



# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## The Righteousness of God, Part 2

Romans 3:21-26, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.<sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

### Partiality

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is disqualified as the king and in 1 Samuel 16, Samuel is found grieving over Saul's deposition. In the midst of Samuel's grieving, God sent the prophet to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint the next king.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Ro 3:21–26). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

As Samuel arrived at the home of Jesse, the prophet saw Eliab, the eldest son, and immediately surmised that he had found the next king. Why? The text indicates that Eliab was a tall, good looking man. Samuel's first thought upon seeing him was, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before [me]" (1 Samuel 16:6). And that is why God rebuked Samuel with these words:

1 Samuel 16:7a, "...Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him..."

Now imagine for a moment what would have happened had Samuel not received the word of the Lord and went ahead with his first thought, Eliab would have become king. David, the only man qualified for the office of king (he had a heart for God, 1 Samuel 13:14), would have continued tending sheep. And God's people would have remained in darkness under another king like the nations!

Praise the Lord that God's word came and delivered the nation from the possible tragic events into which Samuel's partiality would have plunged them!

Now, the same word of God that delivered the people of God from the adverse effects of Samuel's partiality speaks today! And it can and will deliver us from the adverse effects of partiality if we would but heed it! Yet the partiality I'm referencing is NOT the partiality of one man toward another, one people toward another, one nation toward another; rather it is a partiality that is more detrimental to mankind and the Christian than all other forms of discrimination combined!

What is this partiality? The supposition that God's right-standing can be attained or maintained by our living!

Romans 3:22b, "...for there is no distinction."

This is an important qualification. As Paul has just stated that the "righteousness of God" is imparted to "ALL who believe," this would naturally raise the questions:

- You mean it doesn't matter who you are, or what you've done?
- The "righteousness that comes from God" is given to all who believe?

The answer Paul gives to this is essentially, "Yes!" The "right-standing that comes from God" is available to ALL who believe apart from works, birth, ritual, nationality, social class, intelligence, etc...! That is the force of "there is no distinction." From this we conclude that regardless of whom you are or what you've done, the gospel is available to you! There is no one beyond the saving power of the Gospel!

Now Paul could have left it there, but he doesn't. Rather he continues with a detailed explanation of the IMPARTIALITY of the imputation of God's right-standing as it relates to the believer, the one being saved!

Romans 3:23-24, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified.”

Would you notice that on the surface the relationship between Romans 3:23-24 is obscured. The KJV, NKJV, and NASB all translate Romans 3:24 as it really is a participial phrase. But that means it modifies something in verse 23, and that something is not clear. Now, the NIV and ESV translate verse 24 as if it contained a finite verb, and hence miss Paul’s point in this text.

Romans 3:24 is a participial phrase (masculine, nominative plural) that modifies the “all” of verse 23 such that when the two verses are combined they produce the literal translation:

Romans 2:22b-24, “For all, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The implication is that just as Paul has shown that when it comes to God’s wrath (“there is no distinction,” Romans 2:11-16), likewise when it comes to God’s salvation, “there also is no distinction.” All being justified/saved are sinners and fall short of God’s glory!

What we have in our passage is a discussion of God’s IMPARTIALITY as it relates NOT to those who are under His wrath, BUT to those who are saved. And what we learn from this text is that the application of the saving benefits of the right-standing of God also is impartial!

Paul discusses this in verse 23 and gives us two reasons for why God’s righteousness is impartial. First all who are saved are sinners.

### All Who Are Saved Are Sinners

Romans 3:23a, 24a, “for all... being justified... have sinned...”

Of those that receive salvation, ALL are in the same boat. All are guilty of sin. From the newborn babe to the Pope, ALL are guilty before God of sin! And what does this mean? In Scripture, *hamartia* is the most comprehensive term for moral iniquity. In its most essential form, it denotes nothing less than the transgression of God’s law.

1 John 3:4, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

In Romans 3:23 Paul uses the verbal form and places it in the aorist tense (past tense of completed action). That means that the sin here spoken about is a past and completed reality. In other words, from this text we conclude that all being saved understand that they were guilty of sin and so...

1. Liable to the Penalty of Sin — death, Romans 6:23.
2. Subject to the Power of Sin — slavery, Romans 7:7-11, 14-17.
3. Hampered by the Presence of Sin- this why we get old, become sick and die, 2 Corinthians. 4:16a; Romans 8:10.

And thus it doesn't matter who you are (status), what you are doing (good deeds), or what position you may hold (attainments). The Bible describes the state of all men prior to salvation as that of sin: ALL HAVE SINNED!

