

What About Righteousness?

Romans 3:19-31

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Introduction: Since the time of Moses God has been using men and circumstances of His choosing to encode a written revelation of Himself and His will to mankind. The Scripture is said to be inspired. It is not the men but the Scripture that is inspired.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

God used human men who were guided by The Holy Spirit. Peter tells us that...

2 Peter 1:20-21 ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The Scripture therefore reveals to every generation the thoughts, opinions and desires of The One True and Living God.

1 Corinthians 2:11-13 ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

The Book of Romans is no exception. In it, God is revealed in His righteousness and justice and mankind in their sin and injustice. This book explains that much of the trouble in the world is God pushing back against stubborn and godless mankind.

Romans 1:18-19 ¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

At the same time God makes His existence clear to humanity. Mankind knows there is a God and they don't like Him.

Romans 1:20-22 ⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

The more humanity rejects God and His truth the more they seek to obscure His image in themselves. They deny their origins. They deny the obvious design and order in

creation. They deny their own humanity and sexuality. God has a point where He will abandon them to their desires.

Romans 1:28 ²⁸ And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

Chapter Two discusses all the objections to God's assertions about the heart of humanity. What about morality? What about our racial standing? What about our religion? What about the Law of God given through Moses? Surely one of these things will justify us in the eyes of God. There must be something we can do to be righteous!! God's conclusion is decisive and unequivocal. No human remedy will suffice because

Romans 3:10-11 ¹⁰ "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

Today Scripture introduces the one and ONLY solution to the sin of humankind. Let's read it together now....

Romans 3:19-31 ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ²⁹ Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. ³¹ Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

There are seven vital points in these verses. They reveal in seed form the Gospel of Christ. AND.....they resolve all the conflicts of the Book of Romans so far and explain how you, a sinner, can be justified before the Righteous Judge of Creation.

- All men are condemned by The Law of God [19-20]
- The Law Testifies to the Righteousness We Need [21]
- God Himself provided the Righteousness We Need in Christ [22-24]
- God His own Righteousness and Justice in Christ [25-26]
- Faith Alone destroys self-righteous pride [27-28]
- Faith Alone Justifies all men freely [29-30]
- Faith Alone Authenticates and Confirms The Law [31]

All men are condemned by The Law of God [19-20]

Romans 3:19-20 ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law: This means every human being who has ever lived. For the Jew this would be easy to understand, but what about the pagan. God has explained this already.

Romans 2:14-15 ¹⁴ For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them,

So that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God: God holds every person accountable and will silence all the excuse making and the lame attempts to justify themselves with religion, morality or even birth status.

By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight: This could not be stated more categorically. If you seek to justify yourself by keeping the Law you will fail. The fact that you do not steal now cannot change the fact that you have stolen. If you do not lie now that cannot turn back time and change the fact that you have lied. The Law is simply not a means to righteousness. It was never ever designed that way. When men use it like that they subvert God's intention for it.

Through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin: The Law reveals the righteousness of God and by reason the sinfulness of men. Just knowing that God is righteous is of no value in your quest to BE RIGHTEOUS. And... you need to BE RIGHTEOUS in order to spend eternity with a perfectly righteous God in heaven.

Psalms 24:3-5 ³ Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood And has not sworn deceitfully. ⁵ He shall receive a blessing from the LORD And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

The Law Testifies to the Righteousness We Need [21]

Romans 3:21 ²¹ But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested: There is a righteousness that has nothing to do with the Law. And this is Good News! Because the Law, it has been proven, can only condemn us by revealing our pathetic fallen condition before our truly righteous God.

God's Word is about to answer an age old question. Job first asked it in the oldest book of the Bible.

