

## Today's Sermon

### The Righteousness of God in the Gospel

**Rom 1:17-32, 3:10-26**

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, January 23, 2021

Please turn to Rom 1 again and I'm eager to preach to you on the gospel and the righteousness of God. This will be our 3<sup>rd</sup> week in Rom 1 in this series on God's attributes, and understanding this attribute of God's righteousness has changed lives and changed the course of history literally. The empire of Rome would be changed by this, Christianity itself would be reformed by it, and it's a great need for our world today, because Rom 1 is about our world.

**1:15** *I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.* <sup>16</sup> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* <sup>17</sup> *For in it **the righteousness of God** is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The **righteous** shall live by faith."* <sup>18</sup> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and **unrighteousness of men**, who by their **unrighteousness** suppress the truth.* [then v. 20 mentions God's attributes]

**Outline: 1) God is righteous, 2) We're not, 3) How sinners can be righteous.**

Today we'll look at the attribute of the righteousness of God in the gospel. v. 17 says '*in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed...*' This is for our faith and what we live by, and it's the power of God for the world. Paul was eager to go to Rome with this truth. I want to start with a story of another man eager to go to Rome 1500 years later for a different reason and how this passage changed his life and changed the history of Christianity.

Martin Luther was terrified of the wrath of God revealed from heaven, and in his case, lightning struck near him and he pledged he'd become a monk. As a young man he had seen a stain glass painting of a frowning Jesus and he trembled. Luther saw the Lord as angry and wrathful at Luther's life of unrighteousness. So he devoted himself as a Catholic monk in a monastery, trying to do any and all righteous works to appease God's wrath. He wrote famously if ever a monk could get to heaven by monkery, it would be him, but he couldn't. He would sometimes spend hours in a confessional booth confessing sins from the prior day (like coveting a brother's potato salad?)

Luther wrote of his days in the monastery: "If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy." The righteousness of God in His justice terrified Luther and he opened up his fears one day to a man named Staupitz, who told him if you trust in Jesus and His shed blood and 'trust ... in the righteousness of his life ... God is not angry with you; it is you who are angry with God. Listen to the Son of God ... in the Bible."

Like most Catholics, Luther never read the Bible, but he began to read and study the book of Romans and ch 1, v. 17 gripped him. Somewhere between 1510 and 1512, Luther went on a trip to Rome, the very same city Paul was eager to go in v. 15. On the way, Luther almost died and again dreaded the righteous wrath of God on his sin, but this time the words of Rom 1:17 [*the righteous shall live by faith*] came ‘forcibly to his memory and enlightened his soul like a ray from heaven... Comforted and eventually restored to health, he resumed his journey across the hot Italian plains to Rome.’

When Luther got to Rome, he was appalled at the unrighteousness of men like v. 18 says, and he saw the RCC involved in the very sins of v. 21-25. Immorality, irreverence, idolatry with foolish relics, a works righteousness he saw all around him. Unrighteousness was suppressing the truth like v. 18

James Boice tells the story of when Luther came to the stone stairs in Rome: ‘It was the custom for pilgrims, like Luther, to ascend these steps on their knees, praying as they went [bending, kissing each for years off purgatory] ... as he ascended the staircase, the words of our text came forcefully to his mind [*the righteous shall live by faith*] ... Luther was not living by faith. He was living by fear... [he took v. 17] as the foundation of all his doctrine.’<sup>1</sup> One historian wrote ‘When Luther rose from his knees on [that] staircase, in agitation and amazement at those words which Paul had addressed fifteen centuries before to...that same metropolis [of Rome]...truth...also rose...’<sup>2</sup>

Years later he wrote how he had been captivated by understanding v. 17:

‘up till then... a single word... stood in my way. For I hated that word *righteousness*... as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner... I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words [in v. 17], namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who *through faith is righteous* shall live.’” There I began to understand [that] the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which [the] merciful God justifies us by faith ... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates...[he says righteousness became] my sweetest word with a love...*that place in Paul* was for me truly the gate to paradise.’<sup>3</sup>

I pray God’s *righteousness* becomes your ‘sweetest word with a love’ in this place, on this day. If you’re living by works righteousness, this passage can swing open the gate to paradise. If you’re made right with God, righteous by faith, and can believe

God isn't angry at you in Christ, this passage should make you stand on your head for joy! This truth made the reformers stand against the world and turn it upside down. Righteousness is a sweetest word and Jesus said we're to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Mt 6).

### Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after that righteousness

**God is righteous, that's point #1,** but what does that mean? It means just, or upright, rightness. It's not just that whatever God *does* is right, God *is* right. Legally or morally, righteous = perfect integrity, equity, and consistency. No imperfection or imbalance in scales of justice, not unfair in judging us. Grudem: 'God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.'<sup>4</sup> John Frame's *Doctrine of God* calls it His 'perfect internal standard of right.'<sup>5</sup> In the OT and NT the same root word is translated either as *righteous* or *just*. Righteousness is an ATTRIBUTE and also an ACTIVITY in saving sinners

### He judges by righteous justice and saves by righteousness in Christ

v. 20 mentions God's attributes, maybe the best verse on this attribute of God is Dt 32:4: *His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He* (NASB).

But there's other verses that move from His attribute to His activity to save:

- Ps 98:2 '*The LORD has made known his **salvation**; he has **revealed his righteousness**...*' [same key words/phrases in Rom 1:16-17]
- God says in Isaiah '*Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are **far from righteousness**. I am **bringing my righteousness near...and my salvation will not be delayed**. I will **grant salvation** [it's a gift He brings with His righteousness to save]...**My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way**' He says to all who trust.<sup>6</sup>*
- Here in Rom 1:17, I think it's the same, the righteousness of God is righteousness *from* God as a gift in salvation to all who believe, v.16
- Rom 5:17 calls it '*the **free gift of righteousness***' that's our salvation
- God is righteousness and gives righteousness we're to live by, 1:17

But the problem in the next verse is men don't live by it and reject His gifts.

<sup>18</sup> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and **unrighteousness of men**, who by their **unrighteousness** suppress the truth.*

That takes us from point #1 God is righteous, to

## #2. We're not righteous

Because God is a righteous judge, He must punish violations of His Law.

<sup>29</sup> *They were filled with all manner of **unrighteousness**, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,<sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,<sup>31</sup> foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*

This is the Romans Road in the wrong direction. The sign above this highway to hell is the word *unrighteousness*. Everything else runs through that word and that lane. v. 32 says they know God's righteous decree about sin's judgment

We're all in this list, anytime we covet or envy or are in strife or talk about people behind their back, or think of ourselves more highly than we ought. v. 32 says we know God's righteous Law in our heart and we deserve to die. We don't have time to look at all these terms but if you just look at political discourse and media and social media today, you'll see what these words mean. The rioting and unraveling of everything the last 2 years is v. 29-31.

Notice the dismantling of the family and fabric of society in *disobedience to parents*. This also speaks to the sanctity of life we remember on this Sunday

In v. 31 the word *heartless* means literally 'without natural affection.' It can be used of the father who abandons his family or the mother who aborts her baby.<sup>7</sup> The word *murder* in v. 29 and *deceit* speaks to Planned Parenthood in how they deceive mothers against parenthood and plan the murder of the unborn, inventing evil ruthless ways to do it. Ch 3 stalk about those quick to shed innocent blood, that's what abortion is as it suppresses the truth of life.

Pr 14:34 says '*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach...*' 31:8 *Open your mouth...In the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously*' (NKJV). Another translation: '*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves...for those being crushed...the helpless*' (NLT). Righteousness calls us to speak up for the unborn and against the unjust crushing of the helpless. In Isa. 13, God's righteous wrath comes on those who '*have no pity on the fruit of the womb.*'<sup>8</sup> Jer. 22:3 *Thus says the LORD: Do justice and **righteousness**, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor...do no wrong or violence...nor shed innocent blood in this place.*

We need to pray for our land, and that God's hand might even turn the laws of this land this year and turn hearts back to God's righteous care for all life.

But this all started back in v. 24-27 with a sexual revolution and the LGBT redefinition of marriage and morality and male and female gender reality. Like v. 22, professing to be 'woke,' they became fools. Claiming to be wise to social injustice, they foolishly couldn't see their own unrighteousness.

But Rom 2:5 says God's righteous judgment is coming to the unrepentant hard heart. There is a day of wrath coming for all the unrighteous, all of us.

Look at **3:10** '*as it is written: "None is **righteous**, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* Again it gives a catalog of sin but it all starts with unrighteousness. We're not righteous by nature, not a one of us, left to ourselves none of us seek good or do good by God's righteous Law and standard.

