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The Righteousness of God, Part 5

Romans 3:21-31, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised

through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. ¹

Prognosis & Diagnosis

Of the many questions the patient asks the doctor in the time of severe illness, two of the most common are these:

- What's the diagnosis?
- What's the prognosis?

Diagnosis is the act or process of identifying the nature of an illness. And prognosis is a prediction of the probable course and outcome of an illness. Or another way of putting it: diagnosis identifies the illness; prognosis gives the implication when it comes to our lives. Now of the two, we would be hard-pressed to say which is more important. From the doctor's perspective, the diagnosis is crucial in order for him to treat the illness. From the patient's perspective, the prognosis is crucial to how he's going to live with the illness. And to emphasize one at the expense of the other is to risk ship-wrecking whatever chance there may be for a healthy recovery.

This truth is paralleled in our relationship with God. To stress identification of Biblical truth over its implication, and vice versa, is to fall into one of two extremes: either dead orthodoxy or legalism. The healthy walk will include both, diagnosis and prognosis, identification and implication, doctrine and ethics.

Now thus far Paul's focus has been on the former, what we might call the diagnosis. Romans 3:21-26 revolves around the theme of God's righteousness in which Paul has analyzed these things:

- Its Impartation, Romans 3:21-22a.
- Its Impartiality, Romans 3:22b-24a.
- Its Application, Romans 3:24b.
- Its Vindication, Romans 3:25-26.

With this we have learned of the glorious gospel of Christ in which God imputes His right standing to the sinner on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death. It is by grace we are saved!

Now, we will shift the focus shifts to the implication of all that we have seen thus far. We pick it up in Romans 3:27 and the first implication when it comes to the glorious doctrine of The Righteousness of God: Boasting is excluded:

Romans 3:27a, "Where then is boasting?"

The Holy Bible : English standard version. 2001 (Ro 3:21–31). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Or where is bragging? Where is glorying in self? Where does the exaltation of self come in? “Boasting” as it is used here carries the idea of a deeply felt pride, of deriving joy and glory from one’s efforts. Essentially it is the desire to establish oneself before God and man as worthy in and of yourself of love, respect, or honor. Paul is thus asking:

- What’s left of the life of independence that seeks to be someone in and of yourself?
- Where then is self-sufficiency?
- Where is living in your own strength and glorying over what you do?

We see a great example of the “boasting” referenced in this passage when we look at Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 4 we read this:

Daniel 4:29-30, “Twelve months later he [Nebuchadnezzar] was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon. The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

This is the utmost in establishing oneself as independent from God.

Daniel 4:31, “While the word was in the king’s mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you...’”

It should be no surprise to learn that this type of “boasting” is antithetical to life in the Kingdom, and constitutes rebellion against the glory of God. In fact, the word as it is used carries with it the idea of “making a claim upon God on the ground of one’s works.” Thus, “boasting” carries with it the attitude that God owes us something.

In the context of the right standing of Christ given to the sinner on account of God’s grace, Paul asks the natural question, “Where does boasting in one’s achievements fit into the man of God’s life?” Paul’s answer is this:

Romans 3:27b, “It is excluded.”

The word “excluded” literally means to shut out. Here it is in the aorist tense which conveys the sense of “once and for all it is banished.” And so having said all that he has about the righteousness of God, Paul concludes that boasting, once for all, is banished! And yet he is not done. Paul goes on to explain why.

Romans 3:27c, “By what kind of law?”

Or perhaps better stated, “On what basis? On what principle?”

Romans 3:27d, “Of works?”

Of works-righteousness? Of seeking to be saved by one’s efforts? Paul is asking this question in

reference to the Jew who gloried in their religion (cf. Romans 2:17ff) and the Gentile who gloried in themselves (Romans 1:18-32). Both of these religious systems endeavored to earn a right-standing with God on the basis of self-effort. In these systems, is boasting excluded?

Romans 3:27e, “No”

Indeed! Any and all systems of works righteousness find their ground in what the person is and does. And thus, in the system of works, the worshipper may legitimately feel satisfaction and pride in his personal achievement. Boasting is not excluded in the system of works righteousness.

Now in contrast to the system of works righteousness, the system of grace in which we have been saved excludes such boasting! How so? Boasting is excluded in the Kingdom of God by the...

Romans 3:27f, “...by a law [principle, rule, system] of faith.”

In the system of salvation by grace through faith, there are no grounds what so ever for boasting. How so? Because with grace salvation is not of man, but completely and totally of God.

Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

1 Corinthians 1:30-31, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

Romans 3:24, “[We are] justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

When a man is saved and brought into the household of faith, “boasting” is completely and totally excluded since the saved individual did nothing in order to attain salvation. We come into the kingdom...

- Spiritually bankrupt and mourning over our sin, Matthew 5:3, 4.
- Beating our chests with the lamentation, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” Luke 18:13.

Is it conceivable that the broken, sinful, wretched individual could then boast about anything?

Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

This is a summary of the message Paul has been teaching throughout the first three chapters of Romans. Because God’s righteousness is imparted to the individual through the route of faith and not works, there absolutely is no ground in our lives for boasting in the accomplishments or achievements of our hands! Isaac Watts put it this way:

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count

but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.²

With this we must ask ourselves, “Is boasting a part of my life?” And lest you answer too quickly, recognize that boasting can be quite subtle. There is perhaps no other sin that is more crafty in its attack; it can be there even when you think it’s not. Jonathan Edwards put it this way:

Spiritual pride is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of religion. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit, to darken the mind and mislead the judgment. This is the main handle by which the devil has hold of religious persons, and the chief source of all the mischief that he introduces, to clog and hinder a work of God... Alas! how much pride have the best of us in our hearts! It is the worst part of the body of sin and death, the first sin that ever entered into the universe and the last that is rooted out. It is God’s most stubborn enemy! (Raymond C. Ortlund, 2002, p. 66)

James 4 gives us an example of the subtlety of boasting; speaking of believers, James wrote:

James 4:16, “But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.” What is the “arrogant boasting” that James is talking about here? For this we go back to...

