

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #13

Romans 3:21-26

One of the most difficult nouns in the English language to define is the noun “religion.”

According to students of religion, there are five common denominators with all religions:

- 1) Belief in a deity ; 2) Some doctrinal system; 3) Some code of conduct ;
- 4) Some historical religious stories; 5) Some form of religious rituals or rites .

But the big question of all religion has to be this - what must one do to be saved?

What must one do to actually be in a right relationship with God?

If you ask that question of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, she will tell you that there is no such thing as sin and that salvation from sin is not necessary.

If you ask that question of Charles Russell, founder of Jehovah’s Witness, he will tell you that salvation is not a free gift of God, but that it is something we attain by purposing to dedicate ourselves to doing God’s will by our obedience and works.

If you ask that question of Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, he will tell you that “mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

If you ask that question of William Miller, founder of Seventh-Day Adventist, he will tell you that “salvation depends on conversion and upon one’s maintenance of acceptable character.”

If you ask that question to Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God, he will tell you that salvation comes through self-effort which includes baptism in water and the keeping of the Sabbath day.

(For an in-depth discussion of all false religions we recommend from our church library, Josh McDowell & Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today’s Religions*, Nelson Publishers)

All of these false systems of religion say there is something you must do to be saved. There is something you must do to be right with God. These works systems are straight from Satan , for the only real, true way to be right with God is by faith and not works! No human works will ever save anyone from his sin.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THAT GIVES ONE EVERLASTING LIFE AND A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY GOD OF THE BIBLE MUST COME THROUGH FAITH AND NOT WORKS .

You and I will never be able to do anything in and of ourselves to be right with God. Our works, our religion will not save us. It is only by relying on Jesus Christ and His grace and mercy that we will be saved.

STATEMENT #1 – God’s righteousness cannot come through keeping the Law. **3:21-22a**

Notice how **verse 21** begins “but now” (νυνὶ δέ). In sharp contrast to the depravity of man there may be the righteousness of God. For 2½ chapters we have been seeing how depraved we are, so we know there is no way we can possibly be right with God by attempts of depraved people to keep the Law.

The Greek preposition “apart from” literally means separated from, apart from, without (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 486).

Paul’s first point is simply this - God’s righteousness that saves a sinner has nothing to do with keeping the Law. It is without the Law, it is apart from the Law, it is separated from the Law. **Many people are totally lost because they just don’t realize God’s righteousness that will save them is not found by them trying to hang around His O.T. Law; it is totally separated from the Law.**

If a person wants to be righteous in God’s sight, he cannot ever think in terms of keeping the Law to be righteous, because God’s righteousness will never be found by keeping the Law.

Now the last part of the **verse 21** informs us one way God’s righteousness was revealed as being without Law, and that is it was made visible, made clear and made known by the Law and the Prophets.

What Paul is specifically saying here is that God’s Law clearly made known the fact that the righteousness of God cannot ever come through keeping the Law. In fact, **verse 22** says that the Law and the Prophets even revealed God’s righteousness could only come by faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us go back to Eden. Adam and Eve sinned against God. How were they made righteous? Was it their works? No - God tracked them down and in His grace, He shed the blood of animals and He clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

Let us look at Abraham. How was Abraham made righteous in the sight of God? Genesis 15:6 informs us Abraham “believed in the LORD” and God counted it to him as righteousness.

Let us look at the Law. Why were blood sacrifices necessary if man could be right with God by his own works? When we read Leviticus, there are over 80 references to blood sacrifices. Why are they necessary if man can earn his salvation? Every time an Old Testament Jew shed the blood of an animal, he was saying - “I am not equal to God; I do not have His righteousness.”

Let us look at the Jewish prophet Habakkuk. He pointedly said to the nation Israel, “The just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Habakkuk knew what all of the Law and Prophets knew - **man cannot ever be righteous in God’s sight by keeping the Law - but by believing and relying on the grace and mercy of God found in His blood sacrifice.**

The law of God can restrain evil and reveal sin, but it cannot ever save a sinner.

