

The Righteousness of God Through Faith

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Date: 01 March 2020

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[0 : 00] Let's have our Bible open please at Romans chapter 3. Romans chapter 3. And we're considering these verses 21 through 26. Verses 21 through 26, not the whole of the chapter that we read, but just this little section in the middle of it, verses 21 through 26.

Romans chapter 3 and verses 21 through 26. We live in an age where for something to be new is to be considered better.

That's essentially what the whole advertising industry is based upon, that premise that they're trying to sell you new stuff because your old stuff is so out of date. Your old stuff is so rubbish.

It was brought home to me recently watching an advert for IKEA, the Swedish furniture company. You had people who were sitting in their kitchen and friends rang to say that they were coming over and these people were embarrassed by how old their kitchen was, by how uncool their kitchen was. And so what did they do? They went out and bought a new kitchen. Suddenly they were happy, smiling and had everyone in the world over to see their kitchen. To have something new is to have something better.

[1 : 14] The old is shunned and discredited. The old is inferior and not worth bothering about. And as we come to Romans chapter 3, the seeming, as we come to these verses 21 through 26, we see this contrast that Paul offers to the Roman Church as well.

He writes to remind them of some old truths, but he also writes to remind them of some new truths. All of these truths, however, are important. All of these truths are significant according to Paul. We see this not in terms of the things we need, but rather we see the old in our condition. Paul here writing to the Roman Christians reminds them that their condition by birth is sinful. We see the new righteousness that God offers apart from the law, this righteousness through Christ. We see this new propitiation, this new turning aside of God's wrath that is offered through Christ.

And we want to think about these three things to see that hopefully it will become slightly clearer as we look at it, as we get into it. First thing we want to think about a new righteousness, this righteousness of God that is apart from the law.

[2 : 39] Secondly, we want to remind ourselves of the old problem, why it is that a new righteousness was necessary, why it is that we needed something other than the law.

Thirdly, we are going to see a new propitiation, what it was that God set forth in Christ. First thing we want to think about is this new righteousness, the new righteousness.

We see that in verses 21 and 22 of Romans chapter 3. As we come to verse 21 we notice how Paul opens this section, what does he say verse 21, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested.

So the obvious question as we come to this verse is well, what's gone before? If Paul is using this free as but now he is obviously contrasting it with what's gone before.

What's the previous section in Romans 3 all about? Well that's why we read it all together. Chapter 3 begins with the great assertion that both Jews and Gentiles are under the punishment of God.

[3 : 48] That having the law was in a sense no advantage to the Jews, they were still under the just punishment of God. We see verse 9, what does Paul say, what then are Jews any better off?

No, not at all, for we have already charged that all both Jews and Greeks are under sin. He then quotes extensively from the Psalms to back up this position, to back up the argument that he's making that all are under sin.

All have turned aside, together they've become worthless, their throat is an open grave, their tongues practice to seek verse 13. Their mouths are full of curses and bitterness, there is no fear of God before their eyes, verse 18.

So that verse 20, by works of the law, no human being will be justified in this sight. By works of the law, no one will be declared right with God.

By keeping the law, no one will be declared right with God, that's what Paul's arguing in the opening section of Romans 3, these first 20 verses.

[5 : 01] And even that speaks to us tonight friends, doesn't it? Because none of us here tonight, none of us here tonight will be made right with God through keeping the law.

None of us here gathered here tonight can keep enough of God's law to save ourselves, to make ourselves right with God. And maybe as you come this evening, that's what you're relying on.

You're thinking to yourself, well, come to church, I'm a good person. I haven't murdered anyone, I haven't stolen anything. That's what you're relying on to keep yourself right with God.

But it won't work. But you see, there's slightly subtler versions of this as well. We might know in our heads that keeping the law will never make us right with God, but actually what we subtly believe is that having the right theology will make us right with God.

We believe in justification by faith alone, therefore we're right with God. We're reformed in our understanding of theology, therefore we're right with God.

[6 : 14] We come to a reformed church, therefore we're right with God. No, none of those things make you right with God. You can rely on those things to functionally save you.

