

So That The Justifier Might Be Just

Romans 3:1-30

In the near future, I am going to tackle the issue of Justice in Sunday School. I don't often do topical studies, but with all of the questions regarding Social Justice, and Black Lives Matter, and Critical Race Theory, and Cancel Culture, and Awokeness I feel compelled to do one now. If you don't normally attend Sunday School, I would encourage you that this might be a good time to make a change. I say that, but I recommend Sunday School all the time. As 21st C. Christians, we can all use more time studying the Word of God.

I don't bring this up simply because I want to put in a plug for Sunday School. I bring it up to make this one point: God is Just! (And for that we should all be thankful.) In fact, if something is just, it is so precisely because it is in accordance with God's Justice. Without a Just God, the whole concept of justice collapses under its own weight.

That being said, when God promises to redeem a people for himself, his Justice is brought into question. How is it possible that God can uphold justice when he allows sinners into heavenly glory? Most of us do not really care all that much about this question, although we should. We are far more concerned that he allows us into his heavenly kingdom, than that he does it justly. But, if God could be proven to have acted unjustly in redeeming sinners, Satan would win. And, if there is one thing that we should all be looking forward to concerning the eternal kingdom it is that it is a kingdom of absolute justice.

So, to compromise His Justice in order to save sinners would be the worst scenario possible. In chapter 3, Paul sets out to prove that the Justifier is himself Just. We are going to look at the whole chapter. But we are going to break up the reading into 4 sections.

1. Vv. 1-8 – Paul deals with objections to God's Just Judgment of all Men.
2. Vv. 9-20 – Paul gives his final arguments that all men are under God's just judgment.
3. Vv. 21-26 – Paul explains how the One who Justifies sinners Is Himself Just.

4. Vv. 27-30 – Paul begins to unpack the implications of Justification by Faith Alone.

Read Romans 3:1-8.

What was the point that Paul just made in chapter 2? The Jews will not be shown partiality in the final judgment. Being a Jew does not give one an exemption on that day. With this in mind, Paul's next question makes sense:

Then

what advantage has the Jew?

Or

what is the value of circumcision?

- 2 Much in every way.

To begin with,

the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Being among the people of God may not exempt you from the Judgment Day, but that does not mean it is altogether worthless. There are lots of advantages to being a Jew (Paul will list some of them in chapter 9), but one biggie is that the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

- Oracles are spoken words from God.
- God has revealed himself, and his plan of redemption to the Jews.
- It is a blessing to have these words – even if the mere having of them does not guarantee you entrance into heaven.

In verses 3-8, Paul deals with some philosophical questions.

The first question is whether or not the failures of men can destroy the plans of God.

- 3 What if some were unfaithful?

Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?

The question: "What if some were unfaithful" is the understatement of the year.

All have been unfaithful save one – Jesus Christ.

Still the question is asked because we know that sin ruins things. The more you sin, the more you destroy God's order of things. Travel down the path of rebellion, and you will destroy your life. But contrary to this general principle, Paul seems to be arguing that man's rebellion does not ruin God's plans. God's plans are unbreakable. God remains faithful to carry out all of his holy will.

Can the disobedience of God's people nullify (cancel out) God's faithfulness to fulfill his promise to save a people for himself?

4 By no means!

Let God be true
though everyone were a liar,

At first glance, Paul's point is clear enough. God is always true/faithful! If he says something will come to pass, it will come to pass.

And God has spoken in two clear ways:

- God has promised to save a people for himself.
- God has promised to justly judge all sin.

Paul then proves his point by using OT Scripture:

as it is written,
"That you may be justified in your words,
and
prevail when you are judged."

Paul is quoting Psalm 51:4. The complete verse reads this way:

Psalm 51:4 ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

If you are not familiar with Psalm 51 it is the confession of King David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and was confronted by Nathan the Prophet.