STATEMENT #2 – God’s righteousness must come through faith . **3:22-23**

What is faith? It is what you trust in to make yourself righteous and right with a Holy God. The “for” which begins **verse 23** explains why the righteousness of God must come through faith and not works - because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The verb “fall short” is one that means to lack or to be inferior to. The noun “glory” comes from a word that means opinion or expectations .

Here is Paul’s point - God’s righteousness must come by faith in Jesus Christ and not works because every human has sinned and has continually fallen short or been inferior to the expectation of God. There is no distinction between any human being.

STATEMENT #3 – God’s righteousness must come through God’s work. **3:24-26**

The term “justification” may best be understood as a judicial act of God in which He declares a sinner righteous and imputes to Him the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification is a judicial declaration which is just the opposite of a legal judicial condemnation in a court of law. Justification is the legal moment God declares a sinner righteous. This is not legal fiction , this is legal reality . A judicial calculation by God - Genesis 15:6.

Now the emphasis here is that in order to be righteous in God’s estimation, it is God who must calculate this and accomplish this.

Fact #1 - Sinful man becomes righteous in God’s sight by God’s grace . **3:24a**

The word “gift” in Greek literally refers to a gift that is given freely (Smith, p. 125). Salvation is a free gift of God. It is not of any works of man. It is a gift given by God to man without any works or merit in view.

We do not become righteous because we want to or we deserve to; we become righteous because God gives us a free gracious gift called justification.

God owes every one of us condemnation . He does not owe any of us justification . Justification is a gift that comes by the Grace of God. **This free gift God gives to us does not cost us anything, but it cost God a great deal.**

Fact #2 - Sinful man becomes righteous in God’s sight through Christ’s work . **3:24b-26**

John Calvin said of these two verses: “There is not probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ.”

There are at least three saving works of the Lord Jesus Christ:

(Saving Work #1) - Jesus Christ is God's redemption . 3:24b

God's redemption is found only in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ made the necessary payment that God would accept on our behalf. He made that payment with His own life and it is only by believing on Him that a sinner can be set free from his sin and from God's wrath.

The specific Greek word used for "redemption" (*απολυτρωσις*) is the strongest Greek word which means to pay the price for something and then set it free. Jesus Christ is God's only Redeemer who from God's assessment paid the acceptable price and can set you free from your sins.

(Saving Work #2) - Jesus Christ is God's propitiation . 3:25

The word "propitiation" comes from the Old Testament idea of "mercy seat" (Exodus 24 and Leviticus 16). The mercy seat was made of gold and was about 3½ feet long and 2¼ feet wide. The mercy seat was located in the Holy of Holies and it was the place where the priest poured the blood for sin in order to appease the wrath of God. God could not meet with sinful man until that blood was poured onto the mercy seat.

Propitiation assumes the existence of the wrath of God and the need for legal satisfaction or appeasement of this wrath.

Now watch what Paul is saying - the only place the Holy God will meet with sinful man is at the place where Jesus Christ shed His blood - the cross of Calvary. How do you go to the cross - by faith. The only place that God's wrath will be appeased against us is when we, by faith, totally trust in Jesus Christ to save us. That is where the Holy God will meet with sinful man (Exodus 25:22; Leviticus 16:11, 14).

(Saving Work #3) - Jesus Christ is God's righteousness . 3:26

How can God be just if He declares sinners to be righteous when sinners are not righteous? The answer to that question is this - **Jesus Christ is God's righteousness**. When a person receives Jesus Christ, that person receives the righteousness of God. Therefore, God can legitimately declare the sinner righteous not because the sinner is righteous, but because Jesus Christ is righteous.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the present time in the program of God, there is only one way to become righteous in the sight of God - believe on Jesus Christ. If you will place your faith totally in Jesus Christ to save you, you shall be saved from all of your sins.

It is not by our works, it is not by us keeping a law, but by faith in Him. "On Christ, the solid Rock, we stand - all other ground is sinking sand."