James 4:13-15, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ [This is the boasting referenced here! It is an attitude of independence from God and His providence such that you think you can do whatever you wish. To this James responded...] Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’”

When you and I live independent from God’s authority, sovereignty, regency, or rule we are boasting in ourselves no matter how much we might think otherwise. Living independently from God, His regency, and His word is arrogance! That is why the Bible calls the child of God to boast in God alone! And to derive joy, satisfaction, and meaning from who HE is and what HE has and is doing!

Galatians 6:14, “But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Jeremiah 9:23-24, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.”

² Red Trinity Hymnal #252.

2 Corinthians 12:9, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

And this is NOT something that just comes when a person is saved; rather "boasting in God" flows from a determined act of the will that:

- Meditates on who we are outside of grace, and who we are in Christ!
- Actively works at giving praise to God in every situation!
- Learns to live in dependence upon the Spirit of God!

In light of the great and glorious work of Jesus Christ whereby we have received the right-standing of God, we must see that all boasting in self is necessarily excluded. But there is another implication that flows from the "Righteousness of God,"

God is not Monopolized

Romans 3:29a, "Or is God the God of the Jews only?"

Paul places "of Jews" in the emphatic position so that we literally read here, "Of Jews is He the only God?" Now amazingly this was in fact a belief of the Jew in Paul's day. Yet don't misunderstand. No Jew would have denied the fact that God is the God of all mankind- Jew and Gentile alike (there is only one God; He created all things). Rather, what they would have contended while God is the God all peoples, yet only one people possessed God. That is why Jonah resisted going to Nineveh. He did so not because he thought his witness might fail, but because he feared it would succeed! He didn't want to share God.

In Judaism, Gentiles had to become "Jewish" before they were accepted as a people of God. Peter was amazed at God's salvation of Cornelius; this Roman soldier was saved as a Gentile and not as a proselyte (Acts 10:44-48; 11:17-18).

From all of this I hope you see that Paul here is referencing the Jewish nationalism of his day that held the belief that it wasn't simply that Jews were the people of God, BUT that God was the God of the Jews! Jews belonged to God, BUT that God belonged to them!

The Jews of Paul's day lived as though they had a monopoly on God! Notice Paul's argument!

Romans 3:29b, "...Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also."

One of the fundamental truths of Judaism was that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). If that is the case, then the logical conclusion from is that (1) God is the God of all men AND (2) the approaching of this ONE GOD likewise will be one and the same. Notice the next verse.

Romans 3:30, "Since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the

uncircumcised through faith is one.”³

Paul’s thinking here is quite simple, but very important. Because there is ONE God who imputes His right-standing impartially not on the basis of who we are or what we have done but on the basis of His good pleasure through faith. There can be no Monopolizing of God!

Now brothers and sisters it is my belief that this is a highly neglected truth among God’s people. And of the various ways this neglect is manifested I want to mention at least one. I have called this the “Conformity Syndrome.”

We develop a certain “flavor” in our relationship with God. It could be the way we speak. It could be in the activities that are allowed or prohibited. It could be in how we dress. And because there is only one God, we conclude that the character of our relationship with God MUST be universal, and so must be the norm! And thus, we use this judgment as the standard by which we evaluate other Christians.

Now, I’m NOT talking about Biblical precept here, BUT personal preference and privilege. The disciples demonstrated this when it came to casting out of demons. During Christ’s third year of ministry, John approached the Lord with a serious issue:

Mark 9:38-39, “John said to Him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us. [The key here is to realize that this individual wasn’t doing anything wrong; he just wasn’t doing it the way the disciples did it...] But Jesus said, ‘Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.’”

The issue here was not that John and the disciples found someone who was Biblically wrong in what they were doing. It was that they found someone who was socially wrong, and operationally wrong. These disciples had the wrong etiquette and the wrong choice of friends. See, the disciples were groupies who lived and functioned as though they held a monopoly when it came to God!

Today there are many Christians who live much the same as did the disciples! So many of us are moved NOT by the Word of God, BUT by

- The consensus of the group.
- The personality of a leader.
- The collective likes and dislikes of a movement or clique.

The church is full of these groups:

- KJV only Christians.
- Dobsonites.

³ The “of faith/through faith” distinction clearly is synonymous. See also Gal. 2:16 for the same construction.

- Christian School-ites.
- Anti-TV Christians.
- Homeschooling Christians.
- Public schooling Christians.
- Anti-traditional Christians.
- Anti-contemporary Christians.
- Pious Christians.
- High fashion and low fashion Christians.
- High church and Low Church Christians.
- And everything in between Christians.

Now much of this wouldn't be so bad except that we judge our world and one another by the principles and rules of our clique rather than God's word, THIS IS WHERE WE ERROR! This was the problem at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1:12, "...each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'"

Brothers and sisters, I exhort you exclusively from the perspective of "preferences" (not doctrinal issues). Take a close look at the things that cause division between you and another Christian. If the thing that causes the division is not Biblically demanded (something for which you would excommunicate an individual), then

- You have fallen prey to the "Conformity Syndrome."
- You are living as though you have a "Monopoly on God."

And it could properly be said that no longer are you the people of God, but rather the people who own God! In view of this, let us turn aside from judging our world and one another with anything other than the Word of God! Let us be the people of God, and not the people who own God!

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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