But actually what saves us is a relationship with Jesus Christ, not keeping the law, not coming to a reformed church, not having a right theology, but knowing Christ.

And over and against that Paul says, verse 21, this is the way things are verse 20, no one will be made right with God, no one will be justified by God by works of the law, but verse 21, the righteousness of God has been manifested, the righteousness of God has shown itself apart from the law.

The law didn't. The law couldn't save anyone. Why? Because we could never keep it. Because we could never do enough good deeds to make ourselves right with God, because we could never keep the law.

But now Paul says verse 21, there's this new righteousness, now there's this new hope, now there's this new relationship with God on offer. That's apart from the law.

[7 : 41] Don't you just love what he includes at the end of verse 21? He says, look, no one's going to be saved by the law verse 20, no one can make themselves right with God verse 20. But in new righteousness has come verse 21, and new righteousness apart from the law, and what does he include at the end of verse 21?

Although the law and the prophets bear witness about it, this new righteousness apart from the law has come, but actually the law and the prophets spoke about it.

new righteousness apart from the law has shown itself but actually the law and the prophets still bore witness about it. For me personally the impact of the sugar tax has been devastating. If you go to the shops you can't buy new, you can only buy new recipe iron brew anymore which is nowhere near as good as the old one.

They try and fob you off, they say that the recipe is exactly the same just without the sugar and they've replaced it with artificial sweeteners but it's just not as nice. They say that the old bears witness to the new, they say that the old recipes just the same just slightly tweaked and hear the old hear the law and the prophets speak about this new righteousness hear the old bears witness to the new and we saw that in Isaiah 53 didn't we that's why we read from that passage the suffering servant on whom our iniquities were laid. Notice not in whom we keep the law but on whom our iniquities were laid. We can think of some more examples in the Old Testament the Viticus 16 that we read yesterday Exodus 12 all testified to the coming righteousness apart from the law. So what is this new righteousness then? If it's apart from the law, if the law and the prophets bore witness about it what is this new righteousness? Well Paul gives us the answer in verse 22 the righteousness of God through faith in

Jesus Christ for all who believe. God is perfectly righteous. God is perfectly holy. It's His righteousness that we need to attain to. If you're here tonight and you're trying to save yourself by keeping the law what you need is perfection. What you need isn't 80% what you need isn't 85% but perfection because God is perfectly righteous because God is perfectly holy.

[10 : 39] And we've attained that this evening through faith. That's how we attain to righteousness tonight. That's how we attain to right standing with God tonight.

Through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. The movie you're here tonight and you're thinking to yourself well actually I'm quite a pure a poor Christian. I'm not making much of a fist of the Christian life or not making much of a fist of this whole holy living thing or not much making much headway and putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

But notice tonight friends, how does God see you in Christ? He sees you as righteous. The gift of God is righteousness in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you look to Christ tonight? Then you're righteous in God's sight. Not in your own righteousness not in your own efforts but in His. As God looks at you this evening through faith in Christ he sees not your disobedience he sees not your unrighteousness but he sees Christ's righteousness. This is the new righteousness. This is the righteousness that has been manifested apart from the law. That law that couldn't save anyone that law that showed us our sin. This is the new righteousness apart from the law. But what does it mean to be righteous?

You see it's one of those terms that we perhaps hear bandied about church a lot. It's one of those terms that we perhaps have heard since we were young but what does it actually mean? Well it means that we're considered not guilty. It means that we're considered right in God's sight. That we're considered justified in God's sight. It is not the law that makes us different. It is not the law that makes us righteous. It is faith in Jesus Christ. You see this old righteousness would never work because we couldn't do it. Adam and Eve couldn't do it in the Garden of Eden and ever since then none of us can keep God's law. But this new righteousness does work. This new righteousness does succeed because Jesus Christ lived a perfect life because he always obeyed the commands of God because he was always faithful to God's plans and purposes and that tonight is ours in Christ. So that's the new righteousness apart from the law through faith in Christ. Secondly then we want to see tonight this old problem and old problem. And we see that in verses 22 and 23. He really schools the end of verse 22.

