

## Romans 3:21-31

### God's Aim in the Gospel

*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 3:25,26*

One of the things that has always struck me about Romans is the truth it conveys about the unity of the gospel. Paul dismisses the notion that there ever was or ever could be more than one gospel. You would hardly think this to be necessary until you come to learn in our day that there are theological schools of thought that teach that very thing.

I don't know how prevalent you would find the notion today but if you go back to the time when the original Schofield Bible was the best selling Bible on the shelves you would be going back to a time when the notion was held that there were various ways throughout the history of the world in which men could be saved.

Schofield divided history into 7 different dispensations. Each dispensation presented a different kind of test for man's salvation. In the garden of Eden the test was refraining from eating the forbidden fruit – man failed that test. In the time of Noah man was given the test of following his conscience – he failed that test. In the time of Moses the test came in the form of the law – he failed again. Today is the dispensation of grace in which men are saved by believing in Christ – and if my memory serves me correctly the church will eventually fail this test also leading to the necessary action on God's part of rapturing the church out of the world.

Paul allows no place in his writings for different gospels during different dispensations. In the opening verses of this epistle Paul refers to the gospel as that which was *promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.* (1:2,3).

This verse teaches us that the gospel of our day is the same gospel that was promised in the days of the Old Testament prophets. This verse, along with many others teach us that Christ is the subject of the Old Testament as well as the new. This truth also comes out in the verses we've read from chp. 3 – *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets* (3:21).

Do you see what Paul is saying about this righteousness? He's talking about the righteousness of the gospel and he's saying that this righteousness revealed in the gospel is not a new and unique message. It's true that it's more fully revealed now but the fact is that this message was witnessed by the law and the prophets.

So the gospel of Jesus Christ is a unifying theme throughout the entire Bible. If you were asked the question – what is this book about that we open each Sunday to read and preach – the correct answer would be this book from cover to cover conveys the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

But not only is the theme of this book a singular theme throughout the book – but the purpose of God behind salvation is a singular purpose as well. And this brings us to our next point of analysis in our study of this section of Romans 3. We’ve already considered the Universal Need for the Gospel. We’ve devoted a study to the Nature of the Gospel. The last time we were in this portion we studied the Grounds upon which the Gospel is based. And let me just say here again that we need to keep a very clear distinction in our thinking between the means to salvation and the grounds for salvation.

Faith is the means to salvation but must never be mistaken as the grounds for salvation. Christ is the grounds for salvation. Christ’s atoning death is the grounds for our salvation. The merit of Christ’s life and death is what procured our salvation. Faith is simply the means for appropriating what Christ has done.

### Our point of analysis today then is – God’s Purpose in Salvation

And this is stated for us in 25 and to make it a point of emphasis Paul states it again in v. 26. Look at what these verses say – *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

The word *declare* is an interesting word. It’s not the common Greek word that is most often translated by the English word *declare*. We sometimes think of the word *declare* as being a synonym for the word *proclaim*. Perhaps one of the reasons the translators of the AV translate this word the way they do is because they recognized that there’s a sense in which God is proclaiming his righteousness.

But the word carries the literal meaning of *a demonstration* or *proof*. The same word is found in 2Cor. 8:24 *Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.*

Seeing this definition of the word we can come back to our text in Romans and interpret it to mean – *God proves His righteousness for the remission of sins – v. 25. God proves his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

Let’s think for a minute then on this proof of God’s righteousness. What exactly does God prove by the gospel of His Son?

When you see verse 25 in its context then you have to link it to Christ as the propitiation for our sins. It is in connection with Christ as our propitiation that Paul tells us God’s righteousness has been declared or proven.

What did God prove, then?

