

Romans
Message 35
Something is Marvelously True, But What?02
Rom 3:19-31

- 19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.
- 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.
- 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;
- 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
- 27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.
- 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.
- 29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:
- 30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.
- 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. KJV

Introduction:

Last week we considered the idea that these few verses are a compressed version of a vast sweep of theology concerning God's Work to bring men (generic) from hopelessness because of sin to a marvelous and perfect relationship with Himself.

We looked at the reality affirmed by Paul, that there is a righteousness from God that is not dependent upon the works of man and that that righteousness is affirmed in the Jewish scriptures from the very beginning. We spoke of Abel, Seth, Enoch and Noah as being possessors of that righteousness though they existed long before the Law was given to Moses. Nor were they justified by some other construction of Law. It was 'by faith' (Heb 11:4) that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain and that faith must have been a gift of god for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

The awful condition of man that Paul has described in vs. 10-19 had brought Paul to the conclusion:

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...”

The Righteousness which comes from God is the only possible remedy for the situation and it can only be acquired as a free gift from God Himself. It is not possible for man to qualify for it nor earn it, the problem is simply so absolutely enormous that it is beyond man’s ability by an factor of infinity.

So, having affirmed that, we want to turn our attention to the other part of this set of massive truths but before we do, we have a grammatical problems to resolve.

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 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: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; **Being justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:...”

The phrase (highlighted) is what is called a “participle phrase” which is a verb phrase used as an adjective. If you remember your High School English an adjective is used to modify a noun. So, in order to understand this phrase and the intention of it we must find the noun it is intended to modify. In Greek as well as in English the adjective normally follows fairly closely the noun it is intended to modify which usually is the one immediately before the phrase, the ‘antecedent.’

But if we use that rule here we have a problem for that makes the antecedent of the phrase be “all” as in the “all who have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and that is impossible logically for it would argue for universal redemption which would make all of this effort to precisely define our theology pointless. If everyone is going to be saved, it does not matter what any of us believe or do, we all end up safely in heaven.

If universal redemption was not true, how can we avoid the grammatical conclusion forced upon us? There is one possibility in which the participle is not required to modify the noun immediately preceding it and that is if there is a parenthetical comment involved. If you put a parenthesis right after ‘believe’ in v.22 and then end the parenthesis with ‘God’ in v.23, you will see that the participle is then required to modify “them” as in “them that believe” and that is exactly what Paul was saying. Problem solved.

Men have forced another problem upon this text. It is affirmed by many that those who believe are Justified **because they believe**, but the Holy Spirit through Paul anticipated that perversion of the text and included the affirmation that they are “Justified freely” without a cause, without a trade-off, and without any qualification. Believing and Justification are inseparably linked for sure, but the justification is not caused or brought about or given as a reward for believing. Really, it is the Justification that is the cause of the believing. It must be for the sinner, dead in his trespasses and sins, cannot believe with saving faith. It is only the spiritually living who can show the signs of spiritual life. So, our troublesome participle phrase actually explains to us how those who believe actually came to that place. It was a free gift of God, otherwise known as “Grace.”

Now, let us look at this word “Justified” and make sure we understand what Paul was saying. He has already used the word three times in this letter to the Romans and we should at least look at those.

- Rom 2:13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. KJV)
- Rom 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. KJV
- Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. KJV

It is obvious in the 3:4 passage that Paul was using a quotation from the OT (Ps 51:4) which speaks of God, so that does not really help us when talking about men becoming Justified.

The other two verses, if we do not carefully consider them, are confusing, seeming to say opposite things. One says that the doers of the law are Justified and other says that it is not possible to be Justified by “the deeds of the Law.”

Here is what he is saying. There are people who faithfully (not perfectly but faithfully) keep the commands of God’s Law.... BUT.... they are not Justified by doing so. They cannot be because they fail from time to time and all failure is sin and all sin is judged and condemned by God.

You can identify a Christian by his keeping of God’s law but you cannot make a sinner into a saint by having him keep that law. Saints and sinners fail at the task and even one failure is unrighteousness. The same with believing. You can identify the believer by his faith but you cannot change a sinner into a saint by convincing him to believe something. (Which, by the way, is the great failure of most so-called Evangelism.)

But we haven’t solved the problem of our word, “Justified,” have we?

Look again at the whole text. Let us read it together again, at least down to v. 24.

