

Romans

I. Justification by Faith

- A. Romans 3:21-31 . . . But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [22] even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; [25] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; [26] for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. [27] Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. [31] Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.
- B. We ended last Sunday's teaching with the reminder that it was never God's purpose that keeping the Law (*i.e., doing works of the Law*), would offset or somehow compensate for the debt of death owed for sins committed. Rather, God's purpose for the Law is to reveal the perfection of God's righteousness, the extent of our sinfulness, the cost of sin – both naturally and judicially (*God's discipline/judgment*), and the profit of righteousness – both naturally and judicially (*God's blessings*).
- C. Prayer

II. Justification by faith, apart from the Law

- A. Because we are going to examine verses 21-31 in small chunks, I want to give you an overview to act as the glue that holds all the smaller pieces together.
 1. First, Paul is showing us that who God justifies has not changed since Adam, and it will not change throughout eternity.
 - a. We know from Romans 2, that God justifies those who are committed to living a righteous life by faith – as manifested through repentance, humility, and submissive obedience.

- b. Jesus gave an example of this in His parable about the Pharisee and tax collector who went into the temple to pray (Luke 18:10-14). The Pharisee prayed: "God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector was unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, and beating his breast, said: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" Jesus finished His parable by saying the tax collector went to his house justified rather than the Pharisee. And He gave the reason as "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."
 - 2. Second, the method God uses to justify sinners was determined, and in one way fulfilled, before the creation of the world, even though from a human and time-limited perspective, it was completed at the end of Christ's life. Therefore, even though Christ's death and resurrection took place in Jerusalem at a particular time in earth's history, its effects flow in both directions as if Christ came and died at the beginning of time.
 - 3. Third, trust in God and His word, the serious pursuit of godliness, and fellowship with God were the signs of living by faith for OT saints just as they are today.
 - 4. With this overview in mind, let's look at the specifics of Romans 3:21-31, and in our looking, try not to get mired in the details.
- B. Romans 3:21-22 . . . But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, [22] even (*including*) the righteousness of God (*that is manifested*) through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.
- 1. The first two words "But now" refer to the time of Christ onward. Therefore, from the time of Christ to the end of the age, the Law is no longer the means of making known the righteousness of God. God has replaced the Law as the means of manifesting His righteousness with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. The phrase, "the righteousness of God," refers to the justness or rightness of God's method of justifying repentant sinners and crediting them with a righteousness that makes it possible for them to be freed from the penalty of sin, reconciled to God, and given God's gracious gift of eternal life.

3. Now this does not mean that the Law failed in manifesting God's righteousness, whereas Christ succeeds. Rather this means that where the Law once was the supreme means of revealing God's righteousness, now the redeeming work of Jesus Christ is the supreme means.
4. And again, let me remind you that switching from the Law to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ as the supreme manifestation of God's righteousness does not mean God's method of justifying sinners has changed in these NT times.
 - a. And Paul validates God's unchanging method of justification by reminding us that the OT Law and Prophets spoke about Jesus Christ and His justifying work before Jesus came to earth as one of us. And in December's Advent season, we looked at a number of OT scriptures speaking of Christ, His coming, and His redemptive work.
 - b. Peter affirms this "from the beginning of time" truth in 1 Peter 1:18-21, "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, [19] but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. [20] For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you [21] who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."
5. Next Paul says: "even (*including*) the righteousness of God (*that is manifested*) through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction."
 - a. Why does Paul say that the righteousness of God is also manifested by repentant sinners putting their faith in Jesus Christ for justification and the gift of eternal salvation?
 - b. Because most Jews believed their unique relationship to God and their keeping the Law – or at least what they deemed to be the important parts of the Law – meant that they alone would be justified by God and given the gift of eternal life. In other words, the Jews held an exclusive view of God and salvation, whereas the salvation God gives through Christ's death is for all who repent and live a life of faith and obedience.
 - c. The truth Paul is emphasizing here is that God is perfectly righteous (*just*) in justifying any and every repentant sinner who believes in Jesus Christ, from Jew to Gentile, Catholic to

Protestant, and from the least sinful to the most evil people of all time. Why? Because God is impartial (*no distinction*).

6. Therefore, here in Romans 3:21, Paul has begun his teaching that God's method of justifying sinners and giving them the gift of eternal life is the redeeming work of Jesus Christ linked with our repentance, faith in Christ and His redeeming work, and the pursuit of godliness through faith in God's revealed truths.
 7. Though we have talked about this already, I want to remind you that neither faith itself, nor the obedience of faith, are new requirements for being credited with righteousness (*justified*). Paul validates this in Romans 1:17, where he quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to show that this requirement started in OT times.
 8. However, and this is important, the requirement that is ADDED to righteousness, is faith in Jesus Christ, for He has now been revealed as the means of our eternal salvation. John, especially, tells us how vital this added requirement is.
 - a. John 1:11-12 . . . He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. [12] But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.
 - b. John 6:40 . . . For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.
 - c. 1 John 5:11-12 . . . And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. [12] He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.
 9. The truth that is important for NT believers to understand and live by is that the faith we are to place in Jesus Christ is the same faith and resulting life of obedience required in the OT, with the one addition of faith in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.
- C. Romans 3:23-25a . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; [25] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.
1. Paul has already told us that God is impartial in his judgment because He is perfectly just. Here Paul tells us there is no distinction in God's sight among those who believe because everyone has sinned, and in sinning, they have fallen short of the glory of God.

