

### Righteousness and Justification

#### Romans 3:23—26

Paul has just wrapped up presenting a case against all mankind, showing how we are all in a hopeless condition, far from God with no way for us to humanly come back into a proper relationship with Him. This relationship was broken back in the Garden of Eden when Adam disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit. Before this time, man and God had a perfectly harmonious relationship with nothing coming between them. Adam and Eve would meet with the Lord (probably the preincarnate Second Person of the Trinity) in the garden and they would talk with each other. This was a person to person conversation, not just an internal impressions a vision or dream.

With Adam's fall came condemnation, not only to him, but to all mankind because we are all in Adam, not only physically, but spiritually. If we remain spiritually in Adam, we will stay in our condemned condition. Our only hope is to move from being in Adam to being in Christ. This is what the book of Romans is all about, showing us how God made it possible for us to move from being in Adam to being in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:14—18).

One barrier in understanding the Book of Romans is the terminology. While there are many key words related to our salvation that we commonly use, there are other word that are not so common but yet are very important in our understanding of Paul's Gospel. Some of the terms that show up in Romans chapter three include righteousness, justification, redemption, propitiation, forbearance. Other terms found throughout Romans are also important in understanding our position in Christ such as imputation, reconciliation, faith and grace. All these words are interconnected and so they must be taken and understood as a collective and not individually.

#### **Righteousness**

In its simplest form, to be righteous is to be right, or perfect. Everything a righteous person does conforms to the standard of perfection. When we speak of God's righteousness, we are saying that everything done by God is absolutely perfect and right. There is no imperfection in anything He does. This standard of perfection is brought out in Matthew 5:48 that says, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The word righteousness could be substituted for the word perfect and the meaning would not be changed. God is perfect and is an example for what He expects in us. Anything less than that is unrighteousness.

Knowing this should point out a major problem for us since we know we are not perfect because we are unable to meet the high standard set for us by God. Our unrighteousness condemns us, preventing us from standing before God because there is no unrighteousness in Him (Psalm 92:15; John 7:18; Romans 9:14). All those who are unrighteous have God's wrath being revealed against them in Scripture (Romans 1:18).

#### **Justification**

This first part of Romans speaks of condemnation and is followed by a section on justification. The first part of Romans (through chapter five) sets the stage for the introduction of God's offer of justification. We need to be justified because we are all guilty of breaking God's law (sinning). If we were perfect, we would not be in need of justification.

The common definition for justification is "just as if I've never sinned." Those who have been justified are seen as being sinless. While loosely true, it actually discounts the fact that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Our sin was the reason Christ died. Our sin had very real consequences. Instead of us dying, Jesus Christ died in our place so that we who believe now can be

pronounced sinless. This offer of justification is extended to all people without distinction and given to all those who believe Paul's gospel.

To be justified is to be declared righteous, in fact, these two words are almost synonyms in the Greek. *Dikaioyne* (g1343) and *dikaion* (g1344) are translated righteousness and justifier respectively in Romans 3:26. The Justifier is the One declaring people righteous. He could be called the Righteousfier, if there was such a word. Verses that say there is no unrighteousness with God (Romans 9:14), are also declaring that there is no injustice with God. Since God always does the right and perfect thing, He will be completely fair and righteous and just in His dealings with mankind.

It's very important to understand that when we have been justified, we are not made righteous, we are declared to be righteous. It is used in the same sense that when Christ took on our sins, He in effect became sin for us and made it possible for us to be made righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). Obviously, Christ is not a sinner, He was only declared to be one by accepting the sins of the world. Likewise, we are not righteous, but we have been declared righteous (have been justified) through our faith in Christ.

The pathway for mankind to be justified had been changed since the revelation of the Mystery. previous to this, God told Israel what He expected through the Mosaic Law. If they were to be righteous, they were to obey the Law. However, any infraction of the Law was the same as disobeying the entire Law (James 2:10), which could only lead to a guilt and condemnation. The Law is righteous and good, but it is only capable of condemnation (Romans 7:7—12). Paul now declares a pathway to God that is not thought the Law, but is through faith in Jesus Christ without the Law (Romans 3:21—22). It is futile to seek righteousness through keeping the Law, as many people are doing today. Righteousness can only come through Jesus Christ. Those who seek righteousness through their own endeavors are actually proving themselves to be self-righteous, becoming righteous without God. As Romans 3:28 says, "...a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

The source of our justification is God (Romans 8:33). The basis of God being able to justify us is the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Without Christ's blood, we could not be declared righteous. The means of our justification is God's grace (Romans 3:24). It is because of God's grace that He made a way for mankind to come into a right relationship with Him. We appropriate God's justification through faith (Romans 5:1). Justification is offered to all mankind, but will only be given to those who accept God's free offer of righteousness by believing in Jesus Christ. Finally, we are guaranteed that we will be justified because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 4:25). If He had not been resurrected, there is no way for us to have the assurance that we will be with God for all eternity (1 Corinthians 15:13—19).

Imagine vile sinners, like us, being declared "not guilty" when we stand before God. Romans 8:33 rhetorically asks, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" In other words, who is able to accuse the believer? We are blameless and therefore unaccusable (1 Corinthians 1:8; Colossians 1:22), unlike the nation of Israel, who is looking forward to a future forgiveness and future blessings as they enter into the Millennial Kingdom (Jeremiah 31:33—34). This is why Satan is able to accuse Israel (Revelation 12:10) but is not accusing us today who are already forgiven, justified and declared righteous. There is nothing that Satan can accuse us of because we are already seen as being perfect.

Since we, as members of the Church, the Body of Christ, are even now justified before God, instead of eternal damnation, we have been given eternal life. Understanding what God did for us should cause us to fall to our knees in humility and thanksgiving. It should also drive us to serve Him completely by giving Him full and absolute control of our lives (Romans 12:1—2).

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