

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: [www.churchredeemeraz.org](http://www.churchredeemeraz.org)

Series: Exposition of Romans  
Number: 153  
Text: Romans 3:9-31  
Date: July 1, 2012 (a.m.)

Pastor/Teacher  
Gary L. W. Johnson

### REVIEWING THE MERCIES OF GOD THE PROBLEM OF JUSTIFICATION: THE LAW & THE JUSTICE OF GOD

“The justification of the *ungodly* (Rom. 4:5; 5:6),” writes W. G. T. Shedd, “includes both pardon and acceptance. Either alone would be an incomplete justification of the ungodly. In the case of a sinner, the law requires satisfaction for past disobedience and also perfect obedience. When a criminal has suffered the penalty affixed to his crime, he has done a part, but not all that the law requires of him. He still owes a perfect obedience to the law in addition to the endurance of the penalty. The law does not say to the transgressor: ‘If you will suffer the penalty, you need not render the obedience.’ But it says: ‘You must both suffer the penalty and render the obedience.’ Sin is under a double obligation; holiness is under only a single one. A guilty man owes both penalty and obedience; a holy angel owes only obedience.”<sup>1</sup> Since justification is a forensic, legal or judicial term, it must by definition stand in close relation to the Law and Justice of God. How can a Holy and Righteous God justify the ungodly without violating His Law and Justice? Has He lowered the standards – or set them aside altogether? Is God like the parent, who when confronted with the child’s wrong-doing, expects only a sincere “I am sorry” from the child and the matter is dropped? Is this the way God deals with sinful men? A lot of people think that it is, and for this reason it is safe to say that almost all of the errors concerning justification may be traced to defective views of the Law and Justice of God. This is how Machen stated the matter. “The truth of Christianity cannot be established by the intellect unless an important part of the argument is based upon the fact of sin which is revealed by the law of God; the beauty of Jesus, which attracts the gaze of men, cannot be appreciated without a knowledge of the holiness upon which it is based; the companionship of Jesus is possible only to those who say first, in deep contrition: ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord;’ the example of Jesus is powerless to those who are in the bondage of evil habit, and it is not even a perfect example unless He be the divine Redeemer that He claimed to be. The true schoolmaster to bring men to Christ is found, therefore, now and always in the law of God—the law of God that gives to men the consciousness of sin. A new and more powerful proclamation of that law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour; men would have little difficulty with the gospel if they had only learned the lesson of the law. As it is, they are turning aside from the Christian pathway; they are turning to the village of Morality, and to the house of Mr. Legality, who is reported to be very skillful in relieving men of their burdens. Mr. Legality has indeed in our day disguised himself somewhat, but he is the same deceiver as the one of whom Bunyan wrote. ‘Making Christ Master’ in the life, putting into practice ‘the principles of Christ’ by one’s own efforts—these are merely new ways of earning salvation by one’s own obedience to God’s commands. And they are undertaken because of a lax view of what those commands are. So it always is: a

low view of law always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace.”<sup>2</sup>

## I. THE PROBLEM STATED

A. The Law requires perfect obedience (Deut. 27:26; Gal. 3:10; James 2:10)

1. No allowance is made for ignorance (Rom. 2:12).
2. No distinction is made between persons (Rom. 3:19).
3. No relaxation of its strictness is permissible (Ezek. 18:4, 20).
4. No exception is made (Rom. 1:18).

B. The Law’s indictment – all who break the Law are condemned by the Law: Notice the fourteen counts in the indictment of Rom. 3:10-18:

1. “There is none righteous, no, not one: (v. 10).
2. “There is none that understandeth” (v. 11).
3. “there is none that seeketh after God” (v. 11).
4. “They are all gone out of the way” (v. 12).
5. “They are together become unprofitable” (v. 12).
6. “There is none that doeth good, no not one” (v. 12).
7. “Their throat is an open sepulcher” (v. 13).
8. “With their tongues they have used deceit” (v. 13).
9. “The poison of asps is under their lips” (v. 13).
10. “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: (v. 14).
11. “Their feet are swift to shed blood” (v. 15).
12. “Destruction and misery are in their way: (v. 16).
13. “The way of peace have they not known: (v. 17).
14. “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (v. 18).

NOTE: The Three General Divisions here:

1. CHARACTER: what a man IS (v. 10-12).
2. TONGUE: What a man THINKS AND SAYS (v. 13-14).
3. CONDUCT: What a man DOES (v. 15-18).

C. God the Judge is Just

1. His judgment is according to truth (Rom. 2:2, 6).
2. His judgment manifests His Righteous character (Dan. 9:14; Ezek. 39:21).
3. His judgment means that He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Exod. 34:7) and “all” are guilty (Rom. 3:9, 19). This is our fundamental problem – we are sinners and as Lloyd-Jones has observed, “Sin is not just something that means that you and I have failed, and have let down ourselves and our standard; sin is not just something that makes us miserable and unhappy. The essence of sin is rebellion against God leading to estrangement from God; and if we do not conceive of sin always in reference to God and our relationship to him, we have an inadequate conception of sin. This, then, is the starting point of evangelism, this is the starting point of the Gospel. Man is a rebel against God, and estranged from God; and our central need, therefore, is to be reconciled to God.”<sup>3</sup> We are subject to the judgement of God because we are guilty of breaking the Law of God. *NON ESSET REATUS ABSQUE CULPA*, said Calvin, “There could be no punishment without culpability.”

With all this before us, how can God justify the willful transgressor of His law without justifying his sins? How can God declare a sinner “justified?” How can a man be just before God (Job 9:2)?

