

Romans Study Part 3: The Gift of Righteousness (3:21-4:25)

Covenant Presbyterian Church

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"[I]t is not the Law but the Gospel, not the revelation of wrath but that of love, which saves the world. Wrath prepares for love; but wrath never did and never will save a soul." - B.B. Warfield

I. Righteousness Apart from the Law

- A. Just as the wrath of God has been revealed (1:18) so, too, has the righteousness of God (3:21). This harkens back to the thesis of the letter (1:17)
 - 1. Here "righteousness of God" refers to the righteousness that God graciously bestows upon believers
- B. This passage is driven forward by several important terms:
 - 1. **Justification** = to be declared righteous, not guilty (legal, forensic)
 - 2. **Grace** = receiving that which is not deserved
 - a) Different from mercy, which is not receiving what you do deserve
 - 3. **Redemption** = to be bought out of sin/death (slave, marketplace)
 - 4. **Propitiation** = to satisfy the wrath of God

II. Just and the Justifier (3:26)

- A. The perfect beauty of God's redemptive plan is displayed succinctly in this verse.
- B. If God simply forgave sin he would be gracious, but unjust, for sin rightly deserves punishment.
- C. If God condemned all sin and provided no way for salvation he would be just, but not gracious.
- D. In Christ, however, God is able to punish sin as it deserves, thus maintaining his justice, AND he is able to declare sinners justified, thus maintaining his grace.
 - 1. This is accomplished through *imputation*
 - 2. What Calvin calls "the wondrous exchange"
 - a) "...we obtain justification before God, solely by the intervention of the righteousness of Christ. Which is equivalent to saying that a man is righteous, not in himself, but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation... We see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ; and that all of our title to it rests solely on our being partakers of Christ; for in possessing him, we possess all his riches with him."¹

III. Justification by Grace Through Faith and the Law of God (3:27-31)

- A. Boasting?

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. 11. xxiii. Trans. John Allen, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian), 820.

1. Our salvation is not a cause for boasting on our part, because we do not deserve it, we do not earn it, and we did not initiate it. It is a work of God from start to finish.
 - a) The fact that salvation is by grace through faith excludes our boasting (vv. 27-28)
 - b) "You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." - Jonathan Edwards

B. The gospel does not nullify the law (v. 31)

1. The gospel does not nullify the law - it cannot be so.
 - a) The law is a reflection of God's own holiness and righteousness, therefore it is good and holy itself (c.f. Rom. 7:12)
 - b) The law shows us the need for the salvation that God provides in and through the gospel.
 - c) In the justification we are declared righteous, which is defined by the law.
 - d) In sanctification we are being conformed to the righteous standard of the law.
2. Law and gospel are complementary, not competing.

IV. Abraham and David: Case in Point (ch. 4)

A. "In Romans 4:1-25, Paul summons both Abraham and David as Old Testament witnesses in support of justification by faith alone..."

1. Justification by grace through faith is not new; it is not a New Testament development. Salvation has always been by grace through faith.

B. "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness" (4:3-5)

1. Counted = reckoned or imputed
 - a) The "wondrous exchange!"
2. God considered Abraham righteous even though he had no righteousness of his own
3. He was clothed in the righteousness of Christ
 - a) Not because of anything that Abraham had done, but because of the grace of God

C. Righteous before circumcision (4:9-12)

1. Circumcision was the sign, it did not cause justification, nor was it required for justification

D. The promise came through faith, not law (4:13)

1. The law brings wrath (4:15)
 - a) The law shows us to be sinners, it condemns us
 - b) The law cannot save us - that is not its purpose
 - c) It is the righteous standard (7:12) that we do not meet and cannot attain under our own power
2. The promise of salvation depends on faith and rests on grace (4:16)
 - a) Three facets of saving faith
 - (1) **Notitia** - the knowledge or object of our faith

(2) **Assensus** - The conviction that the knowledge or object of our faith is true

(3) **Fiducia** - trust, reliance, dependence upon the knowledge or object of our faith

b) Faith does not earn salvation, nor does God reward faith with salvation. But faith is required to receive the salvation that God graciously gives.

(1) Faith itself is a gift of God.

(a) Faith requires one to receive the noetic effect of regeneration in order that he/she might believe in the first place

(2) "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love." (WCF 9.2)

(3) "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened." (WCF 14.1)

(a) 1 Corinthians 12:3; John 3:5; 6:44-45, 65; Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8; Phil 1:29; 2 Pet. 1:1

(4) Q. 73. *How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?*

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but *only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness* (WLC)

E. The father of us all (4:16-17)

1. We are called to have the same faith in God that Abraham had

a) To "walk in the footsteps of faith" (4:12)

b) To be one who "shares the faith of Abraham (4:16)

c) To trust in God so that we, too, may be counted as righteous

2. Abraham's faith was also on clear display when he and Sarah trusted that God's promise would be fulfilled through a son that was not yet born, even though they were well-beyond childbearing years.

F. Written for our sake (4:23-25)

1. Abraham is an example of salvation by grace through faith *for us*

2. God made an example out of Abraham - in a good way!

3. The sudden mention of Jesus' death and resurrection shows that Christ is the fulfillment of all that was promised to Abraham (4:25)

a) But what he longed for, we have received.