

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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II. THE MESSIANIC DELIVERANCE (3:21-8:39)

The line of argumentation running through this whole block of material is that God has delivered man from enslavement to the power of sin and has given him new existence "in Christ," which is received on the basis of faith (3:21-8:39).

1. The Concept of a Righteousness Which is Acquired by Faith (3:21-31)

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished, ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ²⁷Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. ²⁹Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we

uphold the law.

Paul here introduces his theme of righteousness or justification (i.e., a right standing or favorable relationship with God), which we enter into by means of belief. Following this introductory statement Paul develops five treatises on various themes relating to the deliverance that has resulted from the Messianic visitation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. These treatises are: a treatise on faith (4:1-25), a treatise on the death of Christ (5:1-21), a treatise on freedom from the power of sin (6:1-23), a treatise on freedom from the Law (7:1-25), a treatise on freedom from the curse of death (8:1-27), and all of this is followed by a summary in 8:28-39 which concludes the Messianic deliverance section of material.

***(1) A Righteousness Other Than by Lawkeeping
Has Been Revealed (3:21-23)***

*But now apart from the law a **righteousness** (dikaiosune) of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) even the **righteousness** (dikaiosune) of God through the faith of Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; (23) for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;*

“A righteousness,” says Paul. What does he mean by this term? *Dikaiosune* has multiple meanings. In **daily usage** it means, “right standing, a state of being right.” A righteous person is one who will do the right thing. In **legal usage** it is, “a state of being innocent or acquitted of legal charges.” In this sense a righteous person is a law abiding person. In **religious usage** it means, “to be in right standing with God.” A righteous person is a person who is not guilty of sin. “A righteousness other than by lawkeeping has been revealed,” says Paul. The righteousness of which Paul speaks here is a righteousness that comes from God as a gift, which becomes a reality in one's life through believing that the story of what God has done through Jesus of Nazareth is true (3:21-23).

The verses before us here in 3:21-31 are introductory to a collection of treatises designed to further develop the concept of a righteousness which is not acquired by perfect obedience to the Law of Moses. The leading idea running throughout this text is: the righteousness of God (verses 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30). In the Greek text the word translated “righteousness” is the same as the word translated, “justification.” They are interchangeable in that

they are from the same Greek root *dike*, from which has developed a large Greek word family. The term *dike* means, “right..” From this word derives *dikaios*, which means, “righteous, just, justice, to be innocent, free of guilt, acquitted; to be morally or ritually clean and worthy of fellowship, one who is in a right or good standing with God.” *Dikaiosune* is, “righteousness, justification, a state or condition of being a righteous or just person, to be free of the charges of guilt for transgression or sin). The verb *dikaioo* is, “to make right, to justify, vindicate, to declare innocent; [as a judicial term] in the passive voice - to be acquitted or cleared of all charges against; [as a religious term] to be made morally or ritually clean. *Dikaioma* [as a judicial term] means, “acquittal, justification, to be found not guilty.” *Dikaiosis* is a judicial “declaration of innocence, acquittal.”

The theme of righteousness or justification is of great significance to Paul here in these lines of text. To fully appreciate how Paul is using these terms, we must understand them from both their Hebrew and Greek backgrounds; since Paul, as a scholar at home in both Hebrew and Greek worlds of thought, is, in all probability, working out of both concepts.

The Hebrew terms for “righteous” and “righteousness” are “*tsedeq*” and “*tsedaqah*,” which are lexically defined as, “to make right, declare right, to justify, make things right, to show oneself to be right or justified in one's course of action, to be a righteous person, a person who does the right thing.” As we have seen, the Greek terms means, “to be declared right or just, in the vocabulary of the law courts - to be declared not guilty, to receive acquittal.” Although the Hebrew and Greek term have essentially the same meaning, there a nuance to the Hebrew concept that that needs to be emphasized.

Matthew Black, professor of New Testament studies at the University of St. Andrews University in Aberdeen, Scotland, gives the following discussion on the term "righteousness" as used by the Apostle Paul:

. . . 'righteousness' (and its cognates) has a wide range of meaning in the Bible. While it does have a connotation of 'integrity' ('uprightness,' 'virtue'), in Hebrew thought, where ethics are 'relational,' the emphasis tends to be on 'right relations' ('justice') within the societal unit (the tribe, nation, etc.) and, within the structure of a theocratic society, it includes the covenant relationship

to God.

'Righteousness' is also an attribute of God; the 'righteous God' performs acts of righteousness (Jg. 5:11). When attributed to God, 'righteousness' can mean 'right vindicated' (cf. NEB: 'God's way of righting wrong') - hence 'triumph, victory, the victory of the righteous cause.' The word thus comes to be nearly synonymous with 'salvation,' stressing the more positive aspects, not 'deliverance from,' but a vindication of, and so the *triumph* of, etc. (the righteous cause). The expression 'the righteousness of God' comes especially to be applied to the saving action or intervention of God in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (e.g. Ps 103:6), or the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity (Isa. 51:5: 'My righteousness (triumph) is near, my salvation is gone forth.'). (M. Black, *Romans*, New Century Bible Commentary, pp. 44-45.)

These comments concerning the Hebrew understanding of righteousness must be added the Greek concept in order to fully understand the New Testament sense of the term, especially as used by Paul. Black further observes:

Since Paul can use the verb *dikaioo*, meaning 'to pronounce righteous' and so 'to acquit'. . . it is not surprising that the noun (*dikaioo/dikaioosune* - mwl) has come to be traditionally rendered by 'justification,' in the forensic sense of **justification**, namely 'acquittal.' (Black, p. 44.)