Job 9:2-12 ² ".....But **how can a man be in the right before God?** ³ "If one wished to dispute with Him, He could not answer Him once in a thousand *times*. ⁴ "Wise in heart and mighty in strength, Who has defied Him without harm? ⁵ "*It is God* who removes the mountains, they know not *how*, When He overturns them in His anger; ⁶ Who shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble; ⁷ Who commands the sun not to shine, And sets a seal upon the stars; ⁸ Who alone stretches out the heavens And tramples down the waves of the sea; ⁹ Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, And the chambers of the south; ¹⁰ Who does great things, unfathomable, And wondrous works without number. ¹¹ "Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; Were He to move past *me*, I would not perceive Him. ¹² "Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?'

The crowds asked the same question to John the Baptist and to Jesus Himself. What must we do to work the works of God?" The Rich Young Ruler said, What must I do to obtain eternal life?" The multitude at Pentecost shouted out, "What shall we do?" When men see their hopelessly sinful state in the pure white light of God's righteousness there is always this reaction. If nothing I can possibly do will make me righteous enough for eternal life then what is the solution.

Being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets: Again Paul makes the point that there is nothing wrong with the Law of God or the Old Testament. The fault is with humankind. God gave The Law and The Prophets to reveal their sin and point to His provision of a Savior who would provide for them what nothing else could. True Righteousness and Eternal Life.

Hebrews 10:1-2 For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?

Hebrews 10:11-14 ¹¹ Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹² but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, ¹³ waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. ¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

And there are the Feasts, The King, The Priests and the Prophets who all testify and point to the Messiah who would fulfill the righteousness of God.

God Himself provided the Righteousness We Need in Christ [22-24]

Romans 3:22-24 ²² even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the

glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

Even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe: All human attempts to obtain righteousness have been proven entirely inadequate by the Law and the Prophets. Likewise by the first three chapters of Romans. So God is now revealing a righteousness that can be obtained, but He specifies that it cannot be obtained by any labor of men. It is obtained through “Faith.”

Sadly, faith has been substantially subverted throughout the ages. In our day it takes many false forms that cannot save a man.

Men have faith in their religion. They are called men of faith. They go to church, they seek to keep the ten commandments, they do good works and observe the rituals and tenants of their religion. This is not faith in Jesus Christ. He might be in the mix somewhere, but God has already disallowed all the works of men so adding Christ to it will not make it faith in Christ.

Men have faith in their morality: I am a good person and try to treat everyone well. I have faith that God will accept me into heaven when I die

Men have faith in their doctrine: I believe everything the Bible says and I do not hold any false doctrines or associate with people who do.

Men have faith in faith: I just have faith that everything will work out in the end and I will get to heaven.

But this is a righteousness that cannot be gotten by any means available to men. It is unobtainable by all the means we humans know about. It is therefore offered by faith. Which means NOT BY HUMAN MEANS of any kind. This faith cannot be added to the already rejected means of salvation. It must replace them! Faith is not part of a system of salvation. He is the only way of salvation! It is Faith in Christ Alone, because there is no other way to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 ⁵ For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time.

For there is no distinction: This little phrase, levels the playing field. All the categories of men in the world have been given the same remedy for their sin. All humanity must depend upon what God will provide for their righteousness.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God: This is the sweeping summary statement covering all humanity. Condemnation and accountability are universal and so is the offer of God’s righteousness. Any human may come. All the condemned are justified in exactly the same manner. It is the only way of salvation that must replace every other failed attempt of mankind.

Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: When I was first saved I used to imagine that anyone I told about this incredible news would embrace it eagerly. I conveniently forgot that I had heard it and rejected it several times leading up to my salvation. My optimism was quickly extinguished however and I was left to ponder why free salvation, apart from works would be so universally rejected. Have you ever wondered about it. There are for reasons just in this little sentence...

Justified as a gift: Do you like receiving gifts from people you don't like? I didn't think so! Men don't like God so when He offers them something they need it comes with implied dependence. God is saying..."you need me to save you," and they don't think they do and even if they did they don't want to receive it as a gift as if they were needy.

By His grace: Even if they do think they need it men prefer to get it for themselves. "By grace" means that they have no merit before God. Nothing they have done makes them deserving to obtain a righteousness that will get them to heaven. The Catholic Church teaches that God gives grace in response to man's observance of the Sacraments. In other words you can only obtain grace by performing your religious duty. This is why The Gospel of Christ insists in "Grace Alone." It is unmerited! To do anything at all to merit it is to render the entire concept of Grace dead.

