

Summary: The righteousness of God was not manifested by the law – but the Law and the Prophets do bear witness over and over again to it. The righteousness of God is manifested in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which means that we can only be justified by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the law. And this is the same for all – both Jew and Gentile.

In our study of the book of Romans,

we are talking about Paul’s teaching on justification by faith.

What does 1 Kings 17 have to do with justification by faith?

God had sent a famine on the land of Israel.

There was no rain.

And God commanded Elijah to go to a Gentile widow.

And she received him by faith

and with that same faith fed him with her last morsel of food.

And the jar of flour was not spent.

And the jug of oil did not run dry,

according to the word of the LORD.

And then the son of the woman became ill and he died.

And Elijah raised up the child and restored him to his mother.

In the book of Kings,

God warns Israel that there is no way to escape death and judgment.

Israel’s hope is not that they will avoid the coming exile.

Israel’s hope is that God will raise them up from the dead.

And in token of that, there are two boys who are raised from the dead.

This one in 1 Kings 17 and the other in 2 Kings 4.

It is perhaps somewhat shocking (as Jesus pointed out in Luke 4)
that the first raising was the son of a Gentile.

In Romans 3 Paul will tell us that God justifies Jews and Gentiles
in precisely the same way.

And if we understand the Old Testament, this should not surprise us.

While the righteousness of God has only been *manifested* in Jesus,
the law and the prophets bore witness to it!

The prophets spoke of the righteousness of God.

Elijah gave us this picture of it –

how God would justify the Gentiles by faith,
through the resurrection of the Son.

In response, let us sing Psalm 119:137-144.

Back in the spring we went through Psalm 119.

And when we came to verses 137-144 we saw that the righteousness of God means not only that God is just,
but that since God has promised to save his people,
the righteousness of God means that he will do as he has promised.
After all, if God promises to save,
then the only way that God can be just is to do what he has promised!

[sing Psalm 119:137-144]
Read Romans 3:9-31

1. The Righteousness of God Has Been Manifested Apart from the Law – as the Law and the Prophets Said (3:21-22)

Earlier we sang from Psalm 119,
a Psalm that bears witness to the righteousness of God.
But as Paul says in Romans 3:21,
Psalm 119 does not manifest the righteousness of God.
While Psalm 119 speaks of God's righteousness,
it does not demonstrate it.

Before the coming of Christ we heard many voices in the Old Testament
proclaiming that God is righteous,
and we saw many pictures that bore witness to the righteousness of God.

But it is only in the gospel that the righteousness of God is revealed.
What is the difference between witnessing to the righteousness of God
and revealing (or manifesting) the righteousness of God?
Moses bore witness to the righteousness of God
when he led Israel out of Egypt,
thereby testifying that God delivers his people from bondage.
The sons of Aaron bore witness to the righteousness of God
when they offered sacrifices on the altar,
thereby testifying that without the shedding of blood
there is no remission of sin.
King David bore witness to the righteousness of God
when he established his throne in Jerusalem,
thereby testifying that the kingdom of God endures forever.

We could multiply examples of both words and signs in the OT,
all of which testified to the righteousness of God –
all of which pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah.

But it is only in the death and resurrection of Jesus
that we see clearly the manifestation of the righteousness of God.

Paul says, *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,*

*although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it –
the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

What is Paul doing here?

We have seen already that in the first three chapters

Paul is demonstrating that there is none righteous.

Gentiles may not have the law,

but they still *know* God and know that God judges sin.

Sometimes they do what is right.

Sometimes they do what is wrong.

But if you sometimes do right and sometimes do wrong,

then you are under the power of sin.

What about the Jews?

The Jews have the law.

And yet the Jews have not brought about the righteousness of God,
at least, not by their righteousness.

Paul points out in 3:5 that it is the *unrighteousness* of the Jews
that has shown the righteousness of God.

And in 3:9-19 Paul has shown that the law

convicts the Jews in particular –

“it speaks to those who are under the law” –

in order to stop every mouth and make the whole world

“accountable to God.”

The law cannot justify because the law does not bring righteousness.

The law brings “knowledge of sin.” (v20).

