

## The Righteousness of God Without the Law

Romans 3:21-26, Sunday after New Year Day

January 3, 2010

Beloved of the Lord.... The Bible says "God was in Christ reconciling the whole world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation", namely the Gospel Word that God through Christ has reconciled the whole world unto Himself. Today let us look at the highest and most important teaching of the whole Bible, that we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." To Him alone be glory. Amen.

I. God's glory and man's sin. Let us begin by speaking first of the glory of God and man's sin, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The glory of God here is God's righteousness, His holiness. God is perfectly holy without the slightest trace of sin and everything He does is perfect without flaw or defect. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "He is the Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." When any man accuses God of doing evil, such a man by the mere accusation proves that he himself is evil, for God alone is good. God dwells in a light no man can approach and His holiness burns infinitely brighter than a thousand suns. If we as sinners were to stand in heaven now at this moment, because of our sins we would instantly be consumed by His wrath. "Our God is a consuming fire." His holy presence cannot tolerate anything unholy in His presence.

What then is sin and unholiness? Sin is the transgression of God's holy law. We as men do not have the right to tell God what is sin and what is not. God drew that line a long time ago and God alone has the right to say, "Don't cross that line, or else!" To trespass is to cross the line of God's holy law. That's why sins are called trespasses and that is why we pray "forgive us this day our trespasses." We are unholy because we crossed the line. God's holiness therefore demands all who are unholy be punished and forever cast away from His holy presence. We can relate to this because when one sins greatly against us we don't want to see them or talk to them. How much more than when we speak of our holy God and our unholy sins?

It matters not then how holy or righteous any man on earth may appear before the eyes of others. In the sight of God, the pope in all his perceived holiness is still a black and filthy sinner at heart, the same as Osama Bin Laden, President Obama, Bush, Clinton or

any one of us in this room. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." God is not a respecter or persons and as our text says, "there is no difference!" It is therefore impossible for sinners to buy their way out of debt. Just as any man is repulsed by a corrupt politician who accepts bribes, dirty money, so much more is God offended by unclean sinners who try to buy God's forgiveness by doing good things after they have done evil. Those who are evil by nature cannot do anything good in the sight of God, and those who try to bribe God by tainted works only make Him more angry. Salvation by the law then is utterly impossible. Just listen to God's anger against the Jews who thought they could be saved from sin by their sacrifices, religious days, and prayers. God says in Isaiah one, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." God was repulsed by all their works, for nothing was done out of love for God with a willing heart. We should then see the utter folly of the man-made teaching "salvation by the law."

II. The righteousness of God without the law. For "now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law the prophets." What does this mean? The "Righteousness of God without the law" is the Gospel way of salvation which all the Old Testament prophets bore witness to. This "righteousness of God" is also called objective justification.

What is objective justification? It is a forensic act of God, an objective truth that stands all by itself, wherein God as a Judge absolves and forgives all men their sins through Christ, thus declaring them righteous. Luther explains it this way: Our righteousness, salvation, and consolation are outside of us, that we should be righteous, acceptable, holy, and wise before God, and still there is in us only sin, unrighteousness, and foolishness. In my conscience there is nothing but the feeling and the memory of sin and of the terrors of death, and yet I should look elsewhere and believe that sin and death is not there." When Luther looked elsewhere, he looked to Christ, and through Christ Luther knew he was righteous, though he could see in himself only sin, unrighteousness, and foolishness. Luther knew as all true Christians know, we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And if God has freely justified ALL, salvation for man

does not cost a dime. That is the meaning of the word FREE, hence the hymn, “By grace I’m saved, grace FREE and boundless, My soul believe and doubt it not.”

But here now we should consider the great cost our Savior paid, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.” Why is that term “blood” so significant regarding our salvation? Hebrews 9:22 answers, “without shedding of blood is no remission”. The one who sins then must pay for their sins with their own blood, their own life. But here’s the dilemma. Man’s unholy blood has no holy value. Sinners cannot pay their debt and that is why hell lasts forever. But God had a plan. He could become a man to shed His blood for all men, yet as God His blood would have infinite value. With God all things are possible. Jesus could pay that infinite price, but it would cost Him His life.

Hence what did God the Judge see in heaven above, as He looked upon and beheld His own Son hanging on the cross below? On the side of the law God saw a criminal, a thief, an adulterer, a truly ungodly and wicked man – our sins being upon Him! “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all!” God therefore poured out all His divine wrath upon Christ the very Son of God, until all His infinite anger and wrath were utterly spent. He hung and suffered there. But what else did God the Judge see in Jesus? Peering into the heart of Jesus, the Judge sees Jesus is a willing sacrifice with a willing heart and spirit, filled only with love and mercy toward the very world which crucified Him! Jesus heart was in it! Now imagine the great upheaval in God’s own heart, to Jesus’ heart is yet filled with mercy and love? This sacrifice truly moved God’s heart! God in His heart was now moved like a thousand earthquakes, turned a full 180 degrees, changed from wrath to love. He had nothing left, not an ounce, not a drop, not a shred of anger toward any man, but divine favor for all! The reconciled heart of God then through Christ is like that phrase in Psalm 23, “my cup runneth over.” In like manner the heart of God through Christ is so filled with love that it is continually running over like an ocean that floods this whole world with God’s forgiveness reaching each and every last sinner, no exception. That is why we as sinners are troubled by our sins, God directs us to His Gospel Word and Sacraments for comfort. There in the cup of wine is the blood of Christ, God’s forgiveness overflowing for you. There in the bread is the Body of Christ, God’s forgiveness overflowing for you.

III. The righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith alone is necessary then regarding salvation and that is also why unbelief alone damns. The only way

we could possibly not be forgiven, is by our own refusing to believe it! Faith then is nothing more than believing the “righteousness of God without the law”, the objective truth that He through Christ has given His own righteousness as a free gift to us so that we might be counted righteous! Subjective justification is when we receive the truth as true, believing it and trusting it in our heart. We receive “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.”

How is it then that we are justified by faith? Faith justifies only in the sense that it receives the justification God through Christ has already given. It is the opposite of trusting in good works for salvation. Thus if a King gives you all His riches, you will not benefit from those riches unless you believe they belong to you. In the Gospel then we have the sure and solid promise that God through Christ has made us rich in grace. The riches of the forgiveness of sins, the eternal inheritance of heaven, is indeed ours because Christ earned it for us with His own blood and this gift has been given. But if we refuse to believe it, these riches given will do us no good and we will die in our sins without the righteousness of Christ upon us. Thus God in the Gospel is compelling and urging us, “Please accept the free gift of Jesus Christ My Son. He came with a willing heart to save you from your sins and His blood truly cleanses you from all sin.”

Finally God is the “justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” We, through Him dear sinner, are counted as just and righteous before God, because Jesus is perfectly just and perfectly righteous. Faith personally applies the work of Christ to himself and understands these riches to be our own. Faith sincerely, like a child, trusts the truth that Jesus Christ is our Savior in our heart. Let us not despair then when we see within these trespasses and sins but look instead to Christ our Savior from all trespasses and sin. Jesus is our Hope and Peace. By His blood we are washed “clean every whit”. Put away your sins by repentance and faith. Go to the Sacrament and find God’s cup of love overflowing toward you. There you will find strength you need to amend your sinful ways, for “he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”