

Romans 3

By: Charles Stanley

From: On the Epistle to the Romans

The Jew had great advantage every way. He had the oracles of God; so have you. What an advantage to have the very inspired word of God! And the oracles of God were committed to them.

Verse 3: Let us notice here how remarkably faith is introduced again. Righteousness of God had always been on the principle of faith. For what, if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? However the bulk of the nation had disbelieved, yet their unbelief and unrighteousness had not changed God — He remained the same; He remains true to the unchangeable principles of right and wrong; otherwise, how shall He judge the world?

In setting aside the law as a means of acquiring righteousness, this might be perverted, as some did, and affirmed that the apostle taught that we might thus do evil that good might come. This is strongly condemned, the righteousness of God having been maintained in the judgment of all evil-doers. The apostle now appeals to the Jews' own scriptures, and from them proves that all are guilty: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God."

Verse 19: We cannot deny that these words were written to those under the law. What a terrible description of man under law! Every mouth is thus stopped, and all the world stands guilty before God. Yes, mark, this is not what man is before his fellow-men, but what he is before God. And if all under law, and all not under law, are guilty, what can the law do for the guilty?

Its very perfection as a perfect rule for man, can only condemn the breaker of the law. If a man has got false weights in his shop, what could the test of standard weights do but condemn him? The standard weights would

show how far he was short; but if short, could not show that they were just weights. The law just did this, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Since, then, all are guilty, it is evident, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified IN HIS SIGHT."

Verse 21: Man is thus set aside, and all his efforts and pretensions to righteousness by works of law. "But now the righteousness of God, without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." This is altogether new, and distinct from everything that is of man. It is not the righteousness of man, for he has none. What a fact, that in all this world there was not one found righteous! No, not one. It is the righteousness of God, entirely and apart from the law, what God is in Himself, and what He is for man. Now God could not be righteous in justifying man by the law, for the law could only condemn man. He was guilty.

God was surely always righteous in his dealings with man—perfectly consistent with His own glory. But this is now manifested apart from law, though witnessed by law and prophets. This, then, is the revelation, "even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all, them that believe; for there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

How distinctly faith of Jesus Christ now takes the place of law, and this unto all, both Jews and Gentiles! The righteousness of God, then, is what He is in Himself, and what He is to us. It is apart from law; for there was, and could be, no law or command to God. All is absolutely of God. He so loved; He so gave His beloved Son that, through His sacrifice on the cross, He might be eternally righteous in justifying us, or accounting us righteous.

Verse 24: "Being justified freely by His grace." Yes, accounted righteous freely, without anything on our part, except believing Him — and even faith is the gift of God — it is by His free favor, grace. But how is God righteous in justifying us freely by His free favor, "through the redemption that is in Christ

Jesus”? Not merely—blessed as that is — justified from every charge of sins; not merely sheltered from judgment, like Israel in Egypt, by the blood of the Lamb; but redeemed, fully delivered — redemption through His precious blood.

Well, you may say, that is all very blessed, but how am I to know that I have a share in it? How am I to be assured that it applies to me?

Well, since God is righteous in freely justifying us, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, let us inquire what that redemption is, and how you may know it is unto you, and applies to you. What is redemption? The emancipation, or redemption, of all the slaves in the West Indies, some years ago, will illustrate what redemption is. A vast sum was given, voted by the English government, for the complete redemption of the slaves. They were, so to speak, redeemed forever — forever emancipated, delivered from the wretchedness of slavery.

Now, when the proclamation, or glad tidings, of their redemption arrived in the West Indies, how were they to know it applied to them? Suppose an aged slave, with many a scar of whip and chain upon him, had inquired, in the following words: “Yes, I have no doubt so many millions have been paid — I have no doubt the proclamation of redemption, emancipation, everlasting deliverance, is good and glorious — but how am I to know it applies to me?” What would you have said? “Why, are you not a slave; are not those scars a proof of it? Were you not born a slave? If you were a free man, it could not apply to you, but since you are a slave, it must, it does, apply to you; the proclamation is to you. Believing the proclamation, this moment you are, in perfect righteousness, forever free.” Would you not say so?

Ah, if we took our true place, and owned our true condition as born slaves, conceived in sin, and shaped in iniquity, then all difficulty would soon vanish as to seeing how redemption applies to us. Have you ever owned, do you own, that by nature you were the bond-slave of

sin — sold under sin? The poor West Indian slave might possibly escape from his master, but have you not found yourself utterly without power to escape from Satan and sin? Have you any ugly scars of sin?

If you think, bad as you are, that God will help you to keep the law, and so at last you hope to get to heaven; then you do not know your need of redemption. If the English government voted so much in the council of Parliament, what did God vote in the councils of eternity? Was it to give silver or gold for your redemption? It was to give His well-beloved Son. Yes, He is the One “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.” Poor helpless slave of sin, that redemption is unto you. If you are such, then it must be unto you. Yes, the slave that believed the proclamation was that moment forever free. It is just so with you. God grant it to thousands who read this paper.

