

The Core Passage on Soteriology in the Bible: Romans 1:16-4:25

A. The theme of Romans: the gospel reveals the righteousness of God (1:16-17).

There is a continuous and progressive unfolding of reasons in this text. The apostle tells us first why he is ready to preach the gospel at Rome—he is not ashamed of the gospel. Then he tells us why he is not ashamed of the gospel—it is “the power of God unto salvation.” And then, finally, he tells us why it is the power of God unto salvation—therein the “righteousness of God is revealed” (Murray, 26).

1. The gospel reveals the power of God (16).

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

a. Paul's attitude toward the gospel: no shame!

b. Why? The gospel is the power of God that saves.

The power of God unto salvation of which the gospel is the embodiment is not unconditionally and universally operative unto salvation. It is of this we are advised in the words “to every one that believes.” This informs us that salvation is not accomplished irrespective of faith. Hence the salvation with which Paul is going to deal in this epistle has no reality, validity, or meaning apart from faith. And we are already prepared for the emphasis which is placed upon faith throughout the epistle. The concept of salvation developed in this epistle, therefore, is the power of God operative unto salvation through faith. It is this salvation that is proclaimed in the gospel and the gospel as message is the embodiment of this power (Murray, 27-8).

c. How? The gospel makes righteousness attainable to mankind.

2. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God (17).

Rom. 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

a. What the righteousness of God is.

The phrase 'the righteousness of God' is found eight times in Romans (1:17; 3:5, 21,22, 25, 26; 10:3), two times in Paul's other letters (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9), and three times in the rest of the New Testament (Matt 6:L33; James 1:220; 2 Pet 1:1). The word 'righteousness' is found thirty-three times in Romans; seven times it is used in 2 Corinthians and Matthew, the most occurrences of the other NT books.

Paul's concentration on righteousness in Romans, and specifically on the righteousness of God, is part of the way he brings out the point that when God saves he does so in a way which accords with right. ... One of the truths Paul insists on is that God is righteous in the way he saves as well as in the fact that he saves. ...

... but the important thing is the plain fact that Paul uses the expression in certain significant passages to bring out the truth that in the death of Christ God brings about a righteousness for those who believe (Morris, 101-103).

b. How this righteousness is revealed.

c. What the righteousness of God produces.

So, when the apostle says, the "righteousness of God is revealed", he means that in the gospel the righteousness of God is actively and dynamically brought to bear upon man's sinful situation; it is not merely that it is made known as to its character to human apprehension but that it is manifest in its saving efficacy. This is why the gospel is the power of God unto salvation-the righteousness of God is redemptively active in the sphere of human sin and ruin (Murray, 29-30).

B. The proof of mankind's lack of righteousness in their standing before God (1:18-3:21).

Paul is about to expound a wonderful salvation. But first he establishes the need for it by showing that all people are sinful. Many of his contemporaries did not agree, with the result that his message seemed foolishness to them. Many of our contemporaries do not agree with him either, with the result that his words are incomprehensible to them, too. It has always seemed to most people that they are, on the whole, pretty decent people. They may not be perfect but they have done no great wrong. Since they are conscious of no really disastrous sin, they feel that they must be right with God. But for Paul the significant thing is not that people have met their own standard but that they have not met God's. They have come short of his demand. They are in the greatest of danger because they are subject to his wrath (Morris, 73).

1. The general flow of mankind has suppressed the truth of God (1:18-32).

Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

2. “Moral” gentiles fail the test of righteousness (2:1-16).

Rom. 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

3. Jewish morality proves hypocritical in its strivings for righteousness (2:17-3:8).

Rom. 2:17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God 18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; . . . 23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. . . . 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Rom. 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

4. Conclusion: all mankind is “under sin” & without righteousness (3:9-20).

Rom. 3:9 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, . . . 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

. . . , it is clear that Paul is moving toward a summary and application of the teaching he has been developing since 1:18. He labels this long section an “accusation.” In it, he charges all people, Jews and Gentiles, with being [“under sin”] (v. 9b). A string of loosely related OT quotations confirms the universality and describes the variety of the sin that so characterizes all humanity (vv. 10-18). Finally, in vv. 19-20, Paul draws out the implications of this universal bondage to sin: all stand condemned before the divine bar of judgment and are unable to escape that condemnation by anything they do. Thus is the way prepared for the proclamation of God's righteousness in Christ (vv. 21-26) (Moo, 200).