What is the problem? Why does the righteousness of the law not work? Why don't we save ourselves by keeping enough law? Well we see the answer verse 22.

[14:12] What do we see? For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no distinction between man and woman. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile primarily here for the audience Paul's writing to. There's no distinction between adult and child. There's no distinction between slave and free. There's no distinction between minister and layman. There's no distinction between prince and pauper. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That's the old problem that we're dealing with. That all of us by nature, all of us by birth are sinners. Sin as it's spoken of here speaks of missing the mark. It speaks of failing to live up to a certain standard. I remember a few years back helping at a Christian youth camp and one of the activities that we decided to do was archery. I mean quite why I'm not sure. I mean bows and arrows and a group of 15 year olds. What could possibly go wrong? But as you watch archery on TV it looks quite easy doesn't it? You see those guys and girls at the Olympics and what do they do? They just put the bow, they put the arrow onto the bow, pull it back, bang, hits the middle of the target. Easy. What could be easier than that?

But I should discover that it wasn't quite as easy as it looks. Time after time the bow, the arrow went on to the bow only to land in the long grass somewhere.

Missed the mark, missed the target, missed the standard that had been set. And that's how sins described here is missing the mark as feeling to meet the standard, not hitting the target. And this friends, this friends, please hear me, this friends is the ultimate universal human problem. We're all sinners. If you talk to people out in the world what's the human problem? Well the basic human problem is wealth inequality. It's the fact that the earth produces enough resources to feed everyone but somehow it doesn't quite make it right. No that's not the human problem. The human problem is sin. The basic human problem is lack of access to sanitation. No it's not. The basic human problem is sin. We all break God's law.

We all fail to attain the righteousness of the law. And that's why the new righteousness had to come. That's why God had to reveal there's new righteousness because we couldn't keep the old righteousness. No one could become righteous through keeping your law, through keeping the law. As you go about your business this week it'll be helpful for you to keep that in mind. That the basic problem with people you meet is that they're sinners. The basic problem with the ministers in the Western Isles is that they're sinners.

[17:48] The basic problem when you go to Tescos or Morrison's isn't that the shelves are too long. Isn't that there's enough food on the shelves. The basic problem is that we're all sinners. Ever since the fall of mankind into sin in Genesis 3, ever since that moment in the Garden of Eden where man rebelled against God that has been our problem. We're sinners and that's going to be the problem with the world until Jesus Christ returns. That's the old problem that we're always going to encounter that we can never do enough to make ourselves right with God. That you need the righteousness that God offers because you can't provide it for yourself. That you need this new righteousness apart from the law because you can't provide it by yourself. So we thought about the new righteousness, we thought about how it comes through faith apart from the law. We thought about why this righteousness was necessary because of the old problem of sin that is in each one of us. But now we want to think about how this new righteousness comes about. We've seen that it's apart from the law. We've seen that the law and the prophets bear witness to it but how does it come about? How is the old problem of sin overcome? We do that thirdly as we think about a new propitiation and we see that in verses 24 through 26. Verses 24 through 26 and new propitiation. And we see as we come to verse 24 that it's really just a continuation of verse 23. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We read Romans 3:23 but then what do we see verse 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. All have sinned but they're redeemed by a gift. How can this be? We know that God is a holy righteous God. We know that God must punish sin. That sin must be paid for and so how are these things going to be squared? Well it will be through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. We thought a little bit last night about this idea of redemption and what it means to be redeemed. We saw how it meant paying a price invariably. It meant paying a price to buy someone back out of slavery. A parallel today might be paying the ransom to free a captive but that carries with it the idea of sort of illegality of someone being kidnapped were to be redeemed as Paul understood it in biblical terms was a perfectly common legal feature of the day. But you see friends that's how it was. Because each of us are held in bondage. Each of us are held by sin. We're captive to sin and by his death Jesus Christ has redeemed us. By his death Jesus has paid the price to set us free. But how would Jesus redeem us? So we've seen that all have sinned. We've seen that we've been justified. We've been redeemed as a gift.

