

The Way to Righteousness

(Romans 3:21-31)

I. Introduction

- A. The Roman poet Horace suggested guidelines for the writers of dramas
1. He criticized writers who too easily/often introduced deities into their play.
Do not bring a god upon the stage unless the problem is one that deserves a god to solve it.
 - a. Martin Luther picked up that quotation, and applied it to Christianity.
 - b. His point was sin is definitely a problem that required God to solve.
 2. We wouldn't need church if sin was a problem we could solve ourselves.
 - a. We don't need church for Mary Poppins and “*practically perfect people*”
 - b. Church was never designed for stained-glass saints free of struggle/sin
 3. No, sin is a problem that requires God to solve; that's why we need church!
- B. Do we really get that? Sure, we're know we're not perfect... nobody's perfect
1. But can we think that we are “*practically perfect*” or at least, good enough?
 - a. Most of us aren't as upfront about it as the Pharisee in parable (**Lk 18:11**)
*God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—
or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get*
 - b. But's it's easy for religious folks to see themselves as better than others
 - c. We can try so hard to project a “*holy image*” that we believe the charade!
 2. “*Christian*” used to be a positive term, as in “*He's a good Christian man*”
 - a. Today, the term “*Christian*” is more likely to be seen as “*negative*” term
 - b. Barna Research studied attitudes of young people (“*Outsiders*,” age 16-29)
 - 1) First thing they associate with word “*Christian*” is “*anti-gay*” (91%)
 - 2) Then it's “*judgmental*” (87%), “*hypocritical*” (85%), “*too political*” (75%)
 - c. In fact, “*Christian*” is so negative that some believers won't use it
 - 1) They call themselves “*Christ followers*.” (Χριστιανός appears 3x in NT)
 - 2) Most common Bible term is simply “*disciples*” (“*Christ followers*”)
 3. Why is the word on the street that we dogmatic, self-righteous & negative?
 - a. Have we projected the impression that we think we're better than others?
 - b. Have we meant to project that image? Must we project that image?
 - c. Is that image why people are turning less often to church for answers?

II. The Way to Righteousness: The Book of Romans

- A. This week we started reading Romans—the first of the “epistles” or letters
1. But Romans doesn't look much like a letter except at the beginning and end
 - a. Romans seems more like a theological treatise or maybe a long sermon
 - b. Romans is also why Peter says Paul is hard to understand (**2 Pet 3:16**)
He writes the same way in all his letters... some things that are hard to understand
 - c. Our text **Romans 3:21-26**, but first there a long, rambling introduction
 2. Paul's world and Roman church was made up of 2 kinds of people... twice
 - a. **Jew and Gentile:** Jews were chosen people of God; Gentiles were not
 - 1) Jews knew the Scriptures, kept the Law and followed the traditions
 - 2) They were holy—kosher food, holy days & mostly avoiding Gentiles
 - 3) When Jews became Christians, they were better than other Christians
 - b. **Roman and Barbarian:** Romans were citizens of empire; others weren't
 - 1) Rome was cultural and political center of empire (*all roads lead Rome*)
 - 2) Rome conquered the world; Romans were better than anyone else.
 - 3) When Romans became Christian, they were just better than others!
 3. Like most churches in 1st century, Rome was made up of Jews & Gentiles
 - a. Unlike most churches, Rome was at center of Jewish-Roman tension
 - 1) All Jews and been banished from by Claudius (Suetonius- “Chrestos”)
 - 2) Aquila and Priscilla were in Corinth because of the edict (**Acts 18:2**)
 - 3) But when Paul writes Romans, Aquila and Priscilla are back in Rome
 - b. For five years, Rome was a Roman church; now the Jews have returned
 - c. Jews nor Romans liked the other; they saw themselves as BETTER
 4. So before he can build up this church, Paul has to do a little deconstruction
 - a. He tears down the fiction that they are better because of their identity
 - b. **Theme Statement:** Salvation is God's from beginning to end (**1:16-17**).
¹⁶I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”
 - 1) The gospel is about a righteousness that is totally from God Himself
 - 2) It's not about our identity but what God did in Christ at the cross
 - 3) We become righteous when we have faith—whether Jew or Gentile