2. In other words, no one has risen to the level of God's righteousness, which is the only accepted standard for righteousness and the only basis for not owing the penalty for sin. But since all have sinned, all owe the same penalty for sin.
 3. Therefore, justification is a gift given by an act of God's grace to repentant sinners who live by faith.
 4. In NT times, Jesus addressed this issue of universal sinfulness in the parable of the Prodigal Son. In this story, not only was the younger son lost in sin and needing to repent and return home, but the older brother, the one who stayed home and did his father's bidding, also was lost in his sin and in need of returning to the house for the celebration of his brother's return. And yet the older brother refused to return to the house. Why? Because he saw his father's behavior toward his brother as unjust.
 5. The difference between the two brothers was not the obedient behavior of the older brother and the rebellious behavior of the younger, but rather the humility and repentance of the younger brother in comparison to the pride and resentment of the older brother. It is the story of the prideful Pharisee and the humble tax-collector in the Temple all over again. And just like in that story, humility and repentance brought the younger son home and into the embrace of his father, whereas pride and resentment kept the older brother away from the house and separated from his father.
- D. Romans 3:25b-26 . . . This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God (*long-suffering, patient restraint in the face of provocation*) He passed over the sins previously committed; [26] for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
1. The imagery Paul uses here is that of God passing over the sins of OT believers just like He passed over the households in Egypt who had the blood of a sacrificial lamb over the door and on the doorposts.
 2. The reason there was the absence of justice in God's passing over the sins of OT believers – even though they were fulfilling His requirement of confessing their sin and making an acceptable sin sacrifice – is because their sin had not yet been paid for.
 3. In other words, there is no justice in forgiving sinners so that they may live forever, if their sin has not yet been paid for. And yes, Christ's redemptive work went backward as well as forward, but Paul is making two points.

- a. First, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ keeps God just in His dealings with sin, whether it was overlooking sin in the OT times or fully forgiving sin in NT times.
 - b. Second, Jesus Christ is God's justice in relation to the penalty of sin, not keeping the Law or doing good deeds or another other thing of that nature that we might do.
4. Therefore, the sacrificial and redemptive work of God's only son on behalf of sinners is the proof that God is just when He graciously justifies repentant sinners who come to Him in faith and go on to live by faith.
- E. Romans 3:27-30 . . . Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law (*i.e., requirement*)? Of works? No, but by a law (*the requirement*) of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.
1. The boasting Paul refers to most likely is a response to the Jew's boast that they had a special relationship with God which guaranteed them justification and eternal life – even if they practiced sin.
 2. However, God's penalty for sin and His method of justification and for giving repentant sinners the gift of eternal life removes all possibility of boasting, because no one can do anything to earn or trade for or in some way give something of their own in exchange for the life they owe for sins committed. Only a life can be given, and only the life of Jesus Christ, the perfectly sinless redeemer, is the accepted propitiation for the debt we owe.
 3. Therefore, justification and eternal life remain a GIFT given to repentant sinners who pursue a life of holiness, with the confident belief that it is not their holiness but the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that pays and therefore saves them from the penalty for their sin.
 4. In verse 30, Paul says that God will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Let me give you two possible explanations for this and the warning not to get mired down or distracted by such intriguing or perplexing statements.
 - a. First, it may be that Paul is simply using two similar ways to say the same thing. For example, in most cases in the English language, there is not much difference between using "by" and

“through.” It is possible that it is true here. Besides, Paul uses “by” and “through” interchangeably when talking about faith in other letters.

- b. Second, it is possible Paul is speaking of the Jews as heirs of the promise needing only to live a life of faith according to what they already have, whereas the Gentiles, who come to the truth as outsiders (*strangers to the covenant of promise*), need to enter in by faith, that is, come through faith in order to be admitted into the covenant, become part of the family of God, and become an heir of the promise.

- F. Romans 3:31 . . . Do we then nullify the Law through (*the requirement of*) faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

- 1. To nullify the Law is to invalidate or repeal the Law, as if it were no longer valid or important.
- 2. To establish the Law is to affirm its validity, to treat submission to the Law as a required necessity, and to live accordingly.
- 3. Therefore, though keeping the Law will not pay the penalty for our sin or provide the basis for offering to God something of equal value in exchange for the life we owe, it is nonetheless the Law of God, representing God’s will concerning how we are to live. We see the truth of this in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus takes the Law and explains its intended applications in the life of those who would live unto God.

III. Conclusion

- A. Matthew 5:17-20 . . . Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. [18] For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.
- B. John 3:36 . . . He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.