Through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: This means that you were a slave and someone paid the slave price to own you. You were released from the custody of one master into the custody of another. Jesus Himself spoke of this:

John 8:34-36 ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

The Gospel insults the pride and stubborn independence of man's heart. It says that he needs an indispensable gift from God to be righteous. It says that he has no merit that he could call on to receive this gift and it asserts that he is a slave in need of liberation. All of this only through Jesus Christ Alone.

God Revealed His own Righteousness and Justice in Christ [25-26]

Romans 3:25-26 ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith: God did not provide this gift in secret. He prophesied about it for thousands of years. Isaiah wrote this 500 years before Christ's birth...

Isaiah 53:10-12 ¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul,

He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

In pagan religion the “propitiation” was the sacrifice that would satisfy an angry god. Throwing a virgin into a volcano or sacrificing an infant were perverted ways that men sought to satisfy what they correctly perceived to be the wrath of God revealed from heaven. But nothing they did was sufficient. God required righteousness and they had only sacrifices to give. So God sent His own Son into the world to be and to live the righteous life God required and that righteous life was then sacrificed for your sin and mine. Christ satisfied God’s righteousness. Christ Alone satisfied God!

This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed: What would you say about a judge that knows someone is guilty but does not sentence or punish them for it? You would say, He is an unjust judge and you would be right. Then what about God. He has proven that all men are sinners and that the wages of sin is death and yet for thousands of years now he has allowed men to live their lives.

Now what would you say about a judge who acquits a criminal he knows is guilty and then adopts him as his son and makes him an heir to his will at the same time. Unjust! Because the man is unworthy! He has done nothing to merit this treatment. And justice demands that someone pay for every offense and crime.

Christ in the manger living a righteous life for you then on the Cross, dying for you satisfied the righteous requirements of a perfectly holy God. Christ Jesus gives as a gift, His righteous life and standing with the Father to all who trust Him Alone. He bore your sins that you should have born so that you will not spend eternity in hell away from God. In this way all justice is satisfied and God can declare you righteous and still be a just judge.

Faith Alone destroys self-righteous pride [27-28]

Romans 3:27-28 ²⁷ Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded: What is there to be brag about? Absolutely nothing. God conceived the plan and Jesus carried it out and you and I had nothing whatsoever to do with it. Your prayer life should be bathed in humility and gratitude.

By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith: This means the principle of faith. Putting confidence in absolutely nothing but Christ and the work He did on your behalf. This is FAITH ALONE in CHRIST ALONE, to save you by GRACE ALONE!
For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law: Just in case you missed it earlier, this is the summary statement.

Faith Alone Justifies all men freely [29-30]

Romans 3:29-30 ²⁹ Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

God is God over all the Earth and is the God of all men. Regardless of how many gods men create for themselves...there is but One God. He is the God of Creation. He is The Living God and His Son is Jesus Christ.

And He offers the same salvation to all men everywhere on the same condition. Forsake your own righteousness and embrace Christ...the righteous man who lived and died on your behalf. It was always God's intention to save the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Faith Alone Authenticates and Confirms The Law [31]

Romans 3:31 ³¹ Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

The charge against gospel preachers is that they nullify the law. They say the law has no purpose and that men don't need to obey the ten commandments. Grace bashers make the charge that we preach license to sin. They have been saying this since the Christ lived and taught on the earth.

Paul finished this portion of Scripture with a strong denial of this charge. NO! NO! NO! he says. May it never be! The Law was not given to impart righteousness. It was given to reveal sin and hold men accountable to God. Gospel preachers establish the law and put it in its rightful place. The place God designed for it. We affirm it and its purpose when we preach the Glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul explains to the Galatians:

Galatians 3:21-29 ²¹ Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. ²² But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the Law has become our tutor **to lead us to Christ**, so that we may be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.