Both Jew and Gentile are under the power of sin.

2. The Righteousness of God Has Been Demonstrated by the Sacrifice of Jesus (3:23-25)

That’s why Paul says at the end of verse 22:

For there is no distinction:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

and are justified by his grace as a gift,

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,

to be received by faith.

Verses 22-26 are all one sentence.

The ESV makes it look like there are two reasons why there is no distinction:

1) There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile,

because all have sinned.

2) There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile

because all are justified by his grace as a gift.

But that is *not* the way that Paul sets this up.

If we translate this literally it reads:

“For all sinned (past tense)
and fall short (present tense) of the glory of God,
being justified freely by his grace
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

Paul does not put sinning and being justified on the same level.

Rather, he says that we are all alike in that we sinned (past tense):

it is our past performance that means that there is no distinction.

We are all alike in that we fall short (present tense):

it is our current state of falling short that there is no distinction.

But while Paul does say that all sinned and that all fall short,
he does not say that all are justified.

Rather, he says all sinned and all fall short of the glory of God,
being justified...

In other words, Paul is not saying that everyone is justified.

Rather, he is saying that everyone is a sinner –
everyone falls short of the glory of God –
and that everyone has the same solution:
namely, being justified.

If he had used the indicative mood (like the verbs “sinned” and “fallen short”)
then it would really look like he was saying that every sinner is justified.

But by using the participle he shows us that everyone has the same solution—
everyone has the same hope:

“being justified freely by his grace.”

We’ve reached the point where we need to define something:

What is justification?

Justification is legal language.

We’ve been seeing a lot of legal language in Romans so far:

The language in 2:15 about their conflicting thoughts
both accusing and defending them.

Judging (2:1-6), partiality (2:11), law (throughout),
witnesses, evidence, etc.

Justification is the language of the courtroom.

In the courtroom you are either declared righteous (justified)
or else you are condemned.

And Paul has already said that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin.

All have sinned.
All are falling short of the glory of God.

In other words, we all deserve a “guilty” verdict.

Justification is the declaration that you are righteous (not guilty) before God.

So the question is how can God be just and yet justify the guilty?
If all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
then how can God declare you righteous?

How can you be justified?

If I asked you, “what justifies you?”
How would you answer?
We often say simply “faith”!

But Paul actually gives three answers to this question in verses 24-25.

First, you are justified by his grace as a gift.
The Judge should declare you guilty.
That is what you deserve.
The verdict, “not guilty,” is a gift of grace.

But justification is *more* than just a “not guilty” verdict.
After all, you *are* guilty.

Paul has already established that God is a righteous judge.
How can a righteous judge acquit the guilty?

*Only through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,
to be received by faith.*

So second, you are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
Since you are guilty – since all are under the power of sin –
there must be an atoning sacrifice (a propitiation) for sin.
The OT sacrifices taught about this.
Year after year, day after day,
the priests continued to offer sacrifices in the temple.
The blood of bulls and goats and sheep was shed continually
as a sign of what sin deserves.

As Paul will say later in Romans, “the wages of sin is death.”

Only a bloody sacrifice could put away sin.

Our guilt could not be ignored.
Our sin could not be passed over forever.

You are justified

- 1) by his grace as a gift
- 2) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes people think that God is an angry Father,
and Jesus loved us and came to take away the Father's anger.

But that is not the way Paul talks.

No, *God the Father* put forward Jesus as a propitiation.

Or as John says in John 3:16 –

God loved the world in this way:
that he gave his only-begotten Son.

So first, you are justified by God's grace as a gift.
Second, you are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
And third, this justification is received by faith.

And that is the point that Paul turns to in verses 25-26

3. So that He Might Be Just and the Justifier of the One Who Has Faith in Jesus (3:25-26)

Because only in Jesus do we see how God can be just
and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Paul has two parallel statements in verses 25-26:

*This was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins,
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.*

First we need to do a little grammatical work.

“This was to show”?

What is “this”?

The main root of the sentence is “God put forward Christ Jesus, a propitiation.”

This – the atoning sacrifice by Jesus Christ, as he was sent by the Father –
this was to show – this was the evidence –
of the righteousness of God.

