

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 8 -

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Romans 3:21-31

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

Human goodness or virtue is incapable of justifying man. Thus the Apostle Paul declares finally and conclusively, to his own satisfaction at least, the bankruptcy of the best that man can do to save himself. Not that this reflects on the validity or efficacy of the law; indeed it is a confirmation of the law's place and purpose in the divine economy as Paul points out at the close of the chapter.

The law was never intended to be a means of salvation except as it pointed man to his need of grace in CHRIST. When a man says, "The Ten Commandments is my religion," he is bound by the Ten Commandments; and his condemnation is the greater because he has embraced them and broken them. When a man says, "The Sermon on the Mount is my religion," he is condemned by his own boast when he does not live up to it.

When a man says, "The Golden Rule is my religion," he judges himself by his failure. This is not an uncommon attitude. "If a man just lives up to the Golden Rule." "If a man just lives up to the Sermon on the Mount." That is a big "if." For **"by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."** For a man to take refuge in moral law serves only to increase his condemnation. The reason the law will not save is reserved for later discussion, (chapters 6 through 8) but it is quite apparent; man fails to keep the law.

The second major division of Romans has to do with the divine solution to the human dilemma set forth in chapters 1:18 through 3:20. GOD made a promise to Abraham. This promise, though immediately relevant to Israel of whom Abraham was the physical progenitor, was actually universal and cosmic in its application and meant to be fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST, the MESSIAH. This means, therefore, that GOD does not have two ways to redeem man, one for the Jew and another for the non-Jew. On the contrary, from the inception of humanity man's rightness with GOD has always been dependent upon faith.

You see this, for example, in Hebrews, chapter 11, the great "faith" chapter, where the author begins with Abel.

By faith Abel offered a sacrifice acceptable unto GOD. Justification through faith is not a new principle; it was introduced in the Garden of Eden. The law, given four hundred years after Abraham, was designed to lead men to faith, to make man see his helplessness apart from the undeserved favor of GOD. The law helps one realize how far short he falls from GOD's expectations. The man who says the Sermon on the Mount is his religion is doing the very same thing the Jew was doing in Paul's day, professing the law as his religion but ignoring its practice.

This is the most difficult reality for man to accept, righteousness through faith. The fundamental conflict in history is man's will against GOD's will, the most subtle expression of which is man's goodness versus the righteousness of GOD. Those who resent the Apostle Paul do so because he continually reduces the best that man can do to zero with its edges rubbed off. **"All have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD... There is none righteous, no, not one."** We want to argue, surely some are righteous. He answers, "No, not one!"

It is difficult to accept the idea that salvation is by faith through grace alone! We want to believe that some thing we do is acceptable with GOD, and it is this subtle expression of carnality in the human heart more than any other single thing that defeats the work of CHRIST in the world. Man's best militates against grace, not man's worst - man thinking he is good enough without CHRIST's help.

The new birth is a gift of GOD to be received by faith.

Having begun by faith we embrace rules and regulations which, if kept, accrue to our credit. Failure to keep them is to our discredit; thus we tend to be constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation, with the pride of achievement or the despair of failure. This is a passion of the human heart, and it is the hardest thing in the world for us to realize that the best that we can do, however effectively, is **"filthy rags"** in GOD's sight. Paul declares GOD's righteousness to be **"the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe."**

The righteousness of GOD has been manifested or revealed. Man never reasons his way to an understanding of the righteousness of GOD. By pure reason man can understand that GOD is good, or that He is holy, or that He is perfect, or that He is powerful. Yet man never does discover the righteousness of GOD this way; it comes alone by revelation. It is revealed apart from the law. That is, GOD's righteousness is not apprehended through the law. All the law tells us is that GOD is perfect and that He is a judge; and if we break His law, we are doomed. The perfection of GOD, the justice of GOD, is apprehended through His law but not His righteousness. Nevertheless, and Paul never lets us forget this, the law and the prophets witnessed to this righteousness of GOD which has been revealed.

