

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, PART 1

TEXT: ROMANS 3:21-26

INTRODUCTION:

1. There is an expression found several times in this epistle -- "the righteousness of God" (3:5, 21, 22) or "His righteousness" (3:25, 26).
2. The first time we see this phrase in the book of Romans is in chapter 1 -- "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (1:17).

I. THE MEANING OF "THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"

1. "The righteousness of God" means God is the source of righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 says, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."
2. One of God's divine attributes is righteousness. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Psalm 145:17).
3. The Word of God declares "His righteousness" (Romans 3:25, 26).
4. The book of Romans also emphasizes God's gift of righteousness, which is given to "all that believe" (3:22).
5. Romans 3:26 says, "that He might be just (righteous), and the justifier (the One who declares men righteous) of him which believeth in Jesus."
6. When we receive Christ, we receive His imputed righteousness. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

II. THE NEED OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. Sinners need to "get right with God." This means they need to be righteous. This is the great theme of this epistle (cf. 1:1, 16, 17).
2. If sinners do not get right with God, then they must face "the righteous judgment of God" (2:5).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas says the word "righteousness...has reference to (man's) rightness, or state of being right with God. It means conformity in every respect to the divine law. When thus understood it is a very inclusive term, covering remission of sins, reinstatement in a true position and relation to God, renewal of inward character, and re-establishment in outward conduct. This wide meaning is demanded by the fact that sin is at once a debt, a disease, and a departure. The debt requires to be paid, and this may be called justification. The disease requires to be healed, and this may be called sanctification. The departure requires to be corrected, and this may be called consecration" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*).

III. THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. Romans 3:21 says, "But now the righteousness of God without the law (apart from works) is manifested..." (cf. 16:26).
2. "Without the law" means we are justified by faith, not by works. This is the major difference between what Baptists believe and what the Roman Catholic Church teaches.
3. Recently, I saw a video where California pastor Rick Warren advocated unity between all the various denominations, including Roman Catholicism, because, he said, we all believe in the Trinity, and the deity of Christ, and Christ's resurrection, etc.

4. But he conveniently left out that Roman Catholics deny justification by faith.
5. The declarations of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), are still in force today. "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema" (Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, Canon 12).
6. Rome has not changed its doctrinal position, and has never abrogated the anathemas of the Council of Trent.
7. The word "manifest" (3:21) is often used in reference to Christ. First Timothy 3:16 says, "God was manifest in the flesh."
8. First John 3:5 says, "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."
9. First John 3:8 says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."
10. Griffith Thomas says, "The thought of manifestation calls special attention to the essentially divine source of this righteousness, and the impossibility of its coming from man."
11. In contrast to man's self-righteousness, true righteousness comes from God. It is "the righteousness of God" (3:21).
12. "But now" (3:21) refers to the dispensation of grace. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4).
13. "Being witnessed by the law and the prophets" (3:21) refers to the witness or the testimony of the Old Testament. The New Testament doctrine of justification by faith is in perfect harmony with the teachings of the Old Testament (cf. Romans 4:1-8).
14. Our Lord said, "Search the (Old Testament) scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me...For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:39, 46).

CONCLUSION:

In his study Bible, Scofield quotes John Bunyan: "The believer in Christ is now, by grace, shrouded under so complete and blessed a righteousness that the law from Mt. Sinai can find neither fault nor diminution therein. This is that which is called the righteousness of God by faith."