

# Romans 3:19-28

## An Exposition – The Righteousness of God in the Gospel

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The book of Romans is comprehensive and technical discourse on Salvation by grace through faith in Christ, and on the Gospel message. In the above outline we get a picture of the foundation Paul has been building in order to deliver the Gospel message to us. In chapter one he tells us that ***“the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation”*** (v-16) and he then tells us that it reveals the ***“righteousness of God”*** (v-17). He begins to establish the case of why God’s righteousness is important and necessary explaining that both Gentile and Jew are under the condemnation of God and in desperate need to be justified. In chapter 3:19-28, he explains this ***“righteousness of God”*** which is revealed in the Gospel in very certain terms. The following is an exposition of this text.

**Romans 3:19-20** - 19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. NASB

A. 19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; -

**Paul, having made his case that both the Gentile (1:18-32) and the Jew (2:1-3:8) are guilty before God, this is his final concluding remark stating that they are all liable and *“accountable to God.”* In establishing the extent of this accountability, he states that *“every mouth may be closed and the whole world may become accountable.”* By this he surely means that they have no defense or excuse to speak of the guilt of their sin, but that both their conscience (2:12-16) and God’s Law (here) testify against them.**

B. 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. -

**In regard to being *“justified”* in God’s sight, Paul again established the guilt of the entire world with the reference *“no flesh,”* that is, no human being. These he says, cannot be *“justified”* by obedience to the Law, rather that their failure to keep it establishes what sin**

is, transgression of His Law. Mankind has failed not only at *violating* what the Law forbids (penal sanctions), but also at *fulfilling* what it commands (perceptive requirements). The Law, with all of its high and Holy commands, has indeed caused the sin of mankind to be seen with utmost clarity and it *condemns* us all as guilty before God's judgment bar. It has given us a measuring line that reveals our treason and rebellious refusal to submit to our Creator in His commands to love Him and our neighbor. Here Paul establishes **two very important elements** in the Gospel:

- 1) The UNIVERSALITY of the guilt of mankind before God (Jew and Gentile).
- 2) The inability for anyone to be justified before God by good works or obedience to the Law of God because of their utter failure to fulfill it. It is PERSONAL.

This is consistent with Paul's Gospel in other sections of Scripture as well.

(Rom 2:13, 7:7-9, Gal 2:19, 3:10-13, Eph 2:8-9, Tit 3:5-7)

Galatians 2:16-17 - 16 nevertheless knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the Law** but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since **by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified**. NASB

**Romans 3:21** - 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, NASB

A. 21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, -

Paul had explained in chapter 1:16-17 that the Gospel revealed "*the righteousness of God*" and that this was the "*power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.*" Here he tells us that this "*righteousness of God has been manifested,*" and this "*apart from the Law.*" When Paul speaks of the righteousness of God here, he does not speak of that righteousness which God requires only, but a righteousness which of itself comes from God and is an objective reality that has now been "*revealed*" (v-1:17) or "*manifested.*" This was Martin Luther's great discovery, that is, that the righteousness of God was a foreign righteousness apart from our own works and apart from the very Law of God itself. Now this is **THE essential part of the Gospel**, and of the Christian Faith, the principle of *sola fide*, that is, that the righteousness of God is an objective foreign reality provided by God and received by faith, not merited of our own works.

Here see also, that God's righteousness "*has been manifested.*" It is an historical reality that we observe from outside, that is, the life and death of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ! The life and death of Jesus Himself, is the "*manifested*" righteousness of God. Jesus is our righteousness. This righteousness "*has been manifested*" in Jesus! It is Historical.

1 Corinthians 1:30-2:2 - 30 But by His doing you are **in Christ Jesus, who became to us** wisdom from God, and **righteousness** and sanctification, and redemption,

See also, that it is the righteousness of God, that is, it is theological. It is that righteousness that God **BOTH requires and provides**. Here Paul establishes **two more very important elements** in the Gospel: It is HISTORICAL and THEOLOGICAL.

B. being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, -

Here he establishes that the entire Old Testament is a witness to this "*righteousness of God, apart from the Law.*" That both the Law and Prophets (a reference to the entire Old Testament, that being the Pentateuch and the historical, wisdom, and prophetic literature) have testified that rightstanding with God is obtained by faith and not by works. Here he is

saying that the entire Old Testament witnesses and testifies that the righteousness of God *“has been manifested apart from the Law!”* See then another **important element** in the Gospel, it is BIBLICAL.

**Romans 3:22** - 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; NASB

A. 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ –

Having established two very important points;

1) That the entire world, all mankind, is guilty before the tribunal of God’s judgment because of the failure to fulfill the Law of God.

2) That God’s righteousness now *“has been manifested apart from the Law”*

Paul delivers the sweetest, most glorious and soul freeing words which can be spoken to a guilty sinner who is under the threat and condemnation of God’s fierce wrath. That is, that God has provided the righteousness that He requires in Jesus Christ, and that we can possess it through faith alone in Christ alone! This is THE GOSPEL in a verse, and it is GOOD NEWS! Make no mistake, here the sinner is told explicitly how he/she can be made right with God, *“through faith in Jesus Christ.”* Here is **another element** then, the GOSPEL is CHRISTOLOGICAL. Jesus Christ is the center of the Gospel, it is Christocentric.

B. for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; -

Here we see a great paradox in the Gospel. It is both, all inclusive and very exclusive! It makes *“no distinction”* between Jew and Gentile, but *“all”* mankind can be included in being *“justified”* before God. However, this righteousness of God is very exclusive because it is provided only for those who *“believe.”* See then that God’s righteousness is UNIVERSAL in its scope, but given exclusively to those who believe (have faith) in Jesus Christ! And so, in the words of DA Carson, the Gospel is *“received in authentic persevering faith.”*

**Romans 3:23-24** - 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; NASB

A. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, -

Here Paul repeats the point he had earlier established that *“all have sinned”* and *“fall short”* of *“God’s glory,”* that is, of His glorious perfection which He requires in His Law. Notice the terms *“glory of God”* are used to speak of God’s nature which is equivalent to His holy Law. Learn here that when we sin we *“fall short of the glory of God,”* yes, we fail to glorify God. Sin is a defamation of the *“glory of God”* and an offense to His holy perfection.

B. 24 being justified as a gift by His grace -

Here is Paul’s explanation of the gratuitous and unmerited nature of God’s FREE grace. Now he elaborates on the GOOD NEWS that *“all”* can be *“justified as a gift by His grace!”* Here is the GOSPEL, that in spite of the fact that *“all”* mankind have *“sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* they can be *“justified”* by God as a FREE *“gift.”* By FREE we mean FREE to the one who receives it, but very costly to the One who gives it! Now this is what we mean when we speak about *“grace!”* GRACE is unmerited (not earned) and gratuitous