If you want to know what it means that God is righteous,
look at Jesus.

The evidence – the demonstration – that God is just is found in the propitiation,

in the atoning sacrifice, that Jesus offered.

And this evidence is seen both regarding the past and the present.

Verse 25 – it was to show God’s righteousness,
Because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Notice that it does not say that God had *forgiven* former sins.
Hebrews will point out that all the blood of bulls and goats
could not *actually* forgive sins.

All those OT sacrifices were not really removing sin –
if they had dealt with sin, they wouldn’t have needed to be offered
over and over again!

But that is past.

The time of God’s forbearance is over.
God is not content to overlook your sin.

He wants to forgive your sin.

And so he sent Jesus.

And that is the remarkable news about the *present*:

It was to show his righteousness at the present time
(literally, in the “now” time),
so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Again,

what is “it” about in verse 26?

In Greek, we are still in the same sentence –

the main core of the sentence is still “God put forward Jesus, a propitiation.”

This, the atoning sacrifice, is the evidence of God’s righteousness *in the “now” time*.

All that God had promised to Israel has happened in Jesus.

The Jews were expecting God to justify faithful Israel at the end of history.

But instead, God raised up Jesus – he justified Jesus –
in the “now” time – at the present time.

Why do I bring this up here?

Because Paul asks about “boasting”?

4. Since God Justifies by Faith, He Is the God of Both Jews and Gentiles (3:27-31)

Then what becomes of our boasting?

Whose boasting?

In order to get a sense of how terse Paul is here, let me give you a very literal translation:

*What then the boasting?
Excluded.*

Jews were used to boasting that they were God's chosen people.
And they were.

But Paul says that now, there is no distinction.
All have sinned.
All are falling short.
The only solution is to be justified by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
whom God put forward as a propitiation (an atoning sacrifice).

So what becomes of Jewish boasting?
Excluded!

How?
*By what kind of law?
By a law of works?
No, but by the law of faith.*

And I should add, that while Paul is probably dealing here with Jewish boasting,
the same principle strikes at the heart of all other kinds of boasting as well!

*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (v28).
Or is God the God of Jews only?*

You see, if justification comes by the works of the law,
then God is only the God of the Jews.
But Paul insists that God is also the God of the Gentiles,
since God is one.

This was the basic confession of Israel:
Hear Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.

Now, Paul uses this against those who say that God is only the God of the Jews.
No, God is ONE.
He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Literally, the circumcised are justified "of faith"
and the uncircumcised are justified "through *the* faith,"
or perhaps "through the same faith."

In other words, Jews and Gentiles have their sins forgiven in exactly the same way:
through the atoning sacrifice in Christ's blood –
which is received by faith.

Conclusion

I said at the beginning of our study of Romans
that Paul opens and closes Romans by saying that he preaches the gospel
in order to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations.

And then the *first thing* that Paul does
is talk about how the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel –
a righteousness that is manifested in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus,
a justification that is received by faith apart from the works of the law.

All have sinned (past tense) and fall short (present tense) of the glory of God.
And the only solution for sin is being justified freely by his grace.

The obedience of faith begins with faith.
The obedience of faith begins with forsaking trust in yourself,
or in anything else.
Where then is boasting?
Excluded!

As long as you think that you are “okay,” then you are missing the heart of the gospel!
As long as you try to defend yourself, then you do not see the glory of Christ!

Because as Paul says in v9 – “all are under the power of sin.”

The only way that you can be right before God is by faith.
You cannot be good enough.
You cannot do enough things to please God.
If you compare all the good things in your life against all the bad things,
then you are doing precisely what Paul says is *not enough* in 2:15,
where your conflicting thoughts accuse or defend yourself.

That’s not good enough.

You cannot stand before God with that!

The only way to stand before God is by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
God put Jesus forward as a propitiation – as an atoning sacrifice.
And it is only through the blood of that sacrifice that you can be right before God.

So as Paul begins to expound the obedience of faith,
he starts with faith.
He starts by explaining that faith does not look inward.

Faith looks outward – it looks to Jesus, and his sacrifice on the cross.