Paul's understanding of righteousness is both Hebrew and Greek; i.e., the Greek terms he uses in his writings are colored by his Hebrew understanding of this concept. Righteousness is, for the Hebrew, the thing God does when his people cry out to him for vindication when they've been wronged, when they cry out for deliverance in their oppression. God is the one who "makes things right," hence, he is a righteous God. The God of the Hebrews was the God who makes things right when they have gone wrong (cf., Isa 45:15-25; 50:7-9; Micah 7:9).

The Greek idea within *dikaioosune* is probably best understood as we, in our culture, use the term "justification." When one declares his innocence before the court, and the evidence is in his favor, he is declared "not guilty;" i.e., he is justified in his claims of innocence and stands in a right

relationship with the law, the courts, society, etc. This is the essentially the Greek idea of *dikaisoune* – righteousness or justification.

***(2) By Accepting God’s Gift of Grace,
All Men Receive Acquittal (3:24-26)***

[for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;] and are justified (dikaioo - here in the passive voice - to be acquitted or cleared of charges against) freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (i.e., his violent death). He did this to demonstrate his justice (dikaiosune), because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice (dikaiosune) at the present time, so as to be just (dikaios) and the one who justifies (dikaioo) those who have faith in Jesus.

By accepting God's gift of grace, all men receive acquittal (they are justified) by believing that their redemption is found “in Christ.” They have been freed of guilt by his conquest of the forces that held us in its power through our sins.

The metaphor of the law court is important here, especially in the playing out of mankind's role in its relationship to God. When the accused before the bar has no case - he is guilty and that is that - all he can do is throw himself on the mercy of the court. In Paul's thinking, the whole of mankind is guilty and stands before God condemned, this is the argument of Rom 1-3. The only thing mankind can do is throw itself on the mercy of the court, confess its sins and ask for forgiveness and mercy.

But how can justice be served if the guilty are given mercy and forgiveness? If justice is rendering to every man that which is due him (i.e., reward or penalty as deserved), and mercy is not rendering to a man that which is due him, how can God be just and merciful at one and the same time? How can God not count a man's sins against him (i.e., show mercy) and still be just?

Here is where Paul's statement of God as "just" and "justifier" enters the discussion. God has demonstrated his righteousness or justice by his redemptive work which renders man, “not guilty.” “That he might himself

be just, and the justifier,” says Paul, “of him that has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

The Hebrew concept of "making things right" and the Greek idea of "declaring one not guilty" are both at work here in Paul's development of thought. God makes things right by making things new - new creation. He "makes us right" (*dikaioo*) by "making us new" in conversion; i.e. he frees us from our sins and thus declares us righteous (*dikaioi* - not guilty, acquitted), and delivers us from the power of sin by translating us out of the dominion of darkness into the reign of the Son (Col 1:13). He gives us new existence, an existence characterized by righteousness (*dikaioisune*).

Here is where the inspired genius of Paul shows itself in a most wondrous way. The question again is: How can a just God not hold a man's sins against him? How can he say to one who has destroyed himself by sin, "not guilty"? How can he acquit someone if he is guilty? How can he declare him righteous (in a right standing) when he is full of sin? The answer: he recreates him or creates him anew (2 Cor 5:13-19). As Paul said in Rom 3:24, man is, "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is **in Christ Jesus.**"

The thing in Paul's theology that makes his doctrine of justification work is his doctrine of regeneration or new creation. A person who has been put to death (i.e., experienced a death of his existence) and then is brought back to life again in new creation is no longer guilty of the sins of his previous existence. The new being "in Christ" cannot be condemned for the deeds of the old being "in Adam". The old man or being has been put to death and a new being has been resurrected out of that old existence. What is the point of punishing a person if he is not the same person he was before? We are talking about taking a creation that has been destroyed and bringing a new creation out of the old one.

If Michelangelo's Pieta in Rome were destroyed, one of the greatest works of art in our world would have been destroyed. But what if someone could restore it no matter how badly it was damaged? What if it took a miracle and someone could work such a miracle? Only God could do such a thing and that is precisely what he did do to affect our redemption. Through conversion from our old existence in Adam into new existence in Christ, we are converted from a destroyed masterpiece into a new creation, a being as the original Adam – a being created in the image of God.

It is through this conversion that we attain a new existence wherein we are declared righteous (*dikaios*), and this new existence is entered by means of faith - our beliefs are the portal through which we pass into new creation existence. This piece of imagery stands at the heart of the redemption drama Paul calls his gospel, and can be seen throughout his letters:

*We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that **all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as **Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have newness of life** (Rom 6:2-4).*

*But now we have been delivered from the law, **having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter** (Rom7:6).*

*Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** ¹⁸Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹that is, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.** ²⁰Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. **21For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** (1 Cor 5:17 –21).*

*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which **the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** ¹⁵For **in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation** (Gal 1:14-15).*

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body

through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷*And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father* (Eph 2:14-18).

. . . that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, ²³*and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,* ²⁴*and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:22-24).

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶*Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience,* ⁷*in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.* ⁸*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.* ⁹*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,* ¹⁰*and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him* (Col 3:5-10).

By accepting God's gift of grace, all men receive acquittal (they are justified) by believing that their redemption is found "in Christ." They have been freed of guilt by his conquest of the forces that held us in its power through our sins. Man "in Christ" is a new creation, the old adamic man has been buried in the waters of baptism, the new man "in Christ" as been raised to walk in newness of life. The renewal of the man "in Christ" is a spiritual renewal after the image of him who created him. Man is again a being created in the image of God.

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