We don't do the right thing for the right reason, which is God's glory (v. 23). We're unrighteous before a just Judge

We need sovereign grace and a righteousness outside of us to rescue us

That bad news takes us to our

3 <sup>rd</sup> final point. How sinners can be righteous
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<sup>21</sup> **But now** ... MLJ says as you read these words trumpets should be playing

- **But now** is how God saves those who don't seek Him, God seeks them
- **But now** takes us from wrath to righteousness, from depraved to saved and from a guilty criminal before a judge to beloved child of the King
- Calvin said this doctrine 'the main hinge on which religion turns.'<sup>9</sup>
- This turned Luther's world upside down to stand on his head for joy
- To the Reformers how we're declared righteous (justified) was the key issue and v. 21-26 was the key text about justification by faith alone
- This text saved John Bunyan and suicidal depressed William Cowper<sup>10</sup>
- Paul Washer calls Romans 3:21-26 'the greatest text in the Bible.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>21</sup> **But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—** <sup>22</sup> **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.**

*For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are **justified [declared righteous] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show **God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was **to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just [righteous] and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*****

How can God be a righteous judge and declare us guilty lawbreakers to be righteous? Justify means declare righteous, but we're not righteous, how is it right for the Judge to pronounce us righteous with our violations of His law?

Pr 17:15: 'He who justifies the wicked [is]...an abomination to the LORD.'

But we're wicked, so isn't it abominable for a righteous Judge to justify us?

God's standard is 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48).

Without perfect righteousness like God has we can't be in a perfect heaven.

**But now...** there's a righteousness of God not based on our law-keeping, a righteousness by grace through faith in Jesus and His righteousness for us. Jesus obeyed the Law perfectly and lived the righteous life required for us.

v. 21 says this righteousness is apart from Law, but the prophets spoke of it:

- Paul already quoted the prophet Habakkuk *the righteous live by faith*

- The prophet Isaiah said our righteous deeds are filthy rags to God (64:6) but in Isa 53 Jesus '*the righteous one*' makes many accounted righteous by bearing their sins so He can '*see and be satisfied*,' v. 11
- On the cross He's *pierced for our transgressions*, to pay our penalty
- Justice calls for sin to be crushed, Jesus was *crushed for our iniquity*
- As God's wrath was poured out, Jesus cries 'why have you forsaken me?' God the Son in His humanity is estranged from God the Father.
- Gal. 3:13 says Christ became a curse for us. QUOTE 2 COR. 5:21
- That's what **propitiation** means in Rom 3:25, the blood payment of a substitute, so God can see and be satisfied with justice being paid
- The righteous sinless Savior died so sinful souls can be counted free, God the Just is satisfied to look on Jesus at Calvary and pardon me
- Isa 59 is where Rom 3 quotes from, it says God saw none righteous, so He Himself '*stepped in to save...He put on righteousness...He clothed himself with a robe...The Redeemer will come*' (v15-20 NLT)
- Rom 3:21 says the prophets spoke of this righteousness and v. 24 talks about His Redeeming work through His blood (life and death)
- Isa 61:10 rejoices that God '*has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness...*'
- Zechariah: '*Take away the filthy garments...I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes*' (3:4 NKJV)

**'His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange!**  
 Clothed in my sin, Christ suffered 'neath God's rage.  
**Draped in His righteousness, I'm justified!**  
 In Christ I live, for in my place He died.  
 His robes for mine, what cause have I for dread?  
 God's daunting Law Christ mastered in my stead.  
 Faultless I stand, **with righteous works not mine,**  
 Saved by my Lord's vicarious [substitute] death and life!  
 His robes for mine: God's **justice is appeased.**  
 Jesus is crushed, and thus the Father's pleased.  
 Christ drank God's wrath on sin, then cried "Tis done!"  
 Sin's wage is paid; **propitiation won!**

- Jesus takes all our filthy rags of our righteous deeds and gives His robe of righteousness so God always sees us dressed as His Son!
- In Revelation believers are wearing white robes washed in Christ's blood, and the white linen represents *righteous deeds* (7:13-14, 19:10)
- So there's a real righteousness but it's not mine, it's Christ's and it's given by grace as a gift, v. 24 says and it's received by faith alone
- It's free to us, but there was a great cost to Christ. **Redemption** in v. 24 is when Jesus paid the price due for my sin on the cross, and He took my blame, bore God's wrath, so we stand forgiven at the cross