Dear young believer, it is most important to understand this: that you are not only justified freely (all sins being forgiven, God sees no iniquity), but you are also redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. Yes, delivered from that state of slavery forever. If that great sum of gold set the slaves free forever, has not the infinite propitiation of Christ set us free, redeemed us forever? Shall we allow a shadow of a doubt? No; He gave Himself for us—all free, unmerited favor. Not one thing did we do for our redemption; it was all accomplished before we had one desire or thought of redemption. And now we hear the glad tidings unto us poor slaves of sin; we believe, and are forever free.

“Glory, glory everlasting,
Be to Him who bore the cross.”

But we must further inquire how the righteousness of God is affected by all this.

Verses 25-26: “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; to declare, I say, at this time, His

righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” You notice God hath set forth the propitiation of Christ to declare two things. His righteousness needed to be revealed in these two things: His passing over, in forbearance, sins that are past; and that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Here we would warn our readers of a serious mistake, often found, as to “sins that are past,” as though it meant sins that have been committed before our conversion to God; that sins up to that time are pardoned, or remitted, through the propitiation of Christ; that God would therefore be righteous, through the death of Christ, in thus pardoning past sins before conversion. This error leaves the believer in utter perplexity as to sins, should they be committed after conversion; indeed, this view leaves the Christian worse off than the Jew, as he had another day of atonement every year.

But if the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ only met our sins, or atoned for sins, up to conversion, then there remains no sacrifice, no remedy, for sins after conversion. For “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10). On this finite view of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, who could be saved? The one infinite sacrifice must have met all the sins of a finite sinner, from first to last. What, then, does this scripture mean? Simply this: God had passed over, in forbearance, past sins, the sins of all believers before Christ died; and now He was the Justifier of all that believe, reckoned them as righteous, as though they had never sinned. But the great question was this: How could God be righteous in doing both these things? How could this be revealed, declared, explained? Without an answer to this inquiry, how can any soul have peace with God?

If all had been guilty, how could God be righteous in passing over the sins of those who believed, whether Jews or Gentiles? And if all are proved guilty now—if you are proved guilty, how can God declare of you, like Israel of old, that He hath not beheld, and does not behold, iniquity in you? Clearly He could not be righteous on account of anything in us, or

done by us, under law, or not under law. Here the eye of faith must rest solely on the blood of Jesus — “a propitiation, through faith in His blood.” This alone explains, declares, the righteousness of God, both as to the sins of past believers, and ours now.

Let us, however, remember, that on the propitiatory mercy-seat the blood was placed before the eye of God! “And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times” (Lev. 16:14). This had to be done again; the blood of a bullock had to be sprinkled before God on that golden mercy-seat once every year. And blood of other victims had often to be shed. Not so the blood of Christ; that blood, once shed and sprinkled, can never be shed or sprinkled again.

Oh, my soul, think what that blood is for all thy sins before the eye of God! The blood, sprinkled on the gold, shows what the blood of Christ is, as meeting, upholding, declaring the righteousness of God. Yes, He was righteous in justifying David a thousand years before the blood was shed; just as He is righteous in justifying us eighteen hundred years after. Jesus must needs suffer for both.

Thus we see the great mistake of those who say, “The righteousness of God is that by which He maketh us righteous.” No; the righteousness of God is that by which He Himself is righteous, in reckoning us poor sinners righteous. The difference is immense. If the voice of what calls itself the church says one thing, and the word of God says another thing, which must I believe? Doubtless the latter. “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; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

Dwell on each sentence. Is it not the righteousness of God that He might be just? Do

you believe in Jesus—that He has thus glorified God by His expiatory sacrifice — that now, at this time, through that death, He is in righteousness able to justify all that believe? Is God thus revealed to your soul just in reckoning you righteous?

Since righteousness therefore is wholly of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, “where is boasting then?” Is it on the principle of works that we have done? No, such a thought is excluded. “By what law? of works? No, but by the law of faith.” For we have seen faith finds righteousness in God. I cannot, then, boast of having been, or being, righteous in myself, since we are proved guilty, and know it to be true, and, on the principle of works or law, we can only be condemned.

Justification cannot be on that ground, however we may struggle to make it so. Justification, then, must be on another principle. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.” What else could scripture conclude, since all are guilty, and justification is not what we are to God, but what He is to us, set forth in Christ? Do not mix these two things together. Let your salvation be entirely on the principle of faith—what God is to you.

To be justified by faith is what God is to us through Christ. Deeds of the law are on the

principle of what we are to God. Amazing grace! We are justified by the one, without the other. And in this the “no difference” doctrine is fully maintained. The same righteousness of God to all, Jews or Gentiles, on the principle of faith, and by means of faith.

Those who maintain that we are still under the law, make it void, because it curses those under it, because they do not keep it. Those who were under it once had to be redeemed from its curse by the death of Jesus. Thus, if scripture put us under it again, then Jesus would need to die again to redeem us from its curse. (See Gal. 3:10-13; 4:4-5.) “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish law.” Jesus revealed to the eye of faith, bearing the curse of the broken law for those that were under it—if this does not establish the claims of the law of God, what could do so? But if we were put under it again, then its claims would have to be established again, or it would be made void.

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