

Chapter Twenty-nine
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans
The Imputation of God Righteousness

“²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;” (Romans 3:21-25).

There are teachings in the Bible that are so wonderful they should overwhelm our souls with gratitude to God. One of those truths is the doctrine of justification. We banter the term around with little consideration to the wonders of God’s mercy and grace in its provision. When we speak of being justified before God our souls should be filled with praise and our hearts full of emotion for God’s unspeakable gift.

One of the great products of theology is that it helps to systemize and organize God’s truths. However, one of the by-products of developing a systematic theology is that the process tends to sterilize our emotions. When the great truths of God’s grace and mercy are taught from a heart sterilized of emotions, those truths will never be truly understood. God’s grace is truly overwhelming to the soul. It should fill our hearts with overflowing gratitude and praise. These truths are intended to touch more than our intellect. They should touch the very core of our beings. They should touch our soul, our spirit and especially our hearts.

God’s grace takes us by the hand and leads us to the spiritual mirror of truth where He exposes us to a vision of how He sees us (Romans 1:18-3:18). There we see ourselves as sinners dead in trespasses and sins. There we see ourselves lost and on our way to Hell. There we see ourselves totally depraved and absent of any redeeming qualities. Until we take that trip to the spiritual mirror and finally see ourselves for what we are, we will never fully comprehend and appreciate God’s love, mercy and grace in the gospel. The gospel tells us how God takes a vile sinner and imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus Christ as a free gift of grace through faith and immediately changes the image in the mirror from sinner to Saint.

Romans 3:21 closes the circle started in Romans 3:16-17. It is God’s answer in the gospel to the condemnation of all of the family of Adam. Here God begins to tell us where man can find the righteousness necessary to live in His presence and how to receive that righteousness. God has dealt extensively from chapter 1:18 through chapter 3:20 with the fact of man’s lack of any righteousness and man’s total depravity. God has also dealt quite specifically with the fact that the righteousness necessary for salvation can not be attained through moralism or religious rituals. In closing this circle, God brings it all together with an arrow pointing to Jesus Christ and the Cross where God met humanity’s sin and fully paid its penalty.

Romans 3:21 tells us that God’s means for man to receive His righteousness is totally independent from the Law. The Law is not the way to attain to God righteous. The Law is not a road that brings one to salvation. The Law is an avenue that brings one to the place where he pleads guilty before God (3:19), instructs us about right and wrong and informs us that it is a *dead end* if we are looking to it to find salvation (3:20). Pleading guilty before God is the first step of faith.

On the other hand, Christ is a *free way* to the righteousness of God. He is a new and living way (as opposed to dead ritual sacrifices which could never take away sins, Hebrews 10:4). The highway to fellowship and reconciliation with God has been opened. The veil is rent. The enemy (death) has been conquered. “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:57).

Defining Justification (see previous illustration)

Propitiation details the work of Christ Godward. Justification is the work of Christ manward and is available because God is propitiated by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the “sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2). Justification is a judicial act of God whereby He removes the condemnation of sin upon the believer (in that the believer’s sin penalty has been fully paid and satisfied in the substitute; adjudicated) and imputes to that believer the righteousness of Christ.

The doctrine of condemnation draws our attention to the ultimate Day of Judgment (Great White Throne) when every lost and unredeemed sinner will stand before a holy God to answer for his sin and rejection of Christ. The doctrine of justification informs us that “whosoever will call on the Name of the Lord” Jesus Christ, the adjudication of the sentence/judgment of God upon sin took place 2,000 years ago on a Cross outside of the city of Jerusalem on a hill called Golgotha in the body of the incarnate eternal Son of God Who bore our sins in His body on the tree (I Peter 2:24).

The Law was a standard of righteousness that no one could meet (Romans 3:21).

“But now” we have a new standard of righteousness “without” or outside of and apart from the Law. This new standard of righteousness is the incarnate, eternal Son of God with all the attributes of God in human form.

1. Unlike the Law, this new standard of righteous is not indifferent and uncompassionate.
2. Unlike the Law, this new standard of righteousness is not blind to our needs.
3. Unlike the Law, this new standard of righteousness is full of love, mercy and grace.
4. Unlike the Law, this new standard of righteousness comes with the power to redeem our souls.