- So Rom 8 says there is *no condemnation for those who are in Christ ...in order that the righteous requirement of the Law...be fulfilled...*

This makes a sinner a singer: No condemnation now I dread,  
 Jesus and **all in Him is mine... and clothed in righteousness divine**<sup>12</sup>  
 In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood,  
 Hallelujah!<sup>13</sup>

If you struggle in parenting or people-pleasing or if you're performance-oriented in how you think God thinks of you, this doctrine reminds us we're always pleasing in God's sight and it's never based on performance, it's always based on Christ's performance for us. On our worst days we're never beyond the reach of God's grace but on our best days we're never beyond the need of God's grace. Look at Rom 5, how Paul applies this:

*5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope...* This gives us peace and hope and joy as believers. Even in tribulations, as v. 3 goes on to say.

You may have some situations heavy on your heart in relationships where you lack outward peace, or you may lack inward peace in your struggle or anxiety, but believers have a peace that transcends all understanding based on v. 11, God made peace with us through Christ. There's grace to stand in.

We should have hope in any situation, as v. 5 says, because of v. 6, while we were in our most helpless state, Christ died for us. We can have a joy not dependent on circumstances because v. 8 says God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. **1 John 1:9, 2:2**

READ ROMANS 8:31-32, BENEFITS OF JUSTIFICATION. NOTE V. 28

CLOSE WITH 10:9-11 AND HOW TO BE SAVED, OR JUSTIFIED

It's not just accepting Jesus as Savior, Rom 10:9 says it's confessing Jesus as Lord and it's trusting He is risen in your heart, it's not just an intellectual assent or acknowledgment in your head. It's not about a past event or prayer you prayed, it's about a present personal continual relying on the gospel.

BELOW IS FROM WHAT TY WROTE IN HIS MEMBER TESTIMONY:

WHEN MY ENTIRE WORLD CRASHED AROUND ME I PRAYED TO EASE MY PAIN, I WAS COMPLETELY LIFTED OUT OF MY DEPRESSION AND FOUND LOVE IN CHRIST, I BELONG TO HIM AND I WILL SERVE HIM,

6. How would you explain to someone how they can be saved?

BECAUSE WE WERE ALL BORN IN SIN THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO TO SAVE OURSELVES, GOD DEMANDS ALL SIN MUST BE PUNISHED OR HE WOULD NOT BE A RIGHTEOUS GOD, GOD HIMSELF CAME DOWN TO EARTH IN THE FORM OF A MAN (JESUS) AND LIVED A LIFE WITHOUT SIN, CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED ON THE CROSS AND BORE THE WRATH OF GOD FOR ALL OF OUR SINS, CHRIST BORE AND EXTINGUISHED ALL THE SIN FROM ALL THE BELIEVERS WHICH SHOULD HAVE LANDED US ALL IN HELL FOR ETERNITY, CHRIST DIED FOR SINNERS, RECOGNISE YOUR SIN & REPENT, CME UPON CHRIST AND PUT YOUR TRUST IN HIM, DIE TO YOUR FLESH AND LIVE YOUR NEW LIFE IN SPIRIT WITH CHRIST,

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He was ready to meet God and knew he was going to heaven. Do you know for sure you're going to heaven if you die today? Are you ready? Life is so short and fragile and you don't know when your day will be. Don't delay. I know Ty would want to plead with you to trust Christ. Today is the day of salvation. You don't know if you'll have tomorrow. Now is the acceptable time. Today if you hear God's voice don't harden your heart. Come to Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Most of this introduction is indebted to James Boice, *Romans*, vol. 1, p. 121-24.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God's Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 90-92.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 203.

<sup>5</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship*, p. 446.

<sup>6</sup> 46:12-13, 51:5 NIV, NKJV in 51:5b 'they will trust' (other translations say 'hope').

<sup>7</sup> Boice, 191.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 13:18 NKJV, NASB "will not even have compassion on the fruit of the womb" (compare Luke 1:42 for "fruit of the womb" used of the unborn baby at the earliest stage).

<sup>9</sup> George Finch, *A Sketch of Romish Controversy*, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> Boice, 372-73.

<sup>11</sup> It was a joy to preach with him at the Regeneration Conference in 2011 as he taught on this passage (see [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com) on Romans 3 for several times he's preached it).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be?"

<sup>13</sup> Philip Bliss, "Hallelujah, What A Savior!"