

Day 114, Romans 3

by David Servant

Paul answers several objections to his gospel, showing that salvation is by faith, not by circumcision or Mosaic law-keeping, and that God's righteousness is revealed through Christ.

Scripture: Romans 3:2-31, Hebrews 10:4

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Gods Righteousness"

Description

David Servant delves into Paul's responses to objections regarding salvation by grace through faith in Romans, addressing Jewish criticisms on circumcision, God's faithfulness, and the righteousness of God. Paul emphasizes that salvation is not guaranteed by circumcision or adherence to the Mosaic Law, but through faith in Jesus for both Jews and Gentiles. He clarifies that the Mosaic Law exposes human unrighteousness and the need for a Savior, leading to the understanding that only through faith in Christ can righteousness be attained. Paul's gospel reveals God's righteousness through Christ's propitiation, appeasing God's wrath and providing forgiveness for sins, surpassing the limitations of animal sacrifices.

Transcript

As we read through Romans, it helps to imagine Paul debating with an imaginary Jew who objected to his gospel of salvation by grace through faith, a salvation offered to both Jews and Gentiles. In today's reading, Paul answers several objections that he must have frequently encountered during his two decades of preaching. Some of his answers may not be as clear as we'd like, but we've become used to that.

Paul's downplaying of circumcision certainly would have met with Jewish criticism. If circumcision didn't guarantee salvation, of what benefit was it, and why would God require it? Paul lists one significant benefit: "They [the Jews] were entrusted with the oracles of God" (3:2). That is, above all peoples on the earth, the people of Israel, whose males were marked by circumcision, were blessed because God revealed Himself to them through His written Word.

Some Jews apparently argued that Paul's gospel nullified God's faithfulness to the Jews, because it excluded all unbelieving Jews from salvation. This objection was based on the very false assumption that salvation was the guaranteed right of all Jews. It wasn't, and so Paul's gospel did not nullify God's faithfulness to them.

Some had slanderously reported that Paul was preaching, "Let us do evil that good may come," simply because Paul affirmed that people's unrighteousness revealed God's righteousness, perhaps simply by contrast, but certainly by His righteous wrath poured out at times upon unrighteous people. "So Paul," they reported, "is encouraging people to sin so that God's righteousness will be magnified." Such slander hardly deserved a response. God will, of course, righteously judge the world, and He is certainly not going to reward those who made Him look good by their evil.

Using many quotes from the Old Testament, Paul proves that Jews are every bit as much sinners as Gentiles (3:9-19). Until people understand their sinfulness, they see no need for salvation. In the case of the Jews, until they realized their sinfulness, they would continue to cling to their circumcision, their lineage, or their limited law-keeping as their means to salvation, and they would certainly see no reason for a Messiah to come and die for their sins. So it was essential that they perceive themselves as being just as dirty as the Gentiles whom they so disdained. Far from saving them, the Mosaic Law only exposed their unrighteousness even more, and condemned them.

Finally, Paul reaches the goal he has been working towards since the beginning of his letter. Contrary to what his critics claimed, his gospel did not nullify God's righteousness, but rather revealed it. His gospel was founded in God's righteous law that righteously condemns sinners. It revealed God's righteousness in everyone who believed it, as they turned from unrighteousness to righteousness. It revealed how God maintains His righteousness and yet forgives sinners, because He offers forgiveness through Christ, the one who bore His wrath in payment for our sins. Paul uses the word propitiation to describe Christ's accomplishment (3:25), which means "an appeasing of wrath." Jesus' suffering and death appeased God's wrath against us.

Paul's gospel even provided an answer to those who thought God to be unrighteousness as He "passed over the sins previously committed" (3:25). That is, God has not seemed to be righteous when He has not punished sinners. In fact, He has not seemed to be righteous in forgiving even someone who sacrificed an animal. How can an animal's dying atone for a man's sin? The fact is, it can't, as the writer of Hebrews would later pen, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). But by the sufferings and death of a God-man, one of infinite worth, God can righteously forgive sinners, because the penalty has been sufficiently paid.

So Paul has effectively answered three grand Jewish objections to his gospel. First, he has shown that Jews cannot be saved by circumcision or Mosaic law-keeping, but only through faith in Jesus. Second, he has shown that Gentiles can be saved by faith as well. Third, his gospel did not nullify the Mosaic Law, but rather established it (3:31). Only through the gospel is the Law correctly understood.

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