



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

---

Volume 9 Issue 24

July 18, 2010

## The Righteousness of God, Part 4

Romans 3:21-26, 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 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 and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>1</sup>

### Difficult Situations

- Abraham and Sarah.

- Gideon and the 300.
- Isaiah
- Hezekiah.
- Daniel.
- Mary and Martha.

Each of these individuals found themselves in an impossible situation; yet one from which God delivered them. Consider Mary and Martha, in the final year of Christ’s ministry, their brother Lazarus took ill. When all conventional wisdom failed and Lazarus continued to worsen, the sisters called for Christ. Yet according to the providence of God, Christ was delayed such that when He did arrive, Lazarus had been in the tomb 3 days!

With all hope gone, the sisters are left only to weep! Yet this impossible situation is corrected with just a proclamation from Christ, “Lazarus, come forth!” Truly, God is a God of difficult situations who delights in delivering His people!

I want us to look at the “mother” of all difficult situations; a situation which makes the death of Lazarus seem like child’s play. We catch a glimpse at what this difficult situation revolves around when we read Romans 3. This passage speaks of the cross.

Romans 3:25b, “This was to demonstrate His righteousness...”

While the word behind “demonstrate” is a vague term in the Greek, it nevertheless carries the idea of showing and so proving. For example, speaking of Titus and a couple other co-laborers, Paul wrote this:

2 Corinthians 8:24, “Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.”

From this it is clear that to “demonstrate” something is to show it forth in such a way that it is proven to be genuine and real. Accordingly, for God to “demonstrate His righteousness” means that He has MANIFESTED it in such as way as to validate, verify, or VINDICATE it.

Paul sets forth a very important question here, “From what is God “vindicating His righteousness”?” That brings us to the problem and its vindication.

## Vindication of the Gospel

Ironically the vindication of this problem revolves around the gospel.

Romans 3:25b,<sup>2</sup> “This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.”

---

<sup>2</sup> This actually is found in v. 26a in the Greek.

The word behind “forbear” literally means to hold back. It refers not to forgiveness per se, but to the suspension of a penalty. And thus the important thing to remember is that it points to a truce, not a peace! It is a temporary “cease-fire” and implies a limit. Now in this “cease-fire” God has:

Romans 3:26, “He passed over sins previously committed.”

To “pass over sin” is to overlook it, or to pass it by in relation to punishment. Essentially, it is to let someone go unpunished. Accordingly, God’s “passing over of sins” is not salvation as we know it, BUT simply the withholding of punishment. We see this act on the part of God throughout redemptive history, don’t we?

In Genesis 3 we read of Adam and Eve not being obliterated following their rebellion even though God said this:

Genesis 2:17, “...in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”

For many generations prior to the flood, God “passed over” the sins of the nations (Genesis 6:5-8). Judgment was withheld. During the time of the Exodus, God’s people spent hundreds of years in slavery waiting for

Genesis 15:16b, “...the iniquity of the Amorite [to be] complete.”- during this time, God obviously passed over their sin.

Though in 1 Samuel 12, 15 Saul is disqualified from being king, nevertheless the sentence was not executed for years. Saul’s sin was “passed over.”

Throughout the prophetic ministry, we read of many declarations of judgment which did not take place for many generations. Jonah is a good example of this! This same “passing over” is seen in Psalm 106 which details the sordid sin of God’s people and His longsuffering. In Romans 2 we see this same truth as God withholds His punishment in grace that His people might repent...

Romans 2:4, “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?”

In fact, as he reflected back upon the story of redemption, Paul could say this:

Acts 14:16, “...in the generations gone by [God] permitted all the nations to go their own ways.”

Clearly the grace and mercy of God at times results in God “passing over” that which clearly demands swift judgment. Yet what here is God said to “pass over”?

Romans 3:26, “the sins previously committed.”

This could refer either to:

- The sins we have previously committed.
- The sins people committed in the days before Christ.
- Or both.

Yet however we interpret it is of little consequence to the over-all point that Paul is making here. Don't miss it! The "forbearance of God" results in a postponement of judgment when it comes to the sinner! And so through the grace and mercy of God, sin has been passed over. That's good news!

2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

And yet whether you realize it or not, this truth, The Gospel, presents a HUGE PROBLEM as it pertains to God's righteousness. We have seen that the "righteousness of God" is a statement about God's character; specifically that He has fulfilled the obligations of the promise made to Adam. In other words, He is faithful. He keeps covenant. He is trustworthy and just!

And yet, how many of you have ever wondered why Adam did not immediately die as promised in Genesis 2? If you have wondered this, you have unknowingly grappled with "The Problem" which Paul is addressing?