He proved that sin deserves and receives condemnation. This is something that the sinner tries to overlook. He knows in his heart that sin deserves condemnation – but he also knows that his life is prolonged. He has not yet experienced condemnation and so he

reasons to himself that God must not have noticed his sin. Maybe his sin isn't such a big deal after all. Our text back in Romans makes reference to the forbearance of God. The word *forbearance* also means *toleration*. Does God simply tolerate sin? – the unbeliever asks himself. Maybe God marked his sin but then forgot about him. This rationale is expressed by the Psalmist when he describes the wicked. In Psalm 10:11 we read – *He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it.*

Sinners who labor hard to persuade themselves of God's tolerance or God's forgetfulness will have no desire to see Christ dying on a cross. Here is where God proves that He is mindful of sin. He has seen our sins. He will not and cannot merely overlook our sins. He must and will bring forth condemnation for sins – the cross of Christ proves it.

But it proves something else in connection with sin also. The cross of Christ proves to us that God will be no respecter of persons when it comes to the final judgment against sin. The sinner might hope that God will respect some things that the sinner has done which appear to be good and decent and righteous. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?* (Mt. 7:22).

Won't the Lord have respect to some that have done these works? Won't the Lord have respect to some of those works? The cross of Christ proves that God will have no respect to the sinner's works. *The soul that sinneth it shall die* is God's word through His prophet Ezekiel (18:4).

You see if God could be a respecter of persons – surely He would respect His Son. After all Christ did many good works. And Christ never sinned in any way, shape, or form. His words were spoken in righteousness. His deeds were done in conformity to the law. His thoughts and motives were pure. If God would show respect to any – surely He would show respect to His Son.

But the truth of Calvary tells us that even when One as righteous and as holy as the Only Begotten Son of God stood in the place of the sinner – God stayed true to Himself and judged His Son in the sinner's place. He did not impute our sins to His Son and then show respect to His Son and decide that since this was His Son He would simply overlook our sins. No rather – He judged His Son – His only begotten Son – when His Son took our sins to Himself.

So God proves that sin must and will be judged. God proves that He will be no respecter of persons when at the end of the world the final judgment comes. This declaration of His righteousness which took place on Calvary's cross should move every sinner to flee to Christ for salvation.

For not only does God through Christ declare the righteousness of His judgment – but He also declares and proves the righteousness of His love. This is the marvel of the gospel – that God would actually love poor, vile, and guilty sinners. How can you know? What makes you think you could lay claim to the love of Christ? When you consider how far

short you fall of His glory and how often you transgress His law – does it not amount to arrogance for you to say – *I know that God loves me?*

It is arrogance for the Christ rejecter to think that God's general benevolence will move God to simply overlook judgment. God's benevolence, rather, serves the purpose of giving him space to repent of his sins. God's purpose is clear – *to declare or prove his righteousness*. And the cross of Christ proves that God's love will not supplant His righteousness. His love, rather, will fulfill His righteousness.

And this is where we gain assurance of God's love – the consistency between His justice and His love. It was the love of Christ that brought Him down from heaven. It was the Father's love for sinners that sent His Son into the world. The strength of that love is proven by the fact that *having loved his own which were in the world*, John's gospel tells us (13:1) *he loved them unto the end*.

In other words – He loved us all the way to Calvary's cross. He loved us when His back was flogged. He loved us when a crown of thorns was pressed into His brow. He loved us when nails were driven into His hands and feet. He loved us when He was left to expire – suspended between heaven and earth. He loved us when a veil of darkness was drawn across the earth and His Father's wrath was unleashed upon Him.

This was the only way He could love us – by paying the penalty we owed, by enduring the wrath we deserved. By loving us this way He proved or declared that He would love us forever. I think its important for Christians to see the relationship between Christ's righteousness and His love.

I think its important to note how the text says that when God set forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins – He did not set Him forth with the primary aim of declaring or proving His love. He certainly did prove His love. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (Jn. 15:13). But we have to realize – if we would understand His love aright and if we would love Him back aright – then we have to see the subordination of His love to His righteousness.

