

Aim of lesson

To give the young people an understanding of the terms 'righteousness', 'justification' and 'salvation', to help them to be aware of their personal need, and to teach that the only way of salvation is through Jesus Christ.

Bible background

Acts 4:12; Romans 3; Hebrews 9,10; Galatians 3.

Preparation required

Depending on the spiritual maturity of the young people this may be an easy or hard lesson to discuss with them. Think through how they will cope with the content and adapt it if necessary. Try to avoid teaching the subject in a detached way devoid of personal involvement. This is not an academic subject - it is, by the grace of God, our way to life.

Suggested outline of lesson

The Law of Moses

Discuss the influence of law in the daily life of a Hebrew in the time of Moses. What was the law for? What benefits did it bring to the people?

The important point to make is that in God's eyes the law was like a school teacher (Galatians 3:24-25). When a child is young its parents may give it a set of rules to obey, and it may do so without really appreciating the deeper values that lie behind the rules. Later in life, the child should come to realise these deeper things. In the same way the law provided a code of moral values for the people, but at the same time should have taught them deeper lessons about God and his salvation.

- It constantly reminded the Hebrew people that they were sinners - indeed, there was a sense in which the law made them 'worse' by making them aware of sins which they might otherwise have overlooked (Romans 7:7-11).
- Hence it demonstrate that everyone is in need of constant forgiveness (Romans 3:9-10,19-20, 23).
- By the sacrifices which it laid down it demonstrated that God was not only willing to forgive sins, but insisted on it!
- It showed that through these sacrifices, reconciliation with God was both limited and qualified. Sacrifice and sanctification were possible only through

the priest, and involved personal and communal sacrifices - the latter only on one particular day and repeated every year (Hebrews 9:6-10; 10:3,11).

- Imperfect though it was, it pointed the way by which salvation would be achieved, and set out to lead faithful men and women to Jesus Christ. It was a shadow of future things, an indicator - a precursor of a new way (Galatians 3:24-29).

Those who learned these greater lessons came to understand the great grace of God and the way in which salvation would come through the Lord Jesus. So David could write 'Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered' (Psalm 32:1), and in Romans 4:6 Paul comments that David had seen how God 'credits righteousness apart from works'.

Now work through the students' notes with them to clarify the process of salvation and some of the difficult words. Use a dictionary if you like or compare versions and try to draw the other answers from the young people from what you have just told them.

Six big words

Righteousness

Ask the young people (a) what they think 'righteousness' is, then (b) how we can be righteous.

Righteousness means 'being right with God, being just in the sight of God'. Anyone who could have completely obeyed the law could have regarded himself as a righteous man (Deuteronomy 6:25), as God described Job, and as, in his youth, the apostle Paul thought of himself (Philippians 3:6). However, in its fullness, the law could not be obeyed, and therefore the only way to become righteous is if God grants it as a gift.

Talk with the young people about what 'self-righteousness' means, and contrast it with what the word means in scripture.

Justification

Now ask them what being justified means. In common parlance it has more than one meaning:

- to stick up for oneself and one's actions - 'he tried to justify kicking the cat'
- to act correctly - 'he was justified in doing that'

In scripture it has a different meaning. Justification means 'being made righteous'. In both Hebrew and Greek 'justify' and 'righteousness' are basically the same word, except that one is a verb and the other a noun.

Again, there is the phrase 'self-justification', which in scriptural terms is impossible.

Faith

It is important that the young people should understand that although a correct understanding of doctrine is necessary for us to have faith, the two are not the same thing, neither are faith and belief the same.

Many of the meanings of the words above come together in Genesis 15:5-6. Abraham's faith was not simply that he understood what God was saying, or even that, in the abstract, he believed them to be true. The important thing is that he was prepared to have the whole of his life dominated by the absolute conviction that God would fulfil the promises that he had made to him.

In the same way the faith God asks of us is a personal thing. We should have the same conviction as Abraham, that God's promises are true, and that they apply to us; and this conviction should dominate our lives.

Impute

The word 'impute' is an accounting term, and it brings to mind someone keeping financial records. In our lives we may do good things which could be recorded on the 'credit' side of our account, or bad things on the 'debit'. What God does in his mercy is to erase the things on the debit side, and then to enter 'righteousness' on the credit side. If you look at Romans 4 the same Greek word is translated, in the Authorised Version, as 'count' (v 3,5), 'reckon' (v 4, 9, 10), 'impute' (v 6,8,11) and so on. Modern versions are less concerned about linguistic style: the New International Version, for example, translates the Greek word consistently as 'credit'.

Salvation

Now ask the young people what salvation means, and when it happens. It is important to recognise that there are two correct answers to the second question. There is a sense in which we are saved now (Ephesians 2:5,8). In our baptism we die to one life and rise to a new one; we 'pass from death to life' (John 5:24, 1John 3:14). In another sense we will not be saved until the Lord Jesus returns; 'he who stands firm to the end will be saved' (Mark 13:13). The reason why there are two 'salvations' is that in between we can turn our back on God and lose the faith by which we were at first saved.

A helpful analogy is of a drowning man who has been given a life-belt and who is being pulled in to the shore. He has been saved from death, but his salvation is not completed until he is on dry land.

Make sure that the young people appreciate these points.

Grace

Grace is commonly, and in general accurately, expressed as 'undeserved favour'. Ephesians 2:4-10 perhaps best sums up the meaning of the word. There is a distinction between grace and mercy; grace is being given something that we do not deserve; mercy is not being given something that we do.

Romans 3:20-24

Get the young people to read these verses from Romans 3 and to paraphrase them in their notes. Something like:

New International Version text	Paraphrase
20 Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.	Not that the law was bad, but that nobody can do anything to make themselves righteous.
21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.	But now God has provided a way by which we can be made righteous.
22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,	It is given to those who believe in the Lord Jesus.
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,	Everyone needs this because everyone has sinned.
24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.	But we are made righteous through the grace of God.

Relevance to our lives

If the young people in our care are one day to commit themselves to God, they need to understand the hopelessness of our lives (as demonstrated by the law of Moses) and the relative simplicity of accepting the grace of God.

Prayer

Dear Lord God. Thank you for giving us a way to have our sins forgiven. Help us to believe totally in Jesus so that you may consider us righteous.

Other suggestions for activities

1. You might like to think about the analogy of the Passover to help explain how the Israelites had to have faith in the grace of God and the blood of a lamb to

give them salvation from death in Egypt. Their journey also illustrates their salvation. They were saved at the Red Sea, but their salvation was not complete until they reached the promised land.

2. Ask the young people to explain 2 Corinthians 5:19.