## II. THE PROBLEM SOLVED (Rom3:21-31)

Paul begins this long section in Romans by declaring that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Salvation from what? Romans 1:18 tells us: "For the wrath of God is revealed." The problem that sets up Paul's exposition of the great, powerful gospel in Romans is the wrath of God. It is the wrath of God from which we need salvation through the gospel. It is not a theodicy, in which God and his covenant faithfulness are on trial. Those on trial are human beings exposed to the wrath of God because of their sins. Paul then begins in Romans 1:18 to charge that because of their rampant wickedness, the Gentiles are ripe for the wrath of God. This, presumably, will get no argument from Jewish readers. Then in chapter 2 he brings our attention to the coming judgment of God, writing, "On the day of wrath ... God's righteous judgment will be revealed. For he will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. 2:5-6). Having brought our attention to "that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" in Romans 2:16, he turns his attention in Romans 2:17 to the Jew who relies upon the Law and boasts in God. Paul now dashes the confidence of presumptuous Jews by showing that, though they have the law, they too are lawbreakers. From Romans 2:25 Paul starts putting Jew and Gentile on the same level. Circumcision and being a Jew are spiritual things. Being a literal Jew had advantages so long as the advantages were used rightly. But the Jews were not faithful. (Nor can they accuse God, whose holy prerogative it is to judge mankind.) Paul then spends Romans 3:9-20 demonstrating powerfully from Scripture that "all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin ... so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin? (Rom. 3:9, 19-20). Notice how the whole train of thought is controlled by the overarching threat of the wrath of God upon sin. The pressing question from Romans 1:18 on is how one will stand in the judgment of God. Paul has exacerbated the problem by showing that the whole world is under sin. The question at hand here is not the question of who is to be called the people of God or who belongs in the covenant. Sin, or the wrath of God against sin, is the immediate problem – and this problem is faced by Jews who are in the covenant as well as by Greeks who are not. Righteousness is what all men need; sin is what all men have. Where there is sin, there is no righteousness: "None is righteous, no, not one" "But now" (Rom. 3:21) signals the turning point in Paul's argument so far – and what a turning point it is: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law." That is, there is a way to a righteous standing before God which is not dependent upon the false road of law-keeping. If "righteousness of God" here means "God's covenant faithfulness," Paul's argument does not seem to make sense: it is not God who is on trial here. This is why "righteousness of God" here and earlier in Romans 1:17 has traditionally been seen as the righteousness which God bestows on us in Christ as a gift: "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Rom. 3:22). This is an alien righteousness (cf. Rom. 10:3-4; Phil. 3:9).<sup>4</sup> Notice the emphasis Paul places on the word "righteousness," a word he uses four times in this passage – likewise notice his use of the word "Justify" – used four times. These two English words are in Greek practically the same word (DIKAIOSUNE – righteousness; DIKAIOO – justify). Righteousness provided by God (vv. 21, 22). God is righteous at the same time He gives righteousness.

- A. Righteousness needed by man (v. 23). All men are sinners in God's sight, whether they be great or small in the eyes of men.
- B. Righteousness bestowed through Christ (v. 24). Remember: Justify means to declare or pronounce righteous – NOT make righteous.

**NOTE:** The word translated "freely" is the Greek word DOREAN which means "for nothing, at no cost, without charge" – cf. John 15:25 and II Thess. 3:8.

D. Righteousness declared (vv. 25-26). The death of Jesus Christ was the means of declaring God's righteousness. Why did God make Christ a propitiation? Why the cross? Was it to show God's love? It does show the love of God – but that was not the principle reason. It was "To declare His righteousness," not His love. God did not actually forgive any sin until the death of Jesus Christ – in the death of the Son of God the problem of justification was solved. God has not lowered His standards. His law and justice are the same today as they were yesterday – and so is the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:7).

### **CONCLUSION:**

We are prone, even as Christians, to rely on our own personal performance for our acceptance with God. This insidious self-righteousness is part of our fallenness and will, like the poor, always be with us. As such, it too with the rest of the deeds of the flesh, needs to be mortified. Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon *Bringing the Ark to Zion a Second Time*, noted the great danger of falling into the sin of self-righteousness as a believer. He explained: And let particular persons strictly examine themselves whether they hadn't been lifted up with their particular experiences. I think according to what observations I have made—as I have had [more] opportunity of very extensive observation than any other person in the town---that it has been a pretty prevailing error in the town, that persons are not sufficiently sensible of the danger of self-righteousness after conversion. They seem to be sensible that persons are in danger of it before they are converted, but they think that when a man is converted, he is brought off wholly from his own righteousness, just as if there was no danger of any workings of self-righteousness afterwards. But this is from a great mistake of what is intended by a man's being brought wholly off from his own righteousness when he is converted. 'Tis not meant that a self-righteous principle is wholly done away, that there is no remains of such a disposition in the heart. There is as much of the remains of that as there is of any other corruption of the heart.' So a man is brought, when converted, wholly to renounce all his sins as well as to renounce all his own righteousness. But that don't argue that he is wholly freed from all remains of sin. So no more is he wholly freed from remains of self-righteousness. There is a fountain of it left. There is an exceeding disposition in men, as long as they live, to make a righteousness of what is in themselves, and an exceeding disposition in men to make a righteousness of spiritual experiences, as well as other things;...a convert is apt to be exalted with high thoughts of his own eminency in grace.<sup>5</sup>

### **ENDNOTES**

---

<sup>1</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Third Edition (P & R, 2001) p. 793.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1979) p. 141.

<sup>3</sup> M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans An Exposition of chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification*, (Zondervan, 1970) p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this analysis of Paul's argument to Chuck Hill, professor of NT at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, of his *N. T. Wright on Justification* (III Magazine Online, Vol. 3, No. 22, May 28 to June 3, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards *Bringing the Art to Zion a Second Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) pp.255-256 vol. 22, available at <http://feedingonchrist.com/jonathan-edwards-on-self-righteousness-in-believers/>