

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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The Concept of a Righteousness Acquired by Faith (3:21-31)

***Any Attempt to Achieve Righteousness Before God
as a Result of Lawkeeping is Futile (3:27-30)***

Where, 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.

Any attempt to achieve righteousness before God as a result of lawkeeping is futile. If one is to stand in a right relationship with God, he must do so on the basis of faith, not on the basis of lawkeeping. Why? Because of the purpose or function of Law. It is designed to **control** human behavior and **condemn** human behavior when it violates the law. One violation makes the transgressor guilty. He is no longer innocent, a keeper of the law, one who abides by the law, or a person who does what is right.

As the Apostle John says in 1 John 3:7, *Little children, let no man deceive you: the one who does what is right is righteous, even as he (Gk ekinos, “that one” – the one he identified in 2:1 as Jesus Christ the righteous one) is righteous.*

He also says, in 1 John 3:4,

Everyone committing sin transgresses the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. James 2:10-11 says: *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

The one who transgress, violates, or breaks the law is “guilty of transgressing the law,” is a transgressor of the law. This is the only interpretation possible from a legal point of view. This aspect of this discussion doesn’t strike us as just (fair), but all it takes is one transgression to make you a transgressor of the law. Here our emotions must yield to our rationality. This conclusion does necessarily follow! The question we always ask here is, “Why did God put us in such a situation?” The answer is that we have to learn that our will must be yielded to his will if we are to spend eternity with him. Our life here on this earth is a period of soul making, designed to fit us for eternity. What Adam did was set his will against the will of his Creator, and he was driven from God’s presence. In order to have fellowship with God, man must learn that he cannot set his will against the will of God. This is why God gave man *torah* – instruction, laws, statutes, judgments, and commandments. When we violate his instruction, we are rebelling against his will, and this renders us sinners. In 1 John 1:8-10 we read:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This is why Paul is so sure that no man is righteous, “no not one!” Quoting from Psalms 14:1-3; 53:1-3; and Eccles. 7:20, he says,

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹²All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Eccles 7:20, which Paul quotes here, says, “*There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.*” Ezekiel 18:4 and 20

says, “*The that sins, that soul shall die!*” Someone may ask, “If the Law was given to condemn us, why was it given to us at all?” And what is the meaning of such Scripture as Psalms 1:1-3?

*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But **his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.** ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* Psalms 19 says,

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD **are right**, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are pure enlightening the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is cleansing, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether **righteous.** ¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. ¹¹ By them is your servant warned; in keeping them **there is great reward.** (Here is the problem, “in keeping them” there is great reward - mwl)*

There’s nothing wrong with God’s Law or *Torah* (Lit. “instruction”). The Old Testament (the Scriptures of Jesus) is everything it says is? It is not the OT Scriptures (the Law) that is the problem here; it is man who is the problem. Man as a being with freedom of will, who **will not** keep the law, **will not** live by the law, **will not** walk in the teachings of the law.

So What Does God Do with Us?

What does God do with a people so self-willed that they tend to destroy themselves by the exercise of their volition, their freedom of will? Does he just throw us away? Is that what you do with your children when they exercise their freedom of choice and their choice displeases you? When their freedom of will runs headlong against your will? You understand that your rules for your children are for the well being of your children (if they are good rules). Your purpose in giving them rules is to provide direction, to keep them from doing the wrong thing, or even hurting or destroying themselves. Your rules are for their protection and well-being, and for the development of their moral judgment. Isn’t it the case that you

hope your instructions will, over the years, develop your child in terms of moral maturity. There is a time when they will no longer be amenable to the rules you gave them and will, hopefully, mature to the point that they have their own moral judgment. Are they not expected to come to a time when they are accountable for their own moral decisions? That was the purpose of your rules, wasn't it? Well, that was the purpose of God's rules as well. Your rules are the by-product of your moral judgment. The development of our children's moral judgment or character is what you are looking for in them as they mature and this is what God is looking for in us.

God as Creator, Again!

So, what would you do if your children's exercise of their freedom of choice proved to be detrimental to them? Their judgment was so bad you thought they were going to destroying themselves? Your every attempt at guidance, giving them direction, instruction, even saving them from themselves whenever possible, had failed.

What would you do? Would you wish you could make them over again, but this time they would have the knowledge of what their exercise of bad judgment could do to them? Give them another chance, but this time let them have the knowledge they have gain through experience. Would this not be the most wonderful thing imaginable, if we could create them anew, give them a new beginning?

This is what God did. He came into the world to reclaim his creation, and he did it by recreating him, by making him new. Taking him from one existence to another, but with the advantage of his experiences of the former existence. Here is the meaning and significance of the array of New Testament terms such as: new birth, being born again, born of water and spirit, new creation, spiritual renewal, regeneration, conversation (change), transformation, dying and rising again, putting off the old man (adamic man), putting on the new man (the Christian), and being "in Christ" rather than "in Adam."

