

- b. The second sub-context of 3:21-26 comprises vv. 22-23 and continues Paul's thought introduced in 3:21. Specifically, it serves to interpret and elaborate upon his use of the phrase, *righteousness of God*. In 3:22a he indicated that he was using this phrase with respect not to God's inherent righteous character, but His *justifying righteousness* as it is appropriated by fallen men through faith. Subsequently Paul declared to his Roman readers that this dynamic of justification is both universally relevant and universally necessary (3:22b-23).

Previously Paul insisted that the relationship between the Law and God's righteousness as His endowment to men is one of both continuity and discontinuity. That is, the Law of Moses - the Old Covenant - *witnessed* to the fact that human righteousness is found ever and only in men's obtainment of divine righteousness. At the same time, this righteousness does not come in connection with the Law of Moses; it has been manifested in time and space *apart* from the Law.

Again, it is crucial to understand that Paul was not nullifying the Law or its demand of objective righteousness. Rather, he was recognizing the *prophetic* role of the Old Covenant; as a vital point of prophecy the Law served the gospel of the righteousness of God as a pedagogue and handmaiden. Thus the gospel *presupposes* the Law, even as the Law anticipates and prepares the way for the gospel. Though the specifics will be addressed later, suffice it here to observe that this is the foundational perspective that underlies Paul's forthcoming declaration that *faith establishes the Law* (3:31).

- The Law witnessed to the righteousness of God in that it established the obligation of *perfect conformity to the divine nature* as the basis of communion with God. While the phrase, "Law and Prophets," implicates the totality of the Old Testament scriptures (3:21b), it is obvious that Paul was particularly concerned with the *Old Covenant itself* and its relationship to the righteousness of God (3:21a). As the purpose for the Old Covenant was to establish the terms of Israel's covenant communion with Yahweh, so it was intended to portray to Israel what it is to be a faithful "son" consistent with man's status and purpose as divine image-bearer. By showing Israel what it is to be a "true man" living out his created nature as the image of God - and therefore one suited to communion with God - it witnessed to a righteousness that is entirely foreign to fallen man and thus unobtainable by him. It testified of a righteousness that must come to man from God Himself - a *divine righteousness, but one that is nonetheless human* in that it characterizes man in the perfection of his nature as image-bearer. It is precisely in this way that the Law of Moses prophesied of Christ (Matthew 11:13): it presented to men that *true humanness* is full conformity to the *divine nature*, and therefore pointed directly and uniquely to the perfect man who is Himself God.

- But though the Old Covenant witnessed in this way to the righteousness of God and its relationship to men, it did not usher it in or establish it in human experience. Rather, God's righteousness has now, in the fullness of the times, been manifested *apart* from the Law. The Law of Moses showed the sons of Israel what they must be to enjoy communion with God, but it did not *effect* that work in them.

The reason is that the Law only informs; it does not *transform*. It shows men who they were created to be and the height from which they have fallen, but it cannot in any way or to any extent remedy their plight. Any effort toward or conformity to the Law is therefore nothing more than external compliance; *it is simply a form of godliness that lacks the power and substance of it*. While the Law makes known to men that they must have new, circumcised hearts (cf. Deuteronomy 10:11-16, Ezekiel 18:23-32), it cannot effect that renewal, and so cannot produce the inward righteousness that covenant union with God demands.

What God requires of man is proper, necessary, and good. Stated most simply, men are justly obligated to live in accordance with their created nature and function as *image-bearers*: creatures uniquely designed for and suited to the most intimate fellowship with their Creator. *This integrity in human existence is the very essence of righteousness*. This is why the obligation of righteousness lies at the heart of all of God's covenant structures; God requires men to be who they were created to be, which obligation implicates their responsibility *to themselves* as well as to Him. Thus, failure at this point brings *misery* as well as enmity.

*But the glory of the gospel is that God, while not setting aside man's responsibility, satisfies that obligation for him in the Man who is God. The One who is **true Man** has satisfied God's just demand upon man as image-bearer, namely human righteousness that is perfect, unqualified communion with his Creator. At the same time, because that Man is also **true God**, the righteousness in which men are made to stand is God's alone.*

In any given covenant between God and men, each party must fulfill his respective obligation or the covenant is void. God cannot rightly meet *man's* obligation, but because men are fallen, He *must* do so if the covenant is to be kept. The only possible way to resolve this dilemma and bring covenant union is for God to satisfy man's covenant responsibility in the God-Man.