David is the perfect example of someone to whom God has promised redemption but who was also guilty of terrible sin. In this psalm, David does not ask God to overlook his sin, nor does he minimize the severity of it, nor does he remind God of the way that He defeated Goliath. He simply confesses his guilt before a Just God. And should God judge him to hell, He would be just in doing so.

At the same time, David pleads for God to show him mercy in spite of his sin. And most of us would agree that David received mercy and is today enjoying the joys of eternal life. Bottom Line: God is able to judge David and save David. God will fulfill his promises to save in spite of the disobedience.

God will be justified in his words: including both promises and judgments. When anyone scrutinizes God to see whether or not he has been righteous in all his ways, God will come through with flying colors. That is what it means when David writes, "He will prevail when he is judged." And, God will also be proven right in his promises of redemption.

Now, the fact that man's disobedience cannot thwart God's purposes to save raises another question:

5 But
 if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of
 God,
 what shall we say?
 That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?
 (I speak in a human way.)
6 By no means!
 For then how could God judge the
 world?

In other words, if we, through our disobedience, continue to serve the purposes of God, maybe God should not judge us after all? Maybe we are just pawns in his huge chess game.

This argument is a common one in our day. Paul will deal with it extensively in chapters 9-11, so I will only touch on it briefly here. It goes something like this: If my choices don't really matter, then how can I be judged for them? If God really

is sovereign over every decision, even our choices to disobey Him, then how is God just to judge us for those choices. God is absolutely sovereign, even over the evil choices of men. And God is absolutely just to judge men for their evil choices.

I have wrestled myself often with reconciling God's sovereignty with man's responsibility/accountability. We do not have time to wrestle with it in any detail right now. But one thing that has truly been helpful is to remember that our choices accurately reflect the desires of our heart. And it is this fact that makes us accountable before God. When I choose to do anything, right or wrong, that choice is an accurate reflection of the desires of my heart. It is not whether or not my choices are independent of God, or whether they are able to thwart God's plans. Neither of which are true according to the Bible. I am rightly judged simply because my choices accurately reflect the desires of my heart.

7 But
 if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory,
 why am I still being condemned as a sinner?

8 And
 why not do evil that good may come?-
 as some people slanderously charge us with saying.
 Their condemnation is just.

This philosophical question goes something like this: If my darkness only works to magnify God's brightness, then maybe I am only serving God's plan. This reminds me of the Eastern concept of (Yin and Yang). Darkness is not really something to judge. It is that which magnifies the good, or at least, brings the balance between darkness and light. Paul calls this thinking "slanderous". Who is it slandering? It is slandering God because one of the fundamental truths about God is that He is Judge of all evil. To even think that He could be "wrong" to Judge the world is slanderous. Paul ends his defense emphatically: their condemnation is just! Paul is finished with the philosophical objections to God's just judgment. Now, he is ready for his final arguments condemning all men.

Read Romans 3:9-20.

9 What then?

Are we Jews any better off?

No, not at all.

For we have already charged that all,
both Jews and Greeks,
are under the power of sin,

All men will stand before the Judge of all the earth to give account of their lives. And this judgment will result in all men being condemned. Why? Because all men are "under the power of sin." We may all sin in different ways and even in different degrees in this life. But we are all "under the power of sin." To be under the power of sin is to be under its influence and control.

The end result is clear: No man will be justified before God by his own life.

10 as it is written:

"None is righteous,
no, not one;

11 no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside;
together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."

13 "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 in their paths are ruin and misery,

17 and

the way of peace they have not known."

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

These are a collage of OT quotes. And in their contexts, a faithful Jew might use them to condemn the ungodly while claiming righteousness for himself. Paul applies each phrase to all men.

1. Psalm 14:1-3 - speaking of the fools who do not believe in God
2. Psalm 53:1-3 - repeat of Psalm 14
3. Eccl. 7:20 - "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."
4. Psalm 5:9 - speaking of the enemies of David
5. Psalm 140:3 - speaking of the enemies of David
6. Psalm 10:7 - speaking of the wicked
7. Isaiah 59:7-8 - speaking of the evil of God's people
8. Psalm 36:1 - speaking of the wicked

If you think that your life will meet God's absolute standard of Righteousness, you are wrong. No one is able to stand before God's Just Judgment.