C. The provision of God in Christ for mankind's righteousness (3:21-4:25).

Although important in its own right, Rom. 1:18-3:20 is nevertheless preliminary to the main point Paul wants to establish in this part of his letter: the availability of God's righteousness to all who respond in faith. This “good news,” announced in 1:17, is now elaborated. The essential points are packed into 3:21-26, a passage that Luther called “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.” The remainder of the section develops one major element of this extraordinarily dense passage: faith as the only basis for justification. . . . he wanted to demonstrate as clearly as possible that faith was both the necessary and necessarily exclusive response of man to God's work of redemption (Moo, 218).

1. God provides for man's righteousness (3:21-26).
 - a. The way to attain this righteousness (21-23)
 - i. God's righteousness is now available (21)

Rom. 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 - ii. God's righteousness is available only through specific faith (22-23).

⇒ The statement about this faith (22a)

Rom. 3:22a the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

The Reformers restored biblical perspectives by insisting that faith is more than orthodoxy-not fides merely, but *fiducia*, personal trust and confidence in God's mercy through Christ; that it is not a meritorious work, one facet of human righteousness, but rather an appropriating instrument, an empty hand outstretched to receive the free gift of God's righteousness in Christ (James I. Packer).

Where faith is presented as the "principle" of a non-meritorious work:

Rom. 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by **faith** apart from works of the Law.

Rom. 3:30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by **faith** and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

Rom. 4:5 But to the one who does not work, but **believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his **faith** is reckoned as righteousness,

Rom. 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of **faith**.

Rom. 4:16 For this reason it is by **faith**, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the **faith** of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

Rom. 5:1 Therefore having been justified by **faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Rom. 9:32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by **faith**, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,

Rom. 10:17 So **faith** comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Gal. 2:16 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.

Gal. 3:12 However, the Law is not of **faith**; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them."

Where faith demands the specific object of Jesus Christ and His work:

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

Gal. 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by **faith in Jesus Christ** might be given to those who believe.

Gal. 3:23 But before **faith** came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the **faith** which was later to be revealed.

Gal. 3:24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by **faith**.

Gal. 3:25 But now that **faith** has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through **faith in Christ Jesus**.

⇒ The explanation of why it must be faith (22b-23)

Rom. 3:22b For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Every person's standing before God is the same (22b) . . .

because every person fails to live up to God's righteous standards (23).

Paul reduces the argument of 1:18-3:20 to its essence in a justly famous statement [v. 23] of the condition of all people outside Christ. And just as sharing in God's glory involves conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30; Phil 3:21), so the absence of glory involves a declension from the image of God in which man was first made. "The future glory may be regarded as the restoration of the lost, original glory." ... Paul, then, is indicating that all people fail to exhibit that 'being-like-God- for which they were created (Moo, 226-27).

- b. The nature of this righteousness (3:24-26)
 - i. It stems from God's initiative (24a).
Rom. 3:24a and are justified by his grace as a gift, . . .

⇒ God does the justifying - "being justified"

The Beginning Place: God is A Righteous God

1. God's nature is a righteous one (Psalm 11:7)
2. God's righteousness is a permanent element of His nature (Isa. 51:6,8)
3. God demands righteous living of mankind
4. God's actions as a judge are righteous (Psalm 1:6; Rev. 16:5; 2 Thess. 1:6-9)

Man's Great Deficit: His Own Righteousness

1. Man's righteousness is contrasted with God's (Phil 3:9-10)
2. Man's righteousness cannot satisfy God's requirements of righteousness (Gal 2:16)
3. Man's attempt to satisfy God's righteousness makes void Christ's work and the benefits of faith (Gal 2:21; Rom. 4:14-16; 10:4)

Justification's Basic Nature: A Legal Action

1. It declares/states one's guilt-worthiness before a judge (Luke 7:29; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 9:30-32)
2. It only comes from God (Rom. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Rom. 3:5, 21, 25ff; 1:17)
3. God does justify the ungodly (Rom. 4:5)
4. As a gift determining one's standing, it is to be distinguished from a quality of living (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30)

*The Reason God's Action is Legal: The Completed Work of Christ
(Rom. 3:24-25)*

⇒ God justifies with no thought of what we deserve - "by His grace"

⇒ God justifies with no constraint other than His will - "as a gift"

ii. It requires a payment (24b).