The failure to see this has led to a lot of funny ideas of what Christians can do in order to love Christ in return. And this leads to my final consideration this afternoon. God's purpose in the gospel is to declare His righteousness. And He does this by proving the truth of sin and judgment and salvation.

If God's purpose is to declare His righteousness in the salvation of sinners then it must become our purpose as saved sinners to declare His righteousness as well. In other words we must align ourselves with God's stated purpose.

How do we do this? We begin very simply by striving to measure up to the righteousness that's been won for us and imputed to us. Christ's atoning death, you see, has freed us from sin's condemnation and sin's dominion. *When ye were the servants of sin* – Paul writes in 6:20 *ye were free from righteousness*. The word free signifying that we were

completely outside the realm of righteousness. Righteousness was like a locked vault to us. We had no access to it – but we had plenty of access to sin.

Through the gospel we have been set free from sin. And so Paul says two verses later in Rom. 6:22 *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

*Sin shall not have dominion over you* he says earlier in the chapter in v. 14. And because sin shall not have dominion over you – you are not to let sin have dominion over you. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof* (v. 12). *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

This is how we align ourselves with God’s aim or God’s purpose. In obedience to the gospel we count or reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (6:11). The word *reckon* is the same word for *impute* in chp. 4. And so just as God imputes Christ’s righteousness to us – we are to impute or count ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God.

To some this might seem like trying to psyche ourselves into living in a world of make-believe. After all I know that I’m not dead to sin. We must sadly acknowledge that we’re fully aware that sin seems to be alive and well. By counting myself to be dead to it am I to pretend I’m dead to it when really I’m not? Are we to pretend that we’re alive to God even though in our experience we seem to be so dead to God?

God does not call us into the realm of the make-believe. He calls on us rather to see our position in Christ. Positionally we died when He died. Positionally we were buried when He was buried. Positionally we rose when He rose. And today we are joined to Him – in union to Him and therefore seated upon the throne with Him.

These are not far-fetched ideals that we strive for. God, who is righteous in all His actions and all His words and thoughts views us this way. It was His purpose to fulfill all righteousness in the life and death of His Son. And because we’re joined to His Son He sees our every obligation to the law as being met.

And so we align ourselves with His purpose by striving for the things He has freely given and we’ve freely received. I strive for righteousness because I’ve been given righteousness. I strive to be holy because positionally I’ve been made holy. By this striving we prove or we declare His righteousness.

And then finally – we must ever endeavor to aim for His glory in all that we do in making His name known. I feel many church’s have lost sight of this and while they may be well meaning in their outreach efforts they seek to justify too much sin or too much worldliness with the rationale that God’s love compels them.

If you read the stories of the mega-churches which have become so large, so fast – they make the love of God the justification for the gimmicks they employ and the schemes they

devise. It's because of Christ's love for sinners – they'll say – that we put on a show. If it will lead to salvation – then bring on the clowns and the acrobats and the side shows.

The Apostle Paul calls for something higher when he writes in Phil. 1:27 – *Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.* What kind of conversation or conduct is becoming to the gospel?

Holy lives are becoming to the gospel. Righteousness is becoming to the gospel. Reverence, or godly fear, is becoming to the gospel. I like what we read in Micah 6:8 in this regard. There we read – *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

This is how we align ourselves with God's aim in the gospel. By striving for righteousness – doing justly the text says – not failing to regard reverence or righteousness because of a love for mercy – but rather aligning ourselves with righteousness because we love mercy. And in that righteousness and mercy we walk humbly with our God. This kind of walk, more than anything else, equips us to serve the Lord we love.

And so I trust today that God will impress upon your hearts the reason He saved you. He had an aim to glorify Himself in the declaration of His righteousness. How we marvel to contemplate the glory of His grace in the fulfillment of His righteousness through Jesus Christ.

I trust that the Lord will so move on your hearts that you'll find that enabling grace to align yourselves with His purpose in salvation.