And so to say that "all... being justified... have sinned" is to say that every person who is saved by the impartation of God's right-standing is saved from a state of rebellion and disobedience. Salvation begins with recognition of this truth!

And so based on this we ask the question: "When it comes to the application of God's righteousness, is there any distinction?" NO! All being saved are alike, they are sinners! No one was in any way worthy of salvation.

Yet, this is just half of it. It is not just that those being saved understand that they have sinned, notice that all who are saved fall short of God's glory.

### **All Who Are Saved Fall Short of God's Glory**

Romans 3:23b, 24a, "for all... being justified... have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

In the Bible that "glory" has the primary meaning of "weight, heaviness, or substance." Thus, the "glory of God" is a phrase which denotes the majesty and weight of God. In fact, "glory" is a word that is used to convey the sum-total of God's attributes. For example, in Romans 1, glory is used in reference to God's omnipotence and self-existence.

Romans 1:20, 22-23: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen... <sup>22</sup> [the non-Christian] professing to be wise... <sup>23</sup> became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image..."

It is important to note that these verses are parallel. God's glory in Romans 3:23 is used synonymously with "the invisible attributes" detailed in verse 20. The glory of God is the sum-total of His attributes! We see it in Isaiah 6 where glory refers particularly to God's majestic holiness.

Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory."

And so by "glory of God," Paul has God's character in mind; specifically, but not limited here to God's righteousness! With this, we see that Paul is here making an assertion about the character of all those who are saved.

Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short."

The word for "fall short" literally means "to come late, to be behind, or to lack." Accordingly to "fall short" of something is to fail to enjoy its fullness. Here again the focus is God's perfection! Recall Paul's description of the religious and how they in and of themselves fall short of God's glory,

Romans 3:10-18, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Now Paul uses the present tense here which indicates that the Christian's "falling short of God's glory" is a present reality. Again, "for all being justified have sinned and are falling short of God's glory!"

The implication is that every Christian is, at this very moment, falling short of God's glory. That means that regardless of the right-standing that you enjoy in Christ, you nevertheless as a Christian in this life continue to fall short of God's glory! And so again we read the message that Isaiah gave to God's people:

Isaiah 64:6a, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment."

In describing this truth the Reformers used the expression "Simul iustus et peccator." That is, "Simultaneously just and sinful." Truly, the child of God lives out his Christian walk painfully aware of the fact that though he has been made righteous in Christ, nevertheless in his daily living he falls short of God's glory. Moule put it this way:

The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of it; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they. (Morris, 1988, pp. 177, Footnote 122)

And so to say that "all... being justified... are falling short of the glory of God" is to say that every person who is saved by the impartation of God's right-standing is saved in spite of his rebellion and disobedience. And based on this, we ask the question, "When it comes to the application of God's righteousness, is there any distinction?" The answer is "NO!" Not only do we all have the same past; we were all guilty of sin! But in Christ we all have the same present- all are falling short of God's glory!

Accordingly when we strip away the things of this world that...

- Cloud our understanding and judgment.
- Cause us to differentiate between Christians.
- Lead us to distinguish and discriminate.
- Make us look down upon others in the body of Christ.

What is left is a description of man that is shared by ALL who are saved! And what is that?

- ALL have sinned! describing our past state.

- ALL fall short of God's glory! describing our present reality.

Now this truth has incredible implications for us if we would heed it. For it delivers us from the adverse effects of partiality! Do you understand that as a Christian God's saving grace is given to you...

- NOT because you were better or more worthy than others?
- NOR because you now live a victorious life over sin?

RATHER, you were saved and you continue to enjoy the blessings of salvation on account of the good pleasure of God. Period (Ephesians 1:5-6)! Listen again to Paul's warning in Galatians:

Galatians 2:18, "For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor."

Galatians 5:7, "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?"

These verses indicate that an inclination of our redeemed but sinful heart will be to abandon the teachings of grace which would have us relate to God solely on the basis of Christ's work on our behalf and so rebuild the system of works-righteousness whereby we endeavor to earn from God blessing and favor as a Christian.

Now honestly, of the two descriptions of the Christian given in our text: (1) all have sinned and (2) are falling short of God's glory, it is the latter one with which we have the most difficulty. Most in Christ accept that at one time they were morally bankrupt and so were guilty of sin. Indeed, "all have sinned!" But now that they are in Christ they entertain the notion that

- They have been made to be a superior person.
- They are less sinful than the non-Christian.
- There is good reason for why they enjoy blessing from the Lord, NOT ONLY have they been made righteous in Christ, BUT ethically speaking they are righteous! *That is why God deigns to bless them!*

Christian, you must see that this thinking roots and grounds the blessings and approval of God to the Christian's conduct:

- I read the word.
- I honor God.
- I give sacrificially.
- I serve Him in specific ways.