The truth is not an innovation with Paul of the New Testament or the apostles; it is an Old Testament doctrine.

The Old Testament does not have one way by which man is saved, the New Testament another; the salvation which is in the New Testament is at the heart of the Old Testament. There is only

one way to be saved from Adam in the Garden of Eden to the last man who will ever live and to this the law of Moses and the prophets testify. This righteousness of GOD has been revealed in the Gospel. **"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST: for it is the power of GOD unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also the Greek, for therein (that is, the Gospel) is the righteousness of GOD revealed."**

The righteousness of GOD involves more than GOD's character, more than His attributes, more than His perfection or holiness. Righteousness is active. Righteousness expresses itself in GOD seeking to redeem man, GOD giving Himself for man's salvation. Hence it is revealed only in the Gospel. Notice verses 25 and 26: **"Whom (JESUS CHRIST) God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."** The sacrifice of CHRIST, which is the heart of the Gospel, was to show GOD's righteousness because in His divine forbearance He has passed over former sins. From the Garden when Adam and Eve sinned until the moment that the Son of GOD died on the Cross of Calvary, GOD had apparently done nothing to absolve man from his sin. To be sure, he gave the Old Testament economy, the entire structure of worship and sacrifices and offerings; but the author of Hebrews makes it very plain that these had no power to forgive sin. As a matter of fact, says the author of Hebrews, the sacrifices under the Old Testament economy were the reminder of sin. It was as though the guilt of man were compounded generation by generation, century by century, millennium by millennium until the very justice of GOD would be questioned.

Certainly the blood of bulls and goats is not sufficient to make a man just before GOD.

This is the problem with which Paul deals here. The death of CHRIST who was the Lamb of GOD and whose blood was shed **"from the foundation of the world,"** occurred at a given moment in history in order to demonstrate the righteousness of GOD although He had endured the sin of man through all those millennia. The death of CHRIST was to prove at the present time (verse 26) that GOD Himself is both righteous and that He justifies him who has faith in JESUS, or, **"That He might be just, and the justifier."**

This is the great theological and philosophical dilemma of history. How can GOD remain just and forgive a sinner? How can GOD forgive sin, justify the sinner, and remain holy? The greatest minds have wrestled with this cosmic problem. There is only one answer, and that answer is in JESUS CHRIST and the Gospel. If GOD ignored sin, He would be less than holy and just. If He punished sin, refused to forgive, He would be something less than loving and merciful. Justice is satisfied if the sinner is punished, but love and mercy are frustrated.

Suppose, for example, one of our local judges should have before him a criminal whose guilt was known by everyone, and though he knew the man was guilty, should forgive and free him. We would not accept it. We would unseat this judge as quickly as possible. We demand justice in our courts. We demand that the criminal be punished. We do not want the judge to be sentimental or sympathetic. We want justice; sentimentality has no place in a court of law; and if we require this of man, how much more so of GOD! This is the dilemma, how can GOD be just and justify the sinner? The answer is in JESUS CHRIST and is so stated in the next verses, 23 through 25.

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God!" The clue is in the word "propitiation." The idea contained in this very remarkable word is that of making satisfaction for sin by atonement. These words give us two pictures, the picture of substitution and that of sacrifice. They tell us that GOD put forth His Son to be our substitute, to actually suffer our penalty, and to be our sacrifice. He was, in the words of John the Baptist, **"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."**

Isaiah puts it this way: **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."** Every sin from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the end of the human race was put upon the Son of GOD on the Cross of Calvary. He died as though guilty of our sins. This was not a third party, laying down His life on the cross; this was GOD Himself, the One sinned against in CHRIST, suffering the penalty of sin!

