

Romans 3:19-28

An Exposition – The Righteousness of God in the Gospel

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The book of Romans is comprehensive and technical discourse on Salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and on the Gospel message. In the above outline we get a picture of the foundation Paul has been building in order to deliver the Gospel message to us. In chapter one he tells us that ***“the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation”*** (v-16) and he then tells us that it reveals the ***“righteousness of God”*** (v-17). He begins to establish the case of why God’s righteousness is important and necessary explaining that both Gentile and Jew are under the condemnation of God and in desperate need to be justified. In chapter 3:19-28, he explains this ***“righteousness of God”*** which is revealed in the Gospel in very certain terms. The following is an exposition of this text.

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

A. 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; -

Paul, having made his case that both the Gentile (1:18-32) and the Jew (2:1-3:8) are guilty before God, this is his final concluding remark stating that they are all liable and *“accountable to God.”* In establishing the extent of this accountability, he states that *“every mouth may be closed and the whole world may become accountable.”* By this he surely means that they have no defense or excuse to speak of the guilt of their sin, but that both their conscience (2:12-16) and God’s Law (here) testify against them.

B. 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. -

In regard to being *“justified”* in God’s sight, Paul again established the guilt of the entire world with the reference *“no flesh,”* that is, no human being. These he says, cannot be *“justified”* by obedience to the Law, rather that their failure to keep it establishes what sin

is, transgression of His Law. Mankind has failed not only at *violating* what the Law forbids (penal sanctions), but also at *fulfilling* what it commands (perceptive requirements). The Law, with all of its high and Holy commands, has indeed caused the sin of mankind to be seen with utmost clarity and it *condemns* us all as guilty before God's judgment bar. It has given us a measuring line that reveals our treason and rebellious refusal to submit to our Creator in His commands to love Him and our neighbor. Here Paul establishes **two very important elements** in the Gospel:

- 1) The UNIVERSALITY of the guilt of mankind before God (Jew and Gentile).
- 2) The inability for anyone to be justified before God by good works or obedience to the Law of God because of their utter failure to fulfill it. It is PERSONAL.

This is consistent with Paul's Gospel in other sections of Scripture as well.

(Rom 2:13, 7:7-9, Gal 2:19, 3:10-13, Eph 2:8-9, Tit 3:5-7)

Galatians 2:16 - 16 nevertheless knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the Law** but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since **by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified**. NASB

Romans 3:21 - 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, NASB

A. 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, -

Paul had explained in chapter 1:16-17 that the Gospel revealed "*the righteousness of God*" and that this was the "*power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.*" Here he tells us that this "*righteousness of God has been manifested,*" and this "*apart from the Law.*" When Paul speaks of the righteousness of God here, he does not speak of that righteousness which God requires only, but a righteousness which of itself comes from God and is an objective reality that has now been "*revealed*" (v-1:17) or "*manifested.*" This was Martin Luther's great discovery, that is, that the righteousness of God was a foreign righteousness apart from our own works and apart from the very Law of God itself. Now this is **THE essential part of the Gospel**, and of the Christian Faith, the principle of *sola fide*, that is, that the righteousness of God is an objective foreign reality provided by God and received by faith, not merited of our own works.

Here see also, that God's righteousness "*has been manifested.*" It is an historical reality that we observe from outside, that is, the life and death of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ! The life and death of Jesus Himself, is the "*manifested*" righteousness of God. Jesus is our righteousness. This righteousness "*has been manifested*" in Jesus! It is Historical.

1 Corinthians 1:30 - 30 But by His doing you are **in Christ Jesus, who became to us** wisdom from God, and **righteousness** and sanctification, and redemption,

See also, that it is the righteousness of God, that is, it is theological. It is that righteousness that God BOTH *requires and provides*. Here Paul establishes **two more very important elements** in the Gospel: It is HISTORICAL and THEOLOGICAL.

B. being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, -

Here he establishes that the entire Old Testament is a witness to this "*righteousness of God, apart from the Law.*" That both the Law and Prophets (a reference to the entire Old Testament, that being the Pentateuch and the historical, wisdom, and prophetic literature) have testified that rightstanding with God is obtained by faith and not by works. Here he is

saying that the entire Old Testament witnesses and testifies that the righteousness of God *“has been manifested apart from the Law!”* See then another **important element** in the Gospel, it is BIBLICAL.