Rom. 3:24b . . . through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

What gives this paragraph its significance is the number of perspectives from which God's justification of sinners is considered. If ["by His grace as a gift"] has indicated the mode of justification as entirely free and unmerited., ["through the redemption"] illumines the costly means by which this acquitting verdict is rendered possible (Moo, 229).

⇒ The meaning of "redemption"

The word ["redemption"] has the root significance of a "liberation through payment of a price," that price being the *lutron*, or "ransom." Thus, in the second and first centuries B.C. ["redemption"] denotes the "ransoming" of prisoners of war, slaves, and condemned criminals. If ["redemption"] has this connotation here, then Paul would be presenting Christ's death as a "ransom," a "payment" that takes the place of that penalty for sins owed by all people to God (Moo, 229).

⇒ The assumption of redemption

"That I live in bondage to sin as well as its certain consequence of suffering the wrath of God"

⇒ The "cost" of redemption cp Ephesians 1:7

⇒ The "payee" of redemption

iii. It satisfies God's wrath (3:25a).

Rom. 3:25a whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

⇒ The meaning of "propitiation"

Just as redemption contemplates our bondage and is the provision of grace to release us from that bondage, so also propitiation contemplates our liability to the wrath of God and is the provision of grace whereby we may be freed from that wrath (Murray, 116).

⇒ The originator of propitiation

⇒ The assumption of propitiation

"That I am liable justly to suffer the wrath of God due to my sin and sinfulness"

The ransom satisfied the outraged holiness and righteousness of God (Griffith).

⇒ The means of propitiation

⇒ The reception of propitiation

iv. It proves God's righteousness (25b-26).

⇒ Regarding past sins (25b) cp Acts 14:16; 17:30

Rom. 3:25b This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Paul's meaning is rather that God postponed the full penalty due sins in the Old Covenant, allowing sinners to stand before Him without their having provided an adequate satisfaction of the demands of His holy justice (cf. Heb 10:4) (Moo, 241-2).

⇒ Regarding present faith (26)

Rom. 3:26 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.

2. God's righteousness is attained by faith alone (3:27-4:25).

In 3:27-4:25, Paul expounds the great theological thesis of 3:21-26. Or, to be more accurate, he expounds one key element in that thesis. For we hear no more in 3:27-4:25 about the atonement, or the demonstration of God's righteousness, or the provision for sins under the Old Covenant. Rather, Paul concentrates his attention on the vital theme stated in v. 22: ... Faith is the topic in every paragraph of this section of the letter, as Paul uses a series of antitheses to draw out the nature and implications of faith as the sole means of justification (Moo, 247).

a. Why faith is the only channel to justification (3:27-31).

i. Only faith harmonizes with the law (27-28).

⇒ The conclusion stated (27).

Rom. 3:27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

⇒ The reason stated-the "law of faith" explained (28).

Rom. 3:28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Paul's concern to meet Jewish views is evident in his addition "apart from works of the law." As in 3:20, what is meant is not certain kinds of works, or works viewed in a certain light, but anything a person does in obedience to the law and, by extrapolation, anything a person does. ... A serious erosion of the full significance of Paul's gospel occurs if we take his antithesis as anything less than these stark alternatives; no works, no matter what kind, or of what motivation, can play any part of making a sinner right with God (Moo, 254).

ii. Only faith harmonizes with monotheism (29-30).

⇒ The conclusion stated (29) cp Psalms 96-97; Jer 10:7.

Rom. 3:29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