Origen rightly says about these verses: "No one has brought goodness to perfection and completion"

¹⁹ Now

we know that whatever the law says
it speaks to those who are under the law,
so that every mouth may be stopped,
and
the whole world may be held accountable to God.

²⁰ For by works of the law

no human being will be justified in his sight,
since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

No Jew will ever be "justified in God's sight" by his faithful observance of the Mosaic Law. No Jew can be good enough to merit eternal life. Therefore, "every mouth will be stopped." Every last person who has ever lived will be "held accountable to God." All that the Mosaic Law can do is make us "more" aware of just how sinful we really are.

We often talk about Jesus with the same enthusiasm that people listen to the safety procedures on an airplane. We are glad that they are there, but we can find almost anything else to be more interesting than listening to the stewardess go over them. Why? Because the plane is safe on the ground. If we could somehow simulate in our minds that we were crashing, we would surely value those safety procedures a bit more.

Paul has sought to simulate for you the certainty of the plane crashing. The plane is going down and none will survive... Unless...

²¹ But now

I have said this before, but these words are some of the most precious in all of Scripture. “But now”

Say it with me, “But now”

Say it again, only this time let out your breath as you say it.

“But now...”

Can you feel the sigh of relief?

Read Romans 3:21-26.

the righteousness of God has been manifested
apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-

What is it that provides the basis for this incredible “sigh of relief”?

It is the “righteousness of God” having been manifested! God has not compromised his righteousness to save. He has manifested HIS righteousness. It is “apart from the law” meaning our obedience to God’s will. But Paul does not want his readers to think that it is in any way “contrary to the Law”.

That is why he says, “although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.”

In other words, this righteousness is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. It is that to which they have pointed all along.

The manifestation of the Righteousness of God is none other than Jesus. Jesus has perfectly fulfilled what the Law commanded. Jesus has perfectly fulfilled what the Prophets promised.

22 the righteousness of God
 through faith in Jesus Christ
 for all who believe.

The righteousness of God originates outside of you and flows into you.

You receive this righteousness by faith alone in Jesus Alone.

And it is given to anyone who believes. Just as God does not play favorites in the judgment, so he does not play favorites when it comes to his righteousness. He provides it for all who believe.

For there is no distinction:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
24 and
 are justified by his grace
 as a gift,
 through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his
blood,
 to be received by faith.

When it comes to receiving righteousness, all men must come in the same way. If you are holding onto your own supposed righteousness, you will not have an open hand to receive His true righteousness. You must first let drop your false righteousness so that you will have open hands to receive his perfect righteousness.

The world wants you to alter the standard of righteousness, to dumb it down. Why? Because they want to feel good about themselves. God has a different path. He wants to expose the evil of our hearts. Not so that we will ultimately be condemned, but so that we will truly run to Jesus Christ.

There has always been, and will always be, only one way to receive righteousness: that is by faith alone. All men have fallen short of the glory of God. Therefore all men are in need of a righteousness from outside themselves. So, the only way any person can ever be justified is through faith. Justification in God's sight is a gracious gift. You cannot do anything to earn it. You can only receive it by faith. But, while Justification comes to you as free gift, it was by no means free. Jesus Christ was set forth as a propitiation by his blood.

Propitiation is a word that needs some explaining. It is not a word that we use in our regular lives. But the translators of the ESV were right in using this word. Propitiation has the meaning of removing anger, or regaining favor. The propitiation occurs only by the blood of Jesus Christ.

How does the blood of Christ propitiate the wrath of God over you for your sin? Illustration using cups of water and a pitcher. The wrath of our sins is poured out entirely upon Christ, so there is no wrath left to be poured out on us on the Day of Judgment. God is just, so he will not punish the same sins twice. He has already poured the entire cup of wrath out on Jesus Christ. There is none left to pour out on you.