The doctrine of justification together with the doctrine of propitiation teaches us how God can provide salvation without compromising His standard of righteousness in the Law. According to Romans 3:26, God is both “just” and the “justifier.” He is “just” in that His wrath and condemnation upon sin is satisfied without compromising His justice or holiness. He is the “Justifier” in that His mercy can be shown in grace as He restores a believer to a position in righteousness before Him.

God is “just” in that His justice demands the adjudication of His death sentence for sin. God is the “Justifier” in that His grace pays the “wages of sin” in the substitute sacrifice of Christ.

Illustration:

Years ago a family by the name of Rosenberg were tried for treason as Russian spies against the U.S.A. The judge who proceeded over the trial was Judge Kaufman. The Rosenbergs were convicted of treason after a long and bitter trial and sentenced to death. In his summation, the Rosenberg’s lawyer passionately and emotionally pleaded with the court for justice. Judge Kaufman calmly replied, “The court has given you what you ask for – justice! What you really want is mercy, but that is something this court has no right to give you.”

You see, the Law has no right or ability to give mercy or grace. The Law gives what the Law breaker deserves. The Law gives justice. God incarnate brings grace and mercy to the Law. In grace and mercy, God takes the death sentence on sin upon Himself and pays it for us.

This new standard of righteousness is shown to the world by the “faith” (faithfulness) of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22).

Salvation is never based upon what we do (or don’t do). Salvation is based solely upon what Christ has done on our behalf. Christ’s faithful obedience to everything the Law demands is a full revelation of the righteousness of God. Because Jesus was faithful in fulfilling every aspect of the Law, He can give to us His righteousness as the new Federal Head (“last Adam”) of the New Creation. This is known as the doctrine of imputation.

This “righteousness of God” comes “unto all” in Jesus Christ. In other words, God’s righteousness is made available to “whosoever will” through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The “righteousness of God” comes “upon all them that believe.” This is God’s pattern throughout Scripture.

⁵ But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. ⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works”. . . (Romans 4:5-6).

“For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).

“For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).

“For there is no difference” (Romans 3:22b); everyone needs God’s righteousness given to them as a gift, because everyone has sinned (3:23) and, therefore, can never be as righteous as God even if they could live sinless for the rest of their lives.

Justification is a free gift of God’s grace in that righteousness is imputed “freely” (Romans 3:24).

Justification (as the result of the imputation of God’s righteousness) is a free gift. It is expensive to God. It is free to us. Justification comes to the believer as a free gift “through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

The “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Death is the price of redemption. Death was the price paid for our justification. “Where is boasting then?” (Romans 3:27). Who has some claim to goodness or righteousness before God? Who can demand justice from God without knowing he will receive condemnation? There is no “boasting” about righteousness before God. Boasting is excluded. It is shut out. The kind of thinking that lays claim to God righteousness based on human merit closes the door of heaven against the person thinking he has achieved the kind of righteousness that God is satisfied with.

The concluding statement is found in Romans 3:28; “a man is justified by faith” totally apart from keeping the Law or personal attempts at righteousness. When Romans 3:23 says we “come short of the glory of God,” it means none deserve God’s glory except they that are as righteous as God is. God’s grace provides His righteousness as a gift. Is your salvation based *solely* upon what Christ has faithfully accomplished on your behalf?

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1. Discuss why it is important never to divorce our emotions from the truths of God’s Word. _____

2. Discuss why God must lead us to the spiritual mirror of truth and expose to us how He sees us. _____

3. Discuss how Romans 3:21 closes the circle of truth started in Romans 3:16-17. _____

4. Discuss why the Law is a *dead end road* to the righteousness of God. _____

5. Discuss why the work of Christ is a *freeway* to the righteousness of God. _____

6. Discuss how the doctrine of propitiation and the doctrine of justification are related and how they compliment one another. _____

7. Discuss what “but now” refers to in Romans 3:21. _____

8. Read Romans 3:26. Explain how God can be both “just and the justifier.” _____

9. Read Romans 3:22. Discuss how this new standard of righteousness is revealed to the world and the significance of that truth to each of us. _____

10. Look up the following Scriptures and discuss the doctrine of imputation. (Romans 4:5-6; Romans 10:4; 1 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:9) _____

11. Read Romans 3:24 and explain the meaning of the word “freely” from the context of this lesson and in the context of the doctrine of salvation as a whole. _____