- 1) This foundational gospel principle is the key to understanding Paul's contention concerning the righteousness of God and how it becomes the property of men; it comes to them "*through faith in Jesus Christ.*" Because of what constitutes true righteousness, the sole means of its obtainment is not personal performance under a moral and ethical framework, but the *reception of God's own righteousness by faith*. It is not the one who works who is justified, but the one who "*believes in Him who justifies the ungodly*" (ref. 3:27-28, 4:4-5, 13-16).

Jesus Christ is the focal point of all *true* religion simply because all religious exercise, in whatever form, has as its goal some kind of interaction and fellowship between humanity and deity.

- Biblically, such intimate interaction with the true God is always framed within the structure of one or more covenants.
- God's covenants establish the terms of His fellowship with men, and because true fellowship requires a "meeting of minds," it follows that God created man in His own image in order to enter into communion with him.
- And in that God's covenants establish and administer that communion, their direct concern is with men's conformity to their nature as divine image-bearers.
- But while men cannot cease to be image-bearers, and so are inveterate "religionists," their fallen condition leaves them estranged from God and unable to recover fellowship with Him, *even when they have come to recognize Him as the one true God.*

Men cannot meet God's covenant terms, for they demand that men make for themselves a renewed, circumcised heart (cf. Deuteronomy 10:11-17; Jeremiah 4:1-4). Because men cannot accomplish that obligation for themselves, *they must perish in alienation from God or somehow share in the covenant fellowship with God enjoyed by another human being.* Again, God cannot simply meet men's obligation for them, for to do so is for Him to violate the very nature of a covenant contract. Yet there is no other covenant human being, for *all* share the same hopeless estrangement.

This reality of utter human despair is thematic in the Old Testament, and serves as the basis for the necessity of Yahweh's intervention (Genesis 6:1-22; Isaiah 59:1-21). Repeatedly the Scripture demonstrates that God alone is the Savior of His people, yet at the same time He saves them through an appointed *human* deliverer. So it was with the Egyptian captivity; so it was with the judges; so it was with Israel's kings; so it was with Cyrus. And with each divine-human deliverance God was building a portrait and heightening the anticipation of the great, sovereign deliverance to come; a deliverance at the hand of the ultimate Moses, ultimate Judge, ultimate David, and ultimate Cyrus.

In the Day of His power Yahweh's people would stand by and see the salvation which He would accomplish for them. As at the Red Sea, He would once more fight for them while they remained silent in helpless, dependent trust (Exodus 14:1-14). This is the prophetic backdrop for Paul's declaration that God justifies men *through faith in Jesus Christ.*

- 2) For this reason it is “*for all those who believe.*” Some have questioned this phrase, observing that it is an unnecessary redundancy given Paul’s previous statement that God’s justifying righteousness comes by *faith*. But Paul’s point was not to reemphasize the idea of faith as such, but to insist upon the *universal necessity* of faith: the righteousness of God that comes through faith is for **all** those (and only those) who believe. This is clearly evident from his clarifying statements in 3:22b-23: “...*for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*”

What is equally clear from these assertions is that Paul was not negating all distinction between people. Verse 3:23 indicates that the point of non-distinction in Paul’s thinking is specifically the absence of both personal righteousness before God and personal remedy. His grammar indicates that, regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious, moral, ethical, personal, or other differences, every human being is *constituted* a sinner.

- 3) And being sinners, all people “*fall short of the glory of God.*” This expression is unique to this context and Paul provides no definitive insight into his meaning. The result is that different interpretations have been put forth by commentators. What is apparent is that this clause expresses the *consequence* of human sinfulness: *the result of men being constituted sinners is that they perpetually fall short of the glory of God.*

Some have regarded the “glory of God” as referring to His approbation and praise (cf. John 5:41, 44, 12:43). Although this sense of the Greek noun *glory* possibly occurs elsewhere in this epistle (2:7-10), it seems somewhat foreign to this context. For Paul’s concern was not with men’s loss of God’s praise but man’s loss of righteousness and the communion that attends it. Others have argued that Paul’s meaning was that sin has robbed men of God’s glory in the sense that the image of God in them has been lost. Such a conclusion can only proceed out of a faulty understanding of man as image-bearer.

But as God’s glory is associated with His power and splendor, so it is associated with His *presence* (Acts 7:55; Revelation 15:8, 21:10-11, 23). In this way it is likely that Paul was speaking of the estrangement and loss that sin has produced. Men fall short of the glory of God in that they are *cut-off* from Him; they fail to live according to their created purpose. Thus, the believer’s hope is directed first toward the glory that is life with God (cf. Romans 5:1-2; Titus 2:11-13). But as men are also defaced as image-bearers, so believers have a further hope of future glory in their own glorification in Christ (Romans 2:6-7, 9:22-24; Colossians 1:25-27). With their entrance into Christ’s glorious presence men will fully share His likeness. “*There shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.*”