And, the merit of Jesus Christ has been poured out upon us, such that God sees us in Jesus as perfectly righteous. You cannot add to what Jesus has done. To try to add to it automatically means that there was something that insufficient about it. The blood of Christ fully and completely satisfied the justice of God.

ESV 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The Cross enables God to justify you justly. Because of the cross, no one can ever accuse God of acting against righteousness when he chooses to redeem and to bless individuals. In our country, the President has the power to pardon criminals. There are some limits on this power, but not many. But just because the president has the power to pardon does not mean that he will exercise that power justly.

Between 1789 and 1797, President George Washington issued 16 pardons. In his three terms—12 years—in office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the most pardons of any president so far—3,687 pardons.

For example, in 1972 Congress accused President Richard Nixon of obstruction of justice—a federal felony—as part of his role in the infamous Watergate scandal. On September 8, 1974, President Gerald Ford, who had assumed office following Nixon’s resignation, pardoned Nixon for any crimes he may have committed related to Watergate.

There is no question that God, being the Supreme Being in the Universe, has the power to pardon anyone he might choose. The question becomes then, “Has God broken the Law of Righteousness when he pardons a sinner?”

Is there any question that King David committed grievous sin? He broke multiple commandments concerning Bathsheba. He committed adultery. He committed murder. He lied. He coveted. But God clearly communicates to David that he was forgiven.

Even the most godly of OT saints have clear examples of having sinned: Noah and Moses to name two. God grants forgiveness to these people. He promises them blessing. Was he unjust to do so? Well, according to the Paul, God was open to being unjust, until Jesus hung on the cross. After the cross, he was no longer open to the accusation of being unjust.

V.26

This (the cross) was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former
sins.

In God’s divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. Whose sins had God passed over? Not the sins of unbelievers. He had passed over the sins of his people – OT believers.

I can imagine Satan (The Accuser) going berserk. “How can you treat David as if he had committed no sin, when he clearly has? He deserves your wrath. And

you extend to him blessing.” Satan would not have simply accused the sinner before God. He would have also accused God for acting unjustly to the sinner.

Before the cross, God was pardoning people. But in doing so he was open to the accusation of being unjust. But in the cross God displays that he acts justly when saving people.

26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
so that he might be just
and
the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The cross demonstrates that God is just when he acts as the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. God does not give those who trust in Jesus an exemption. God has poured out his wrath on each and every sin that has ever been committed. It just so happens that for the person who has faith in Jesus, that wrath has been fully and completely poured out on Jesus Christ. For those who have not received Jesus Christ, that wrath must be poured out on them.

Can you now see how precious is the blood of Jesus Christ? This is why the only means by which anyone can be saved is faith. Not the faith that strives to be a better person. But the faith that trusts in Jesus and receives his righteousness.

And can you see how this path to glory removes all boasting? If you get to heaven based upon your own goodness (at least relatively speaking). No one is perfectly good. But you might claim yourself to be better than someone else. “I am no Hitler, for instance.” Once you think that God will let you into heaven based upon the merit of your works, you have a reason to boast. But if it entirely upon the merit of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, then there is no room for boasting whatsoever.

Read Romans 3:27-30.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting?
It is excluded.
By what kind of law?
By a law of works?

No, but by the law of faith.

28 For we hold that one 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?

30 Yes, of Gentiles also,
since God is one.

He will justify
the circumcised by faith
and
the uncircumcised through faith.

Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, it is faith alone in Christ alone that justifies you. It does not matter if you have grown up in the Church or first heard of Christ on your deathbed, it is faith alone that justifies you. There is no other means because there is no other righteousness. Only Jesus Christ has fulfilled righteousness. And only Jesus Christ has endured the cross that the wrath we deserve can be fully satisfied. This is the gospel. There is more to say. But this is the core.

I am declared righteous by God only for the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The Call to Faith

- Acknowledge and repent of sin
- Cast yourself upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.
- Walk in thankful obedience

ESV **1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.