This is the great mystery of the Atonement, the great mystery of the righteousness of GOD; GOD Himself, against Whom man sinned, in the Person of His Son took upon Himself the consequences of man's sin and laid down His own life on the Cross of Calvary to absolve man from his guilt. This is the Gospel! this is the righteousness of GOD! "The righteousness of GOD, according to Paul," says C. W. Quinby, is "GOD's willingness to redeem sinful man." It is His nature to seek and to save the lost. ***Justice and mercy are met together in the Person of JESUS CHRIST on the Cross. Perfect justice is satisfied; sin has been judged, condemned and punished, and perfect love is satisfied. The One Who was sinned against, He Himself bore the penalty rather than the sinner that the sinner might go free!*** The author of Hebrews tells us in chapter 10 that JESUS CHRIST was the complete fulfillment of the total Old Testament sacrificial system. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul writes, **"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."** The Bible does not explain this; it simply declares it to be so, to be accepted by faith that we might enjoy the salvation which was wrought in this infinite transaction on the Cross.

Finally, Paul concludes this chapter by asking, **"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith."** On what grounds? On the grounds of faith, no man has kept the law; all have sinned and come short of the glory of GOD, and GOD saves all who will believe the Gospel. Man has nothing, therefore, in which to glory before GOD. The Jew cannot glory over the Gentile because the Jew had had special advantages. The Gentile cannot glory over the Jew because of Jewish neglect of those special advantages. All, Jew and Gentile, are saved by faith. The circumcised is saved by faith. The uncircumcised is saved by faith. The one who had the law is saved by faith. The one without the law is saved by faith. There is no other way for men to be saved! Man has no ground for pride.

How often have we been filled with self-esteem over little successes, or even perhaps over another's failure when we should be thanking GOD for His grace; boasting inwardly when we ought to be praising our SAVIOUR? How we take refuge in a few little meritorious efforts instead of glorying in the Cross of JESUS CHRIST. What happens when we boast like this? We become "superior" people; we never say this; we simply act this way to our "inferiors." Boasting, pride, ego, it is no wonder the SPIRIT of GOD cannot pour out revival upon the

Church; we are so inordinately proud of our piety instead of being humble before GOD over our continual sin and failure from which only His grace can save us.

Paul will drive this fact home more and more in Romans 6, 7 and 8 - that there is never a split-second of our lives that we are not absolutely, utterly, totally cast upon the grace and mercy of GOD. There is not one thing of which we can boast. If we do, the very boast is sin and confirms our need of grace.

Pride goes when men take Romans seriously. This is the reason why Romans produced the Reformation because it exposed the conceit of man. It eliminated anything upon which man could get hold in order to boast. It makes it possible for the mighty, exhilarating infinite grace of GOD to deluge the bankrupt human heart, bring the vitality and drive of the life of GOD in CHRIST to man.

The big question is this: Have you received this grace? Is someone saying, I refuse to accept this; there are certain ways in which I may be bad, but I am not so bad as many I know. I am much better than many. Is it possible that you will continue trusting yourself, boasting in your own merit and virtue, however small it is, however microscopic? Are you going to be like a man standing before the judge, charged with the crime of robbery, who says, "Judge, I think you ought to let me off. I never murdered anybody. I never committed any other crimes; I just committed robbery - that is all."

Is that what you are trying with GOD? Oh Lord, I haven't murdered, I haven't robbed, I haven't stolen! But you have been proud, you have been covetous, you have been jealous, you have envied, you have been angry. Yes, LORD, I have been all these things, but I haven't murdered anybody. Is that the way you think? Repent and receive the righteousness of GOD which is a free gift through faith in CHRIST because He shed His blood on the Cross.

Or are you one who has accepted the Gospel but is still trusting self? If you analyze your own life, are the things on which you depend most your own strength of will, your own ability, your own piety, your own decisions? There is so much self-esteem and pride and boasting in us, and the grace of GOD just cannot work because we will not let it. We are too full of our own virtue. We are saved but powerless because we are conscious of how good we think we are compared to many others: how much better we know the Bible; how much we pray; how often we witness when others do not. GOD forgive us! How desperately we need grace continually.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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