Romans 3:22 - 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; NASB

A. 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ –

Having established two very important points;

1) That the entire world, all mankind, is guilty before the tribunal of God’s judgment because of the failure to fulfill the Law of God.

2) That God’s righteousness now *“has been manifested apart from the Law”*

Paul delivers the sweetest, most glorious and soul freeing words which can be spoken to a guilty sinner who is under the threat and condemnation of God’s fierce wrath. That is, that God has provided the righteousness that He requires in Jesus Christ, and that we can possess it through faith alone in Christ alone! This is THE GOSPEL in a verse, and it is GOOD NEWS! Make no mistake, here the sinner is told explicitly how he/she can be made right with God, *“through faith in Jesus Christ.”* Here is **another element** then, the GOSPEL is CHRISTOLOGICAL. Jesus Christ is the center of the Gospel, it is Christocentric.

B. for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; -

Here we see a great paradox in the Gospel. It is both, all inclusive and very exclusive! It makes *“no distinction”* between Jew and Gentile, but *“all”* mankind can be included in being *“justified”* before God. However, this righteousness of God is very exclusive because it is provided only for those who *“believe.”* See then that God’s righteousness is UNIVERSAL in its scope, but given exclusively to those who believe (have faith) in Jesus Christ! And so, in the words of DA Carson, the Gospel is *“received in authentic persevering faith.”*

Romans 3:23-24 - 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; NASB

A. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, -

Here Paul repeats the point he had earlier established that *“all have sinned”* and *“fall short”* of *“God’s glory,”* that is, of His glorious perfection which He requires in His Law. Notice the terms *“glory of God”* are used to speak of God’s nature which is equivalent to His holy Law. Learn here that when we sin we *“fall short of the glory of God,”* yes, we fail to glorify God. Sin is a defamation of the *“glory of God”* and an offense to His holy perfection.

B. 24 being justified as a gift by His grace -

Here is Paul’s explanation of the gratuitous and unmerited nature of God’s FREE grace. Now he elaborates on the GOOD NEWS that *“all”* can be *“justified as a gift by His grace!”* Here is the GOSPEL, that in spite of the fact that *“all”* mankind have *“sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* they can be *“justified”* by God as a FREE *“gift.”* By FREE we mean FREE to the one who receives it, but very costly to the One who gives it! Now this is what we mean when we speak about *“grace!”* GRACE is unmerited (not earned) and gratuitous

(freely given). No one can earn the “justification” or “*righteousness of God,*” because, “*all*” have forfeited it by sinning against God and offending His Glory, rebelling against His holy commands and spurning His threats to punish. Therefore, justification is provided as a gift by grace ONLY and NOT by any form of merit. This is why we say that salvation is by Grace ALONE. It is unmerited by the recipient, but rather freely given. The “Solas” of the reformation express the exclusive role of each one of the elements of salvation.

- *Sola Gratia* – GRACE ALONE – not merited by works, but freely given
- *Sola Fide* – FAITH ALONE – received only by belief and trust, apart from works
- *Sola Christus* – CHRIST ALONE – the righteousness provided by His merit ONLY

Grace has its emphasis on God’s part of salvation being the originator and the giver of salvation. This is why the doctrine of election is also inseparably tied to grace. But faith has its emphasis on the recipient of grace, the sinner who receives the gift by faith. Faith is the conduit or vehicle by which grace is received.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, **it is the gift of God**; 9 **not as a result of works**, that no one should boast. NASB

C. through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; -

See now where the merit lies. It is in “*the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” Here, the “*being justified as a gift by His grace,*” is merited by the “*redemption.*” Of course here the term “*redemption*” speaks of a price paid for the debt. It is a monetary term. Therefore the “*being justified as a gift by His grace*” is provided by the price which was paid by Christ Jesus. Consider here also the word “*through.*” The object of this adverb is the clause, “*being justified as a gift by His grace.*” Therefore justification is a “*gift*” provided “*through*” Christ’s “*redemption.*” See here again therefore that justification is NOT merited by any form of good works or obedience to the Law, but is “*through faith*” (v-22) and received as “*a gift by His grace*” and provided “*through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*”(v-24).