See, justice would demand that Adam be killed immediately! God promised that:

Genesis 2:17b, "...in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

And yet Adam didn't immediately die! Rather, he had the time to run and hide from the presence of the Lord. And then after being clothed, he lived a long life eventually suffering physical death on account of his sin. Now most of us have answered this question by referencing God's grace. We have thought this:

*Adam wasn't immediately killed because God is a gracious God who has chosen to 'pass over' the death penalty prescribed in Genesis 2:17.*

Now as wonderful as this may seem on the surface, this is NOT the answer, and really constitutes for us, "bad news!" For, and this is important, in order for God simply to "pass over" the prescribed death penalty of Genesis 2:15-17 He would have to BREAK the obligations of the promise that required Adam's immediate death!

Now if God did this we might argue that He is loving, but we couldn't say that He is just! And that brothers and sisters is The Problem! For a man to be forgiven for his sin is to imply that God is NOT RIGHTEOUS! Or better put, that God does not immediately punish the sinner when he sins may show that God is merciful and loving, but certainly not just!

- The obligations of the covenant require man's punishment (again, cf. Genesis 2:17)!

- Justice demands that the guilty be punished just as it demands that the innocent go free!

And so the truth of God's forgiveness places God's "RIGHTEOUS" character in question- and Paul knew that which is why he wrote this speaking of the cross of Christ:

Romans 3:25, "This was to demonstrate/vindicate the righteousness of God, because in the forbearance of God..."

The Vindication of God's righteousness was necessary *because* God forbears with sin! Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

The real 'problem,' as it were, with salvation was not the matter of getting sinful men to a holy God but of getting a holy God to accept sinful men without violating His justice. (MacArthur, 1991, p. 219)

Is there a solution to this apparent problem? Indeed there is. Notice the beginning of Romans 3:25.

Romans 3:25, "[speaking of Jesus Christ] whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

This is the ANSWER to the PROBLEM, Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross! Let's walk our way through this passage phrase by phrase.

Romans 3:25, "whom God displayed publicly."

The word for "display publically" means to present or set before. In this context<sup>3</sup>, it refers to being set before in an open and visible way.

And so in contrast to the sacrifices made in Old Testament worship (which were offered behind closed doors<sup>4</sup> in a court restricted to the worshipper and the priest), Christ's sacrifice took place openly, outside of the city confines of Jerusalem, on the hill of Calvary for all the world to see. And hence, Christ was "presented publicly" as.

Romans 3:25, "as a propitiation."

Don't let this strange word detour you in your understanding of this great truth! The language here is the language of sacrifice and worship. To "propitiate" means to remove wrath, whether of a person or of God. It carries the basic idea of appeasement or satisfaction. At the outset note that in the Bible, "propitiation" ALWAYS refers to the work of GOD! In ancient pagan religions, as in many religions today, the idea of man appeasing a deity by various gifts or sacrifices was common. BUT such is not the case in the Bible. God and God alone is the One who works

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Romans 3:1, "made known"; and vv. 25, 26, "demonstrate."

<sup>4</sup> Really, the only "open" sacrifice in the OT was the Scape-Goat which was offered outside of the camp on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16).

propitiation.

1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself..."

Against the backdrop of man's death and imprisonment to Satan we read this:

Ephesians 2:4, "But God, being rich in mercy..."

It is God who does the propitiating, not man. In fact "displayed publicly" is in the middle voice which carries the idea of, "displayed publicly by Himself." From this we conclude that man has no part in the satisfaction of God's wrath. Did you get that? In fact on account of the Law (Genesis 2:17), the ONLY satisfaction or propitiation that man could give on account of their sin is their DEATH.

But that is where the glorious news of the gospel comes in. Christ's work on the cross served to propitiate the wrath of God that has arisen on account of our sin!

1 John 2:2, "And He Himself is the propitiation [a wrath-removing sacrifice] for our sins..."

Do you see? Christ death was substitutionary! It was given in substitute for the death we owed God on account of our sin. This means that God didn't simply overlook our sin, He executed the sentencing upon Christ! Christ has become:

Hebrews 2:17, "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

When Adam sinned it wasn't that God overlooked his sin in favor of mercy. Rather, God's wrath was kindled and, by grace, directed at the "wrath-removing sacrifice" of Jesus Christ. That is what is in mind with the last phrase of Romans 3:25a.

Romans 3:25a, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

As I just mentioned it was the shed blood of Christ which throughout Scripture represents LIFE (Leviticus 17:11; Matthew. 20:28, cf. 26:28; John 10:11, 15) that removed God's wrath. Through the death of Jesus Christ, man can be reconciled to God.

I hope you see that the truth presented in this text is the wonder of all wonders! It wasn't that God violated His righteousness in "passing over the sins previously committed." Rather, it was that God visibly established His righteousness at the CROSS. For while, from our perspective, the death owed to Adam seems to have been overlooked it nevertheless was immediately and

judicially carried out against Christ! Peter shows us about Christ's crucifixion.

