

When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"I Sought the Law & the Law Condemned"

3:19-31

Californians awoke to over 700 new laws on January 1 2011. For example:

- SB 1411 made it a misdemeanor to maliciously impersonate someone via a social media outlet or through e-mails.
- SB 1317 allowed the state to slap parents with a \$2,000 fine if their K-8 child misses more than 10 percent of the school year without a valid excuse. It also allowed the state to punish parents with up to a year in prison for the misdemeanor.

Whether you were ignorant of these and the other 700 or so, you are under them and can be held accountable.

Now the Jews were proud that they had God's law. It made them feel special. It should, however, have made them feel guilty!

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

"The law" is God's written revelation of Himself in the Old Testament.

"Those who are under the law" are the nation of Israel.

The "law" wasn't a get-out-of-jail free card. It wasn't a talisman or a good-luck charm. The Jews, and Paul included himself saying "we," were "under" it, they were subject to its standards.

The law reveals the absolute holiness of God and, thus, the sinfulness of man. A Gentile can understand through creation and because of conscience that there is a God and that something is wrong in his relationship with God. A Jew, having the law, knows all about God and exactly what is wrong - sin that cannot be atoned for by any of Adam's descendants.

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

"The deeds of the law" were the outward obedience required: Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not commit adultery, and the rest. The law was meant to reveal an inward standard of righteousness that it was impossible for men to achieve!

Jesus said that if you even hated your brother in your heart, you were guilty of murder; if you even coveted anything in your heart, you were guilty of stealing; if you even lusted in your heart, you were guilty of adultery. Deeds are not a sufficient righteousness when there is death in the heart. No one, including the Jew, can achieve a righteous standing before God. With God's greater revelation through the law came only a greater "knowledge of sin."

One commentator pointed out, "the law is an instrument not of justification but of condemnation."

Dr. J. Vernon McGee put it more colorfully:

To hold onto the law is like a man jumping out of an airplane, and instead of taking a parachute, he takes a sack of cement with him. Well, believe me, the law will pull you down. It condemns man.

The whole human race stands condemned before God in these verses. Their standing is far short of His standard.

The only righteousness that an absolutely holy and perfect God can accept is His own. If you are to have God's own righteousness, it cannot be achieved by faithfulness - it can only be received by faith.

God declares you righteous when you trust Christ alone as Savior. The Bible uses a special word for this declaration: Justified. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares a believing sinner righteous on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains it like this:

Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness as a result of God's imputing to believers Christ's righteousness, provided by God's grace and appropriated through faith.

We begin now to look at justification by faith in verse twenty-one:

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

If there is one phrase in the whole book of Romans that should excite you, it is "But now." You have just been condemned for three chapters! There is no hope of your achieving a righteousness that can save you. Every mouth is stopped and the whole world is guilty before God. Even God's special nation is guilty and without sufficient righteousness to save them.

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed." God looks upon you to save you, and even though you cannot stand before Him, He has made a way to change your standing.

He saves you by "the righteousness of God apart from the law." In other words, it is God's righteousness available to you in another way other than perfectly keeping His law, which no one can do.

The Gospel reveals this way of righteousness apart from the law, and it does so in full agreement with the Old Testament - "the Law and the Prophets."

Justification by faith is nothing new. It is not a compromise or a concession to sinners. It is and has always been God's way of salvation.

Romans 3:22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ...

The righteousness apart from the law comes to you "through faith in Jesus Christ." It is not ours *by* faith, as we earn or deserve it because of our great faith. It is ours *through* faith by simply believing God.

Newell: "Faith is not 'trusting' or 'expecting' God to do something, but relying on His testimony concerning the person of Christ as His Son, and

the work of Christ for us on the cross ... After saving faith, the life of trust begins... trust is always looking forward to what God will do; but faith sees that what God says has been done, and believes God's Word, having the conviction that it is true, and true for ourselves."

Romans 3:22 ...to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;
Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Since it is by faith, God's righteousness is available "to all and on all who believe." Birth, gender, status, culture - none of these is an advantage or a hindrance. Since all descend from Adam, Jew as well as Gentile, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." When it comes to righteousness, "there is no difference." None can achieve it, but all can receive it.

"Fall short" should be translated, "keep on falling short." No amount of effort can get you to God's perfect standard.