- 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.
- 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: KJV

There is a contrast between ‘sin’ and ‘righteousness’ but there is also a contrast between ‘sin’ and ‘justified.’ In fact, if you will closely consider what Paul is saying you will see that he is

making 'righteous' and 'justified' equivalent terms. Those who have this 'righteousness of God' and those who are 'justified freely by His grace' are the same people and the state of being Justified and the state of being Righteous are the same.

Now, technically, the two words are not exactly the same. One speaks of perfect holiness and other of being acquitted of all charges. And, we can dissect those ideas for the purpose of study and consideration but there is no one who stands Righteous before God who is not Justified and there is no one Justified who is not also Righteous. They are inseparable ideas in practical terms. In all reality, Paul was simply using two different forms of the same word for both conditions.

'Righteousness' = dikaiosune

'Justified' = dikaioumenoi

Both from the root dikaios

It is similar to how 'believe' and 'faith' is treated, both forms of the same Greek word.

This place of being 'justified' and 'righteous' is that place of complete and total right standing with God. 'Justified' is a legal term which indicates that all charges against the person arising from all of their sins has been dismissed and 'righteous' means that they are fully and completely made appropriate for full and complete communion with God. It is truly a radical idea, especially as a free gift.

But, how did they get there, these people who have "all sinned and come short of the glory of God"? What did they do to change their circumstance? If we are to believe Paul, and I do, they did nothing, they were "justified freely by His Grace."

This is an enormous problem for most religious teaching for every system other than the exact one held by Paul introduces some measure of works into the mix, some 'thing' that man does which then causes God to grant him a right standing. Paul, in this little problematic participle phrase forever sets aside the notion that the sinner causes his own right standing with God.

But, we must understand that this act of God is not a granting of righteousness by 'fiat.' That is, God does not simply take a guilty sinner and declare him as not guilty and righteous without a process by which God is vindicated and shown to Himself be a Righteous Judge in the action.

Justification by 'fiat' is what Presidents and Governors do, often at the very end of their term, which allows people convicted of felonies and serving prison terms to walk free and become considered 'not guilty.' We often find ourselves quite upset at such actions because while they are 'mercy' they often are not 'just.' God refuses to become unjust in order to make a sinner Righteous.

Those who are Justified have their sins taken into account before God and an arrangement made whereby those sins are justly and fairly both adjudicated and paid in real terms.

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

This word 'Redemption' is a shorthand for the whole work of Christ in relation to the sinner. It is all necessary (all of the redeeming works of God through Christ) and there is a progression of actions which Paul will describe in detail in chapter 8.

First, there is a work which is exclusively in the spiritual realm, really totally within the mind and purpose of God.

Rom 8:28-30

- 28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
- 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
- 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. KJV

This progression began in eternity past and will carry forward forever into eternity future. This is the purpose and plan of God and it is perfect regardless of the silly objections men make and have made concerning it.

But, there is a temporal element as well, a progression of events which happened in time which are also critical to this matter of making men righteous before Him, dealing with their sins to perfection and in accordance with perfect Justice.

First, there was the enormous condescension of Jesus from the Throne of Heaven.

Phil 2:5-10

- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
- 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
- 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
- 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
- 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; KJV

So, what about this death of the cross?

2 Cor 5:17-21

- 17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.
- 18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;
- 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
- 20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.
- 21 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. KJV

To what extent did Jesus become sin?

1 Peter 2:24

24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. KJV

By merging the identities of the sinner and the Savior, the Savior became the legitimate bearer of the sinner's sins and His death became the actual and proper payment. The sinner being in Him, when the sin was put away all that was left was Righteousness which is now shared by Savior and sinner alike and fully.

We are Justified without doing anything to cause it by the Redemption we experience by our Union with Jesus Christ.

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; KJV

And, here we have a second troubling and somewhat unclear statement. What is this "remission of sins that are past," and how is the "forbearance of God" involved... but most of all how does it call the Righteousness of God into question and how does the Work of Christ vindicate God for it? If we can answer these questions, then we might know something of that this little statement means.

Let us remember what we have observed about the group at Rome through what we have been studying and what we know the rest of the letter says. It was a mixed group, part Gentile and part Jew. The relations between the two groups was not good, not sound, and not biblical. There were thinkers and questioners on both sides and Paul had reached the conclusion that their understanding of the gospel was not solid.... or had been polluted with error, some Jewish and some Gentile.

