in it, repenting of sins, confessing that Jesus is the Christ, and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Peter establishes this pattern for salvation early in the pages of Acts (see Acts 2:22-44). Each time the church grew it was because the same gospel message was preached (see Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:1, 7 etc.). Philip preached the same message to the Samaritans (Acts 8:12-13) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Peter preached baptism for the remission of sins to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:48). Paul preached the same message to those of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:38-39) and every where he preached (see 1 Corinthians 4:17).

By the time one arrives at Acts 15 the pattern of salvation has been firmly established. When the Apostle Paul and Barnabas hear that some are preaching the necessity of circumcision for salvation they were greatly alarmed and "had no small dissension and questioning with them" (see Acts 15:1-5). Circumcision had never been in the equation of salvation. It was now; however, being introduced by believing Pharisees. The conclusion to the matter is that salvation is by the grace of God and not by works of circumcision. The Pharisees had added a step to the salvation process that had never been there to begin with. If God desired men to be circumcised he would have had Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, teach this from the beginning but he did not do this.
A valuable lesson is learned regarding established patterns and authorized silence in the word of God. When God gives the command to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized man is not at liberty to add something like circumcision to this. Neither is a man at liberty to take away any part of this established pattern. Those who say that baptism is not a part of God's saving grace are sorely mistaken (see Acts 15:11 in its context compared to Acts 2:38 and Ephesians 1:7). The established pattern of salvation must be left as it is.

The book of Revelation ends with a solemn warning against those who would alter God's instructions. Moses (Deuteronomy 4:2) and Paul (Galatians 1:6-9) gave similar warnings in relation to adding or subtracting from divine revelation. Man is not at liberty to alter or change God's divine instructions. God's instructions are designed to fabricate a justified man of hope. When man alters God's instructions the result is not a justified man of hope but a fabrication of man's own devices. When false teaching is added to truth, as though it represented truth it is to be identified as a doctrine of demons (see 1 Timothy 4:1ff). Subtracted ideas and doctrines only elevate a man to the status of God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Who is man to change what the Alpha and Omega has announced?

The established pattern of salvation in the book of Acts also teaches us about God's authorized silence. God, through his apostles, taught men what they needed to know about salvation. God did not have to say "Thou shalt not be circumcised to be saved." The Lord had already revealed his mind on the subject of salvation. Today, God does not have to say, "Thou shalt not say the sinner's prayer to be saved... sprinkle babies and call it baptism... accept Jesus into your heart and consider yourself saved..." and many other man made doctrines. God's silence must be respected. Let us take the word of God for what it is and leave our human reason behind us (see Galatians 1:11-12).

John C Robertson

What is Man's Life?

Introduction

Solomon poses a fascinating question in the book of Ecclesiastes that we would like to consider in this lesson. The son of David writes, "What profit hath man of all his labor wherein he labors under the sun" (see also Ecclesiastes 3:9 and 5:16). Man lives a life of about 80 years (Psalms 9:10-12). It goes by lightning fast (James 4:14). And then it is over, we die. The Lord helps us to end our lives in a manner that will be eternally beneficial through his instructions, trials, and tests. Many of the Bible authors term our lives of tribulation and various experiences as the "waiting" process. We faithfully wait for the fulfillment of God's promises.

I. God gives man Instruction

A. Man's few years must be spent gaining wisdom and understanding that we may, in the end, stand blameless before God (2 Peter 3:14).
B. Direction (Jeremiah 10:23)
C. Revelation (Galatians 1:11-12)
D. Through Preaching (Romans 10:13-15)
E. Through established divinely ordained patterns

II. We are called upon to WAIT

A. David wrote, "14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (Psalms 27:14).
B. Daniel writes, "Blessed is he that waits, and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty five days" (Daniel 12:12).

III. God permits man to be tempted

A. God does not tempt yet permits Satan to do this (James 1:12ff and Revelation 13:4, 7).
B. Provides way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13)

IV. God puts man to the Test (Revelation 2:10)

A. Trials are intended to strengthen us so that we will not faint nor be overrun by the wicked (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:1-4; Revelation 14:12).
B. God also permits stumbling blocks to be placed in front of us (see Ezekiel 3:20).

V. God permits man to experience Tribulation (Genesis 47:8-10; Job 14:1; Ecclesiastes 9:2, 11; Luke 13:1-5; Revelation 7:13-14)

A. A common lot for all men (Acts 14:22; Revelation 1:9) it is our appointment in life (1 Thessalonians 3:3).
B. If you faint in adversity your strength is small (Proverbs 24:10).
C. The Lord said, "If you have run with the footsteps and they have wearyed you, then how can you contend with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5).

VI. God Chastises the sinner

A. Lord chastens those he loves so that they may repent (see Hebrews 12:6, 11; Revelation 16:8-9).
B. The more we sin the greater our troubles (Proverbs 13:15)
C. Our job is to figure out why we are suffering (Job 23:10).

Conclusion

The true child of God can see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. There remains a rest from our trials, tribulation, and temptation (Hebrews 4:9). Let us press on faithfully in this life (Philippians 3:12-15). Let us mount up wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31). God is our refuge, our strength, and our redeemer. He will see us through this life if we will put our faith in him. We will overcome with his help (1 John 5:4).