

New Testament Texts and Contexts – Pauline Epistles

There is no other writer in the New Testament who clarifies the discussions of the **Old Covenant Law** in light of the **New Covenant** as does the Apostle Paul. Paul has much to say in regard to the Law being himself a zealous and studied rabbi and Pharisee. Having received the Gospel by personal revelation from the Lord Jesus Himself, Paul is well qualified to explain to us the most intricate details when it comes to **distinctions** between the **Old** and **New Covenants** and the nature of the **Law** in light of the **Gospel**.

Paul's letter to the **Romans** is no doubt the most comprehensive New Testament treatment of the Law. In it Paul uses the word **Law** no less than **78 times**. In chapter 1 Paul begins by telling us that *“the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe”* (v-16) and that all of humanity is under the just penalty of God's wrath, (v-18), and this in spite of the fact that God has revealed Himself sufficiently to all mankind (v-20), and yet mankind persists in their rebellion against God and have thus come under the wrath of God and are *“worthy of death,”* (vs-22-32). In chapter 2 Paul lays out the fact that all of humanity will eventually face God in judgment, as *“his Gospel declares”* (v-16), both Jew and Gentiles alike, all of them will face God in judgment and are subject to both their consciences as well as the very Law of God (vs-12-29). In chapter 3 Paul explains the fact both Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin and judgment (v-9), that there is no one righteous in all the world (v-9-10), and that the *“whole world will be accountable to God”* for their deeds and that no one will be justified in the sight of God on the basis of their deeds, according to the Law (v-19-20). It is here where Paul begins to draw out a **contrast** between the **Law** and the **Gospel**.

Romans 3:19-20 - 19 Now we know that **whatever the Law says**, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and **all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.** NASB

Having clearly stated that all will be *“accountable to God”* and judged by God's perfect standard in the Law, he clearly exposes the purpose of the Law in judgment is to reveal *“the knowledge of sin”* and provide a standard of judgment, against which no one will be able to stand.

Romans 3:21-23 - 21 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 NASB

The **contrast** between **Law** and **Gospel** is highlighted by Paul's statement that the *“righteousness of God has now been manifested apart from the Law.”* In this he is no doubt referring to the Person and Work of Jesus being that *“righteousness”* that *“has now been manifested.”* See here then Paul extolling a *“righteousness apart from the Law,”* yet saying that this righteousness is *“witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”* Paul is explaining that the Law itself testifies of a righteousness of God that is *“apart from the Law.”* Paul will go on here to describe this as the Person and Work of Christ which is a *“gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”* The **contrast** is further highlighted by his statement that this righteousness is made available *“through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.”* See here in these statements a **contrast** between the *“works of the Law”* (v-20) and *“faith”* (v-22).

Romans 3:24-26 - 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**, that He might be just and **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

It is here where Paul brings up the legal term *“justified”* and describes a **justification** which is by **faith** and provides the righteousness of God apart from the works of the Law. This justification is;

- A **gift by grace**
- It comes through the **redemption** which is in Christ Jesus
- Merited by a **propitiation** in His **blood**
- Laid hold of by **faith in Jesus**
- A **demonstration** of God’s righteousness
- Redemptive-Historical - Passed over sins **previously** committed under the Law, for righteousness in the **present time**

In this is seen the most profound and revealing **contrast** between the **Old Covenant Law** and the **New Covenant Faith**. Paul clearly has made the point thus far in Romans that people cannot be justified before God on the basis of the works of the Law, but rather the Law is what condemns and brings the knowledge of sin, being God’s perfect standard of righteousness that will convict the whole world. He therefore presents the only way of justification before God’s judgment which is the **Gospel of salvation, by grace, through faith, in Christ alone**.

Romans 3:27-30 - 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. NASB

He further draws this contrast out, using the word law here as a principle and not referring to the Old Testament Law. This new *“law of faith”* is what brings **justification** in contrast to the *“works of the Law.”* Moreover, he makes it clear that **circumcision is not the means of justification** because God will also justify the uncircumcised by faith. This also ends the controversy of whether God **requires circumcision for salvation**, for here Paul states that faith in Jesus is that which justifies both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. See here in Romans the **contrast** between **Law** and **Gospel** is brought to a bright and clear conclusion. The Gospel brings a justification before God that the Law cannot provide. This comes **by grace, through faith, in Christ alone**. This idea is further expanded and nailed down by Paul in chapter 4 where Paul describes the nature of the **works-faith contrast** in the example of Abraham.

Romans 4:2-5 - 2 For **if Abraham was justified by works**, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "And **Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.**" 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But **to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.** NASB

Paul makes the point that Abraham was not justified by works, but was rather *“reckoned righteous”* by *“believing God.”* Paul denounces being justified by works and clearly re-states that God justifies by faith when he says, *“but to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”*

Romans 4:13-16 - 13 For **the promise to Abraham** or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world **was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.** 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 **for the Law brings about wrath**, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. 16 For **this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace**, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, **not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham**, who is the father of us all, NASB