Romans 3:25 - 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; NASB

A. whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. -

Paul now points to the redemption price which was paid by Christ Jesus. The “*whom*” speaks of Christ. But notice here that it was “*God*” who “*displayed publically*” Christ. It was “*God*” reconciling us to Himself by “*a propitiation in His blood.*” Here “*propitiation*” speaks of an atoning sacrifice which was placed on an altar. This atoning sacrifice propitiates God’s holy wrath towards sin, which means it satisfies or appeases God’s holy anger because of sin. To state this another way, God sacrificed Christ publically, to appease His own holy wrath. Here again notice these **two important elements** of the Gospel, it is THEOLOGICAL because it has been wrought by God and it is CHRISTOLOGICAL because it has been purchased by Christ.

The terms “*in His blood*” speak of Christ being a blood sacrifice that appeases the holy God to provide the justification that is received by faith. God is “*He who requires blood*” (Psalm 9:12) because the wages of sin is death and without the death of someone, sin cannot be

atoned for, because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness or remission of sins (Heb 9:22).

Notice again Paul's emphasis on faith. This "*propitiation*" is provided "*through faith.*" Faith is the vehicle "*through*" which the "*propitiation*" is applied. God's wrath is appeased and satisfied for every individual who receives the satisfaction "*through faith.*" No one can merit this appeasement of wrath without becoming the appeasement themselves. This is why salvation is NOT of works, but rather "*through faith*" in Christ who worked it for us.

B. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; -

Now this blood sacrifice was God making a "*demonstration of His righteousness.*" This is the "*manifested righteousness of God*" (v-21). Consider here, God has something to demonstrate, His righteousness. How did He do that? He sacrificed Christ Jesus publically to "*demonstrate His righteousness.*" Here Paul gives us the reason why God needed to demonstrate His righteousness. "*Because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.*" Here Paul simply means that God needed to demonstrate His righteousness because He had not burst forth in wrath against all sin in all the previous ages on mankind to destroy them, but rather "*in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins*" that were "*previously committed.*" Here learn also that justification for sinners in previous ages was completed by Christ.

Romans 3:26 - 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. NASB

A. 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, -

Here Paul describes that Christ's death was a demonstration of God's righteousness "*at the present time*" to explain that it is now fulfilled at the advent of Christ. This is the "*fullness of time*" when God has once for all time (Heb 10:10-14) demonstrated His righteousness through the sacrifice (propitiation) of Christ.

Galatians 4:4-5 - 4 But **when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son**, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. NASB

B. that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. -

Here Paul states that God is "*just*" in this act of propitiation and that He is the "*justifier*" as well. God is the One who justifies (Rom 8:33), and He justifies "*the one who has faith in Jesus.*" See then in this glorious verse, justification is by faith, and in this God has demonstrated His justice.

Romans 3:27-28 - 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. NASB

A. 27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. -

Here Paul points to mankind and asked how we can boast before God somehow of our own merit. Here he plainly states that *“boasting is excluded.”* In other words, we have no place to boast of our justification before God because it was completely unmerited and gratuitous, not being earned by us but rather freely given and earned by Christ. Further that this justification comes now *“by a law of faith,”* and NOT *“of works.”* The idea of justification *“apart from works”* in this context is emphatic and repeated several times for Paul states just a few verses later.....

Romans 4:5 - 5 But **to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies** the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness, NASB

Notice how many times in this short context this idea of **justification by faith apart from works** has been mentioned.

1. v-21 (But now apart from the Law)
2. v-22 (even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe;)
3. v-24 (being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption)
4. v-2 (as a propitiation in His blood through faith.)
5. v-26 (the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.)
6. v-27 (Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.)
7. v-28 (For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.)

B. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. -

Here Paul summarizes the main point of this passage in very certain terms. This statement emphatically sets forth the idea that justification happens *“by faith”* and is *“apart from works of the Law.”* This is the heart of the Gospel that could not be stated in any clearer terms than are given here. **This is a major theme in Paul’s doctrine of salvation.**

Romans 5:1-2 - 1 Therefore **having been justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have obtained our **introduction by faith into this grace** in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.NASB

Galatians 2:16 - 16 nevertheless knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may **be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law**; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. NASB
Philippians 3:9 - 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but **that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**, NASB

Justification before God is by God’s Grace ONLY, and received by faith ONLY, because of what Christ ONLY has done.