Verse 24 that is in Christ Jesus but how? How does Jesus pay the price? How do we redeem this evening? Well we see the answer verse 25. Whom God put forward that is in Christ Jesus sorry verse 24. Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. Propitiation isn't a word that we use all that often today is it? Unless conversation in the West Nile is radically different from Dumfries it's not a word that I've heard ever used in conversation really. So what does it mean? How are we going to understand propitiation? It's a good word. It's a biblical word that we need to understand.

To propitiate means to turn aside. And here as we read it in Romans 3 it means to turn aside the righteous anger and judgment of God. Let's try and work this through as we read it here in Romans 3. How does Jesus propitiate God here? What are we told? He propitiates God by his blood. By his sacrificial death on the cross Jesus propitiates the wrath of God. Now why was that necessary? Because we're all sinners. Because of that old problem that we're all sinners. That's the fundamental problem that exists. That relationship between humanity and God has been fundamentally breached. That relationship between humanity and God has been fundamentally broken ever since the Garden of Eden. And so if God is to be God then sin must be dealt with. If God is to be just sin must be dealt with.

If God is to be holy then sin must be dealt with. If this new righteousness is to be effective then sin must be dealt with. Jesus on the cross then propitiates the wrath of God. Jesus on the cross turns aside the righteous anger and judgment of God. The righteous anger and judgment of God. The should have fallen on us. The should have fallen on our sin. Instead fell on Christ.

That is where my sin is kneeled to. To that cross of Christ. That is where my righteousness comes from this evening. From that cross of Christ. But there's a problem with that isn't it? Because if we take that seriously what does that what can that turn God into? That can turn God into a vengeful monster as daddy. That can turn God into a Steve Choque said a God who endorses cosmic child abuse. But yeah the problem with that is that we allow our version of anger to shape God's anger. You see when I get angry I'm angry because someone stopped me doing something that I want to do. I get angry because the kids come into my study when I'm trying to read the paper and they're

stopping me doing something I want to do. I get angry because I'm tired and the kids are keeping me awake. I'm not angry with my children all the time I should clarify. But that's how our anger is isn't it? It boils up because someone's stopping us doing something.

[25 : 23] It boils up because people annoy us. But yet God here is righteously angry. God here is justly angry with our sin. His holiness, his justice, his righteousness, his demand that sin be paid for. And his son took that burden willingly on himself so that this new righteousness might be shown. Remember Jesus talking to his disciples what did he say to them? I lay down my life. No one takes it from me but I lay it down and I will take it up again. And we see that's how Paul closes the section don't we verse 26. How does Paul describe God verse 26? It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. How does that work? Well

God is just because sin is punished. God's righteousness and holiness are satisfied and yet sinful fall in humanity can be redeemed.

God is the one tonight who declares that we are not guilty. God is the one tonight who declares that our penalty, our punishment has been paid in Jesus Christ. But that leaves us with a choice to make. That leaves each of us sitting here tonight in one position or another. Because you see tonight either Jesus has propitiated God's wrath on your behalf. Either Jesus has taken God's punishment for sin on himself for you. Or the fearful expectation of judgment still stands. God's righteousness demands that sin be punished. God's holiness demands that sin be punished. And it either fell on Christ or it will one day fall on you. Which is it to be tonight? It's in Christ that this new righteousness apart from the law is manifested. It's in Christ that the solution to the old problem of sin is found. It's in him as the perfect savior of mankind. Come to him this evening. Come and take his yoke upon you, his yoke, and his burden is light. Come and know the peace of sins forgiven. Come and know God's righteous judgment satisfied. Come and know that it fell on him so that it may not fall on you. Amen. Let's turn to the Lord in prayer. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are indeed a just and a holy God. That you are a righteous God. We thank you that this righteousness, this right standing before you apart from the law has been manifest. We thank you for your son the Lord Jesus Christ who willingly laid down his life for the sheep. We pray, Father, you would enable us to think further on these things. We pray that we would have that uneasy reckoning with the Holy Spirit. May we be like Jacob of old who would not let go until you have blessed him. May we not have peace until we know peace with you for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.