Justification by faith is accomplished by the work of Jesus on the Cross. Paul looks at the Cross in verses twenty-four through twenty-six. Notice his references to "redemption" and the "blood" of Jesus:

Romans 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Romans 3:25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

You can only be "justified freely by His grace." All fall short without any hope in any way of ever achieving a righteousness that God can approve of. If you are ever to stand before God, He must freely give you His own righteousness. Since you can't earn it and don't deserve it, it must come to you as a gift, by His grace.

Each person, as he or she simply believes God, is justified by God, "freely, by His grace," as a gift.

While you are justified freely, it was costly to God: it was "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...by His blood..." At the Cross it cost God

the life of His Son to make your justification possible. Your sin was put to Him so that His righteousness could be put to you.

Something else took place at the Cross. Paul says that there "God set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation... to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed."

God is righteous and must judge sin. For many centuries before the coming of Jesus, He had been "passing over" the sins of men. He did so on account of "His forbearance." God bears with sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But not just His "forbearance." God foresaw Jesus dying on the Cross and taking the wrath against sin due sinners upon Himself.

Men misunderstand God's passing over their sins. They do not believe that God is righteous, that He judges sin, and that all sin everywhere calls forth His wrath against it. At the Cross God demonstrated before all the universe, once and for all, His righteousness in judging sin. Jesus took upon Himself the punishment that all men deserved for their sin. God poured out His wrath against sin upon His Son. God demonstrated His righteousness at the Cross.

Because Jesus was the sinless Son of God, perfect in His own righteousness, His death on the Cross fully satisfied God's wrath against all sin, past, present, and future. Jesus was a "propitiation," meaning He was a sacrifice that fully satisfied the judgment of God against sin. Thus, all who receive Jesus as Savior by faith will never face the wrath of God against their sin. Those who reject Christ still face God's wrath against sin.

Because God is "propitiated," or satisfied, He can freely forgive all those who come to Him through the blood of Jesus. He need not and cannot receive any further sacrifice from them.

God demonstrated something else about His righteousness at the Cross:

Romans 3:26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

At the Cross and only at the Cross can God remain "just" and also offer men justification. If God does not judge sin, He is not just. The penalty for sin is death, and a righteous God must assess that penalty. He cannot acquit the sinner; the sinner is guilty. He cannot pardon the sinner; a pardon ignores the righteous penalty of the law. He must assess the death penalty. The sinner must die. You must die.

At the Cross Jesus takes the sinners place, He takes your place, and God assesses sin's penalty on Him! Thus God remains "just" in judging sin, but can at the same time be the "justifier" of those who receive Christ by faith.

He does not compromise His righteous standard to accommodate your unrighteous standing. Instead you are given a new standing before Him in Jesus Christ that meets His standard of righteousness.

As you read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "...He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." He put your sin to Jesus so that He could put Jesus' righteousness to you.

God is just in justifying anyone who has faith in Jesus. As one commentator wrote, "Justice is no less justice, although mercy has her perfect work; Mercy is no less mercy, although justice is completely satisfied."

Since justification is by faith,

Romans 3:27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

You contribute nothing to your justification.

- There is nothing internal that you can "boast" of as having merited God's salvation.
- There is nothing external, no law, that you can obey that merits God's salvation. It is simply yours to receive by faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Romans 3:29 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,

Romans 3:30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Justification is by faith, for the Jew and for the Gentile. It is God's universal provision of salvation for all mankind - for whoever will believe.

Romans 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Justification by faith is nothing new. It was the principle of salvation in the Old Testament. It is the very foundation of the Old Testament, for upon it the "law" is here said to be "established." In chapter four Paul will look back at Abraham and demonstrate, as he says in 4:3, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted [or imputed] to him for righteousness."

In chapters one, two and three you were condemned. You were declared guilty and worthy of punishment. "But now" you see that you can be justified by faith in Jesus Christ! Because of Jesus' work on the Cross, you can be declared righteous. His righteousness can be put to you. God's justice is satisfied by Christ's death and there are no grounds on which He can justly punish you. He remains just, having judged sin, but is the "justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Since justification is by faith, it is not a process or a performance; it is a pronouncement.

- If it were a process, it would take place gradually, over a period of time, as you performed certain commandments or sacraments.
- Justification is the pronouncement of the Judge that you are "Not guilty" by virtue of His Son's work on the Cross. You are fully justified the moment you receive Jesus as your Savior by faith.

If you stand before God in your own righteousness, the wrath of God against your sin must fall upon you - on earth and especially in eternity.

If you stand before Him in His Son's righteousness, the wrath of God against your sin has already fallen upon Jesus and you enjoy abundant life - on earth and especially in eternity.