1 Peter 1:20, "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world..."

From this I hope you see that the cross of Christ not only speaks of God's mercy and grace. It also speaks of God's exacting justice! And this brings us to a very important conclusion.

Romans 3:26, "for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time."

The word for "present time" refers to God's eschatological time clock. As Redemptive History goes, we are in the final age, the last days, and the "present time!" And thus, the "manifestation of God's righteousness" is a gift granted not only at the time that Christ died on the cross, but throughout this entire era! That is why Paul could speak of Christ being "publicly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1) in the preaching of the gospel. It wasn't just at the cross that God proclaimed His justice and mercy. It is every time the gospel is proclaimed. In fact, notice the pun that Paul closes with here; it is beautiful!

Romans 3:26, "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Another way of putting this is, "that He might be righteous and the righteous maker..." This is an incredible statement. Yet that is the message we must derive from the cross!

- It is not just that God is merciful.
- It is that He also is just!

Barclay<sup>5</sup> put it this way:

The natural thing to say, the inevitable thing to say, would be 'God is just, and, therefore, condemns the sinner as a criminal.' But if God has simply punished sinners, while that would have left no doubts about His justice, it would have raised questions about His mercy, and the God of the Bible is both just and merciful. What Paul is saying is that the cross shows us both. (Morris, 1988, p. 184)

And so the beauty and the mystery of the cross are here expounded upon. The cross not only is the symbol of our salvation and thus God's grace and mercy, but is also the manifestation and so the vindication of the Righteousness of God!

- The passage at which we are looking is a magnificent description NOT only of the procurement of man's salvation, BUT also of the unsearchable wisdom of God!
- In the context of man's condemnation wherein there lies no hope, God has performed the unthinkable, the unimaginable, the seemingly impossible NOT only has He forgiven the sinner and restored the fellowship that was lost on account of transgression BUT He has done this in such a way as NOT to compromise His character- and that way was and is the

---

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pg. 184.

## CROSS of CHRIST.

Now it is of the utmost importance that this text penetrates beyond our intellect and so pervades every aspect of our being. Yet what will this mean? It firstly will mean that in response we must SEEK the manifested righteousness of God. Scripture is quite clear: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22)! And yet:

- How is this done?
- How can we be made alive?
- Is it that God just overlooks our sin and invites us into His kingdom?

NO, as we have seen this morning that would violate God's justice! Rather, through the grace and mercy of God, all can be made alive through the cross of Christ! As Jesus Christ, the innocent, died for the guilty so we, the guilty, can receive the life of Christ. How is this appropriated? How does the gift of Christ's righteousness received? Look at our text again!

Romans 3:26b, "...that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

When a man considers standing before the judgment seat of Christ, he either can plead non-guilty on account of the righteous efforts of his own hands, not realizing that to stand before God guilty of just one sin will mean instant death on the Day of Judgment! Or he can stand in Christ's perfect and spotless life given as a substitute in our place.

Now don't miss this. If you are one who is relying upon your own efforts to save you, you will surely die! I urge you therefore turn to Christ! Ask God to forgive you your transgressions because of the cross. Submit to Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life. And be healed.

Secondly, we realize that the gospel always brings with it a message of warfare. Truly, God does not take sin lightly. Having been saved by the cross of Christ, we ought not to look at the cross and see only God's grace and mercy. Rather, we must also see God's justice on account of our sin. As such, we confess that sin is no laughing matter; it comes at a great cost!

Seeing this, may we take the call to kingdom living seriously!

Hebrews 12:1-4, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin."

Finally, it will mean that we LIVE ACCORDING TO the manifested Righteousness of God. Romans 3:26 is quite clear as to those who are the recipients of God's righteousness. It is not just those who have faith in Jesus that receive God's righteousness. But it is those who are "of faith" whose



lives are characterized by faith. That is what “of faith” means here- to be given over to something. That means that when it comes to life, that which must characterize the child of God is not:

- Pride.
- Self-confidence.
- Manipulation.
- The passionate pursuit for happiness.

BUT reliance upon the life and sacrifice of Christ!

Because this is true, you must see that the bitter or difficult providences in our lives are nothing less than an opportunity to live in light of this faith! Think of it in this way. When God saved you He enrolled you into a life-long course of study called grace.

Titus 2:11-13, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”

When a person is saved they are enrolled in a course of study whose instructor is grace. In keeping with the metaphor, how ought we therefore to view the trials and difficulties of life? These are nothing less than a field trip whose purpose is to teach us about God, His Kingdom, His nature, and His salvation.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10, “And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. [IOW, “Lord I don’t want to go on this field trip!”] And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

The manifested righteousness of Christ is a calling for all men to submit to the teaching of grace and so learn to live in and through all things in reliance upon Christ!

## **VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO**

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10<sup>th</sup> Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows:

<http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on July 18, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.