This is how God makes us righteous; he makes us anew through the power of belief. Just as Abraham's faith made him righteous in the eyes of God, so also with us. Through our belief in the story God has given us, we die to one existence and are changed and translated into another existence;

we are born again or anew, recreated. In conversion to Christ, we die to our old adamic existence. As an act symbolic of this, we are buried in the waters of baptism, and are resurrected from that watery grave into new existence "in Christ" (Rom 6). But the power that makes it all work is our belief that God is regenerating us, as he has said he would do. He is the power that affects it; our belief is the power that actualizes it.

So Mercy is More Just than Justice

So then, why is God not amiss if he forgives us and grants us mercy when we stand condemned by our sins? Because for a man "in Christ," forgiveness is more just than punishment. The adamic man is the one guilty of the sins committed by the one "in Adam". Man "in Christ" is a new creation in the eyes of God and cannot be held guilty for the sins committed "in Adam." As Paul says in 2 Cor 5:17, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new."

This condition of newness is, in essence, a condition of righteousness (*dikaioisune*) - a condition essential to fellowship with God. This was accomplished by the death of Christ, which removed the curse of adamic death for those no longer "in Adam," and through his resurrection, brought a new life "in Christ" into existence. This is Paul's whole argument in 1 Cor 15. Christ himself entered into a new existence through his resurrection, and offers this new existence to those who believe this "godstory" to be true, and then act upon it. As we share the existence of Adam by means of our adamic flesh (*sarx*), with the curse of death imposed upon it, we may also share the existence of Christ, and share in his conquest of death through his resurrection into new existence.

Justification and Regeneration in the Letters of Paul

The relationship between Paul's teaching on justification and his teaching on regeneration or spiritual rebirth which occurs through belief can be seen throughout his letters, especially in the letters of Galatians and Romans. Some of the most salient texts are as follows:

*... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are **justified** (*dikaioo* - declared "not guilty" - mwl) freely by his grace through the redemption (new birth - mwl) that came by Christ Jesus. (Through*

conversion to Christ one is transferred from Adamic existence into existence in Christ with a status of righteousness [*dikaiosune* - acquittal, declared not guilty] which is a gift of forgiveness bestowed by the grace of God), (Rom 3:23-24)

*Where, 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** (*dikaioo* - declared “not guilty” - mwl) by faith apart from observing the law, (Rom 3:27-28).*

*Therefore, since we have been **justified** (*dikaioo* - declared “not guilty” - mwl) through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (grace is received “in Christ” – mwl). And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (Through belief in Christ one gains access into the reign of grace which is to be found “in Christ” as contrasted with existence “in Adam.” – mwl), (Rom 5:1-2).*

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been **justified** (*dikaioo* - declared “not guilty” - mwl) by his blood (by means of his death – mwl), how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Through his death, Jesus brought about the death of death for those “in Christ” as opposed to those “in Adam.” The new spiritual creation “in Christ” transcends the adamic body at death, therefore, there is no death to the new creature “in Christ.” – mwl.), (Rom 5:8-10).*

*For those God foreknew he also predestined (determined beforehand - mwl) to be conformed to the likeness of his Son (to become new creations “in Christ” – mwl), that he might be the firstborn (the first being of the new creation – mwl) among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined (those who would experience new creation “in Christ” – mwl), he also called (by means of the gospel – mwl); those he called, he also justified (those who hear and believe the gospel story and are reborn by means of their conversion to Christ – mwl); those he **justified** (*dikaioo* - declared “not guilty” - mwl), he also glorified*

(made them new creations “in Christ” – mwl). ³¹*What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:29-31).*

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl), and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame," (Rom 10:9-11).*

Those who accept Jesus as savior are transferred from adamic existence into existence “in Christ” by means of their death to their old existence, which is put off in the watery grave of baptism, and their resurrection from that symbolic grave into new existence “in Christ.” Accepting Jesus as savior, however, must be accompanied by accepting Jesus as Lord. To confess Jesus as Lord requires that we do all things that he said for us to do, as he expressed in Luke 6:46.

*. . . nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed (buried the adamic man in baptism - mwl), you were sanctified (transferred into new existence “in Christ” – mwl), you were **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (by the authority of his lordship – mwl) and by the Spirit of our God (the presence and power of God which causes our spiritual renewal to occur. – mwl), (1 Cor 6:10-11).*

*. . . know that a man is not **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl) by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl) by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl). "If, while we seek to be **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” - mwl) in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! (Gal 2:16-17).*

If we attempt to continue living “in Adam” after we have been transferred from that existence into new existence “in Christ,” then what is

the purpose of our conversion? We are attempting to reverse the whole process.

*Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." (Gen 15"6) ⁷Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸The Scripture foresaw that God would **justify** (dikaiōo - declared "not guilty" - mwl) the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." ⁹So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ¹⁰All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (Deut. 27:26) ¹¹Clearly no one is **justified** (dikaiōo - declared "not guilty" – mwl) before God by the law, because, "The **righteous** (the "not guilty" - mwl) shall live by faith." (Hab 2:4) ¹²The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." (Lev. 18:5) ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law (adamic death) by becoming a curse for us (by his experience of the curse of adamic death, he, by his resurrection from the power of that death, brought about the creation of a new existence, which is entered into by spiritual renewal "in Christ" – mwl), for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Lev 18:5) ¹⁴He redeemed us (delivered man from the curse of death due him because of his sins – mwl) in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith (by believing that God can and will transform us from beings "in Adam" into being "in Christ" – mwl) we might receive the promise of the Spirit (the promise of transformation from beings of Adamic existence into new spiritual beings "in Christ" – mwl), (Gal 3:6-14).*

*Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴So the law was put in charge to lead us (a tutor to instruct a child in moral behavior) to Christ that we might be **justified** (dikaiōo - declared "not guilty" - mwl) by faith. ²⁵Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law, (Gal 3:23-25).*

When the child reaches maturity, he is expected to have the moral character or judgment that such instruction brings and no longer needs a tutor in the essentials of moral instruction.

*Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law (one who has died to his adamic existence and his amenability to the law does not continue to behave as if he is amenable to the law in that a shift in lordship has occurred – mwl) ⁴You who are trying to be **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” – mwl) by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace (they have rejected the gift of forgiveness they have received by grace “in Christ” – mwl) ⁵But we, through the Spirit, by faith, eagerly await the hope of **righteousness** (dikaiosune - making things right, being declared “not guilty” - mwl) for which we hope, (Gal 5:3-5).*

*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another (the existence of an adamic man ruled by the flesh – mwl) ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth (the transformation that occurs through the death and burial of the old man in the waters of baptism – mwl) and renewal by the Holy Spirit (the spiritual regeneration which occurs in conversion to Christ – mwl) ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been **justified** (dikaioo - declared “not guilty” – mwl) by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life, (Titus 3:3-7).*

His resurrection brought a new existence into existence not only for himself, but for all those who become one with him through their own death, burial, and resurrection “into him.”

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (the first of the new being created by God by the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth – mwl). ²¹For since death came through a man, (the first Adam – mwl) the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (the second or last Adam – mwl) ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him (1 Cor 15:20-23).

The spirit is regenerated through conversion to Christ bringing about a spiritual renewal “in Christ,” at the resurrection the adamic body of man, which as experienced physical death, will be regenerated and given new existence as well.

*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man (the first Adam – mwl) how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ (the second Adam – mwl), overflow to the many! ¹⁶Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin (the sin of the first Adam – mwl). The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought **justification** (dikaioma - making things right- mwl). ¹⁷For if, by the trespass of the one man (the first Adam – mwl) death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of **righteousness** (dikaiosune - right standing with God - mwl) reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of **righteousness** (dikaioma - making things right- mwl) was **justification** (dikaiosis - to be declared not guilty, to receive acquittal - mwl) that brings life for all men (Rom 5:15-17).*

With this must be taken Paul's doctrine of regeneration or new creation, which serves as the means by which God declares us no longer guilty of transgression of the law and condemned. It is the doctrine of new creation that makes the doctrine of justification work, or even make sense.

***(4) An Anticipated Question Leading to the Next Line of Argumentation:
Is This Concept Not Contrary to the Law? (3:31)***

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law, (Romans 3:31).

Here we have an anticipated question leading to the next line of argumentation: "Doesn't the teaching that one achieves righteousness through believing contradict the teaching of the Old Testament (i.e., the Law/Torah)?"

This verse serves as a transition into the next segment of material

(4:1-25), which is the first of five treatises Paul develops in the presentation of his theology of Messianic deliverance. Paul's answer to this question of v 31 is a resounding "No!" To believe in the redemptive power of faith/belief is to accept the testimony of the Old Testament as may be seen in the example which follows: that of Abraham, the one whose faith/belief reckoned him as righteous in the eyes of God.

At this point Paul enters into a series of treatises in which he develops five of the most essential themes of his theology: a treatise on faith, a treatise on the death of Christ, a treatise on freedom from the power of sin, a treatise on freedom from the Law, and a treatise on freedom from death. These treatises provide us with examples of the themes that made up the preaching of Paul, and likely constitute the closest thing we have to compendium of his theology.

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