

## **A Wonderful God: Offers Righteousness**

*Romans 3:9-31*

### **I. No one is righteous because of what they do or who they are; 3:9-20.**

*<sup>9</sup> What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." <sup>13</sup> "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." <sup>14</sup> "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." <sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they do not know." <sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes." <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*

Paul now concludes his argument. The Gentile, rejecting the revelation of God and pursuing a lifestyle that was both idolatrous and degrading, was deserving of the wrath of God. The Jews, who had the law but failed to put it into practice, received no benefit from their privileged position. All people, including both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin.

The ungodly display their fallen nature when they open their mouths to speak. God provided us with the gift of communication so that we may honor and praise our Creator. We tend to take the gift and place it in the service of our own sinful nature. Jesus said that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34). Language reveals the true heart.

Their natural instincts encourage violence. As a result, ruin and misery follows. Peace is unknown to those who turn from God. Their lives are marked by anxiety and lack of genuine satisfaction. They live out their days haunted by the thought that there must be something in life that would satisfy their deeper longings.

The law makes a person conscious of sin. It reveals that we are unable to live up to the righteous requirements of a holy God. Law encourages effort. But human effort falls short of the divine standard. The purpose of the law is to guide conduct, not to provide a method to stand before God on the basis of

one's own righteousness. Paul had now made his case. People have turned from the knowledge of God revealed in creation and degraded themselves. Both Jew and Gentile fall under the condemnation of sin. Is there hope?

## **II. Righteousness through Jesus; 3:21-26.**

*<sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

After building a case against all people, showing their universal sinfulness and therefore their universal need of salvation, Paul then makes clear the only way to be brought into a right standing with God. The righteousness God provides is all from what He did, not in what people may accomplish. It is received by faith, not earned. No one would have come up with a plan that excluded their own contribution toward salvation. We want to earn what God will only give.

Paul explains why the righteousness of God comes to all who believe. It is because there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. Both have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. All have sinned and in so doing have fallen short of God's glorious ideal. The redemption provided by Christ enables us to be brought back into a personal relationship with God.

People want to earn God's favor; however, it would provide a basis for boasting. We underestimate the hopelessness of our sinful state. At best, any righteousness by works would be desperately inadequate. By God's grace we are granted a right standing with Him. The basis for this redemptive process is Christ Jesus.

How do you let a muddy dog in the house without the house getting muddy? You don't. You must wash the dog before letting it into the house. Christ on the cross is the sacrifice that satisfies the righteous nature of God and brings salvation to humankind. The problem of how a holy God can receive into His presence those who by nature are unholy has been solved.

### III. God's righteousness prevents all boasting; 3:27-31.

*<sup>27</sup> Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. <sup>29</sup> Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup> since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.*

People cannot boast of what they receive through no merit of their own. In the case of justification by faith, there is no room for boasting. To show the universal scope, Paul asked, "Is God the God of Jews only?" "Is he not the God of Gentiles too?" Since there is only one God, He must be God of all people. All those whom God will justify, both Jews and Gentiles, will be justified in the same way. Faith, and faith alone, is God's way of setting people right with Himself.

Faith puts law in its proper place. It plays an essential role in the divine plan, but it was never intended to make it possible for a person to earn righteousness. Faith upholds the law in the sense that it fulfills all the obligations of the law. Paul wants every person to understand that God's way of justifying people-by grace-absolutely excludes any possibility that we may take credit for our salvation.

One of the most common and perhaps basic of all sins is illegitimate pride-what Paul calls boasting. The tendency for finite, weak, and sinful human beings to think too much of ourselves is pervasive. We easily bring such boasting into our relationship with God. It suppresses our worship. As long as we think that we have contributed something to our salvation, we will not worship with a sense of humility, dependence, and thanksgiving.

Accomplishments that we are tempted to boast about are inconsistent and imperfect. When things are going well and we are feeling pretty good about ourselves, it is easy to put confidence in ourselves. We end up being self-righteous. The inevitable difficult times will come and if our confidence rests in ourselves, we will find ourselves with no good foundation on which to stand.

The redemptive work of God through His Son Christ Jesus is the most amazing event in the history of the universe. Never would such a plan have risen in the

human mind. God brings a just sentence of death upon all, for all have sinned. He then provides a sinless sacrifice, His only Son, to pay the penalty for the unrighteousness of the sinful human race. From God's standpoint forgiveness is freely offered. All that remains is for people to accept that forgiveness. The obligation is to believe and to trust in the redemptive work of Christ. The good news is good only to those who receive it. God offers His righteousness to those who will receive it, not as something to supplement their own good works but as a gift that alone can place them in a right standing with God. Salvation is for all who believe in God's saving work in Jesus, not those who know about Jesus.