Who would we imagine asking these questions? Would it be Gentiles who question this whole thing of God's Justice since He apparently made people righteous in the OT without the Work of Christ or would it be the Jews who cannot see how God can make Gentiles righteous who do not become faithful keepers of the whole Law of Moses by becoming proselytes? We will answer that question after we consider the issue being raised.

What the question concerns is the forbearance of God in the remitting of sins in past ages. How did He do that if now He has required the death of Jesus Christ in this late age to accomplish that? If He could have done it a different way, why this? If He did do it a different way then how?

Well, we first must consider the various people whom God did obviously pardon. There were all of those before the giving of the Law, almost two thousand years of human beings, some of whom at least seemed to have legitimate relationships and communion with God. Then, of course, there were those from Moses to the writing of this letter, Jews under the Mosaic system. But there were also Jews who lived through the time of the Captivity in Babylon while the Temple lay in ruins and no sacrifices were being offered, people like Daniel, Azariah,

Hannaniah, Mischael, Mordecai, Esther and many others. These were people with a right relationship with God, Justified and Righteous, people who never attended a single event at the Temple.

According to Paul, God in His forbearance, remitted their sins. But how? Under what construction? And how is that reconciled with the necessity now to Repent and Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Is this a Just system?

The answer to that is that God has set forth Jesus Christ as Propitiation and this proves Him to be Just and Righteous. The word translated 'Propitiation' is the word used exclusively in the Greek OT to be the Mercy Seat, that special place on the top of the Ark of the Covenant where the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement and then the Shekinah of God would appear as a signal that the offering was accepted.

But if it is no possible that the death of an animal could actually deal with sin, how could God forgive those people and still be Righteous?

The only logical construction of that argument is that Jesus is the Satisfaction for the sins of them all, no matter what time in which they lived. He has paid the debt of all the believing past and present. There is no injustice, no multiple schemes and no variety of methods. The One and Only Propitiation for Sins is Jesus Christ and His Work perfectly satisfies the demands of God's Law. God is Righteous.

Look at the next verse and the point it makes.

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

His pardon of sin for those in the past is shown to be Just and God is vindicated as Righteous. He did not Justify a single soul apart from a proper sacrifice, the Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, who are these questioning the Plan of God?

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

Who in this mixed crowd is the one most likely to boast? The Jew who thinks he is superior and is the sole possessor of True Religion.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Who seemingly was locked in on the idea that a man is justified by works? Again, the Jew.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

Who was most likely to think that God was God of the Jews only? Jews.

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

But this God Whom they believed was only theirs was the One Whom Paul was proclaiming as the Justifier of the circumcised and uncircumcised through faith and apart from the works of the Law.

The scholars have not been able to settle the reason for Paul to use two different prepositions here, one for the Jew and another for the Gentile but they seem to all be in agreement that no difference is seen as intended by them. Both are justified in the same way.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

And, who would take the position that this idea of Justification invalidated the Law? Still the Jew. The Law is established here by re-setting it to its proper place, “the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.” It is God’s instrument to show us our sin so that we might give up on our works and come in Repentance and Faith.

So, we can conclude:

God in His Grace has mercy on sinners and grants to such as He pleases a Righteousness sufficient to make them acceptable to Him for Communion and Relationship and of such Perfection that He Himself is not stained by interaction with them.

He does this by the agency of a system of faith in Jesus Christ, the True Record of Who He is and What He has accomplished, Redemption through His death (blood). All have sinned and are without ability even to help themselves toward salvation so He has Justified them freely through His Grace.

In sending and setting forth Jesus Christ to be the Propitiation, the actual remedy, for our sins, He has shown Himself Righteous in that He has not compromised with sin or lowered His standards in the least. He demanded full payment and received it for all of the sins He would remit.

He is also vindicated for granting Righteousness to those who came before. Since He did provide Himself payment for their sins, they were never excused for a single one. All is paid and all is well. He is still Righteous even though He has redeemed sinners.

Principle to Remember: God is never going to become Unrighteous in order to save a sinner. The only way anyone has ever been made Righteous in the eyes of God is through Jesus Christ. No one other than a believer in Him has spiritual life, Justification or Righteousness.

We praise and thank God for His Marvelous Grace not only in sending Jesus but also in calling us to Him.

If you are here and without this life and without faith, you might be asking, “what, then, can I do?”

If I were you and knew that I was not a child of God, since all life comes from Him, I would be having long and earnest conversations with Him asking Him to grant me life, repentance and faith so that I might be saved. And, I would resolve not to stop until He had answered my prayer.