HE THEREFORE MUST BLESS ME TODAY! In the words of Eliphaz in Job:

Job 4:6, "Is not your fear *of God* your confidence, and the integrity of your ways your hope?"-

this is the mindset of many in Christ today. Their confidence and hope before God is their integrity and deeds done in the name of the Lord. Because of this, they expect God to bless them!

What happens when God deigns NOT to bless us? What happens when a bitter providence is chosen for the child of God?

- Philippians 1:29: after all, we have been chosen in Christ, "...to suffer for His sake."
- 1 Peter 2:21a: says that, "...[we] have been called for th[e] purpose [of suffering]..."

What typically happens when the Christian encounters suffering in this life? He typically walks the sad and sorry path of Job! At first he assumes that he has done something wrong. But then, with Job, he realizes that the life that he was living yesterday when he was blessed is the same life he is living today when he is cursed.

When this is realized, the Christian walks the path of Job and so criticizes God, His character, His glory, and so His providence. *I haven't changed; why has God?* Child of God, behold the truth of your standing before God today:

Romans 3:23-24, "For all being justified have sinned AND are falling short of God's glory."

Meditate upon this truth. Understand it. Allow it to transform the way you relate to God. Today you stand before God...

- Righteous.
- Without sin.
- Clothed in Christ.
- Beautiful before Him.

Yet practically speaking that doesn't mean you don't sin nor have you become morally superior to the worst of sinners. The riches of God's grace are not given to you because of anything you are, do, or have become! God's selection of you for salvation was NOT on account of anything you did, BUT according to His good pleasure. Likewise, God's choice to lavish blessing upon you today is NOT on account of anything you do, BUT according to His good pleasure. Moses wrote these humbling words to the people of God:

Deuteronomy 9:4, 6, "Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you... Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people."

This is a teaching of grace that we must master! There is no partiality with God. Every non-Christian stands before God condemned and no amount of "good works" can change that

(Romans 2:11-13). Every Christian stands before God blessed and no amount of “bad works” can change that (Romans 3:23).

In light of this I have but two exhortations. If you are saved, listen to the text, “All being justified are falling short of God’s glory!” Self-righteousness is a serious threat to the well-being of your walk with Christ. Accordingly, I exhort you:

- Stop pretending, denying, or faking.
- You do not stand before God/one another on the basis of your righteous deeds.
- Though saved, you are sinful and therefore have nothing to boast about before God.

In light of this; yesterday, today, and tomorrow make your boast the fact that Jesus died for you! Stop trying to forge a link between kingdom blessing and your conduct. Rejoice in the Lord regardless of the providences sent your way. Kiss the hand that smites you!

I think one of the blessings most missed by Christians today is the honor of suffering with Christ.

Matthew 5:10-12, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

James 1:2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”

Philippians 1:29, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”

These texts indicate that in this state of sin and misery suffering is going to occur. In other words, bitter providence is not sent to the child of God because they have failed the Lord. Generally speaking God sends bitter providence that we might taste of the horrors of sin that we might not endure it (Hosea 2:6-7). God might be honored by a people who praise Him regardless of how they are treated (Daniel 3:16-17; Job 1:8). Fill up in our bodies blows meant for Christ (Acts 5:41)

Yet when bitter providence occurs, do we rejoice in the Lord? Do we exalt in the God of our salvation? So few do! Rather they:

- Real from the blow.
- Become angry and bitter.
- And so attack God.

All because they don’t understand the passage before us and so the teaching of grace! Christian! Pray for the mind of Christ that in all things we might abound in praise and glory to our King! May God grant us the grace to stand before God and one another on the basis of Christ’s righteousness



alone!

If you are not saved, listen to the text this morning, “All being saved have sinned!” Did you get that? The beginning of salvation is recognizing that you are...

- A sinner.
- Morally bankrupt.
- There is nothing you can do to save yourself before God.

See for most, the inclination is to try to prove to God that they are worthy of His love. Yet this morning you see that no one is. In light of this I urge you to cast off your excuses and false perception, and in humility:

- Turn from your sin.
- Ask God to take away your sin.

In gratitude, follow Christ all the days of your life!

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on June 20, 2010. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.