5. So Romans begins with this deconstruction of Roman and Jewish pride
 - a. Paul begins with Rome and the depravity of world that denied God (**1:21**)
Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.
 - 1) Pride led them to deny Creator worship the creation, and themselves
 - 2) That led to all kinds of depravity, homosexuality to disobey parents
 - 3) The “*glory that was Rome*” had little to be proud about before God
 - b. But neither did the Jews; they had the Law but didn’t keep it (**2:23-24**)
²³ *You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?* ²⁴ *As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*
 - 1) Having the Law does no good unless you keep it, and Jews had not
 - 2) He suggests some Gentiles in ignorance kept the Law better (**2:14**)
 - 3) Jews had not been made holy by their Law— had no reason for pride
 - c. Paul was both Jew & Roman, and he levels the ground between two (**3:9**)
We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin
6. Paul ends a series of OT quotes and then this startling declaration (**3:20**)
Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

III. The Way to Righteousness: Faith (Read **Romans 3:21-26**)

- A. Paul basically offered us two alternate ways to be righteous before God
 1. One is based on Law/Works; you get it the old fashioned way, you earn it
 - a. Rome would stress their STATUS; Jews would emphasize the LAW
 - b. Paul has just shown that these fail—Jew and Gentile both need GRACE
 - c. No one is righteous; the only way to be righteous is the gift of grace
 2. The word “*righteousness*” means basically “*right standing before God.*”
 - a. It comes from a legal term that means “*equitable*” or “*innocent*” or “*right*”
 - 1) This is noun form of verb here “*justify*” or “*to declare righteous*”
 - 2) Someone suggested “*justify*” means it’s “*just-as-if-I’d*” never sinned
 - b. Notice that is this is “*the righteousness of God.*” It comes from Him
 - c. In **Romans 4**, Paul use the example of the faith Abraham (**4:2-3**)
If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness
 3. So we are righteous, not because we’re right, but thru faith... Gospel truth!

- B. So we don't earn our salvation by the things that we do, achieve or become
1. There aren't hoops to jump through, rituals to keep or even steps to climb
 - a. God doesn't love us more because of songs we sing or prayers we pray
 - b. Don't have to perfectly understand doctrine or belong to perfect church
 - c. We won't lose salvation because we failed to get it all right
 2. What saves isn't us but the righteousness of God that comes by faith.
 - a. So are we saved by faith only? *Sure, if you understand meaning of faith*
 - 1) Faith isn't intellectual accent or coming down front during invitation.
 - 2) Faith isn't a one-time decision or a rung on a ladder that you climb.
 - 3) Faith isn't like a heat-seeking missile that you can "*fire and forget*"
 - b. Faith is trusting Jesus and continuing to live like you trust in Jesus.
 - c. We don't add to God's work in salvation, but we must live within it,
 3. John MacArthur tells of missionary in South Pacific translating the Bible
 - a. He was frustrated because the language had no word for "*faith*" or "*trust*"
 - b. How do translate the NT without a word for faith? How do you preach?
 - 1) A man working for him came in and flopped down into a big chair.
 - 2) He said, "*It is good to rest my weight here!*" That was the word!
 - c. Faith is resting our weight in Jesus—settling in and down in place of rest
 4. Our response to God's grace is "surrender" to the God who saves.
 - a. Faith is not a works of human achievement but it is surrender to God
 - b. Repentance is the surrender of sin-scared lives to the God who forgives.
 - c. Baptism is not an act of achievement or merit, but of surrender to God.
- C. **Irony**: We fear grace makes it too easy! Understand the critics in **Rom 3:8, 6:1**
1. Grace used to sound like **heresy**; now it sounds more like **permission**
 - a. It doesn't matter so much what we wear, watch, drink or act like. *Grace!*
 - b. It doesn't matter how often I attend or how involved I become. *Grace!*
 - c. It doesn't matter if I stay in my marriage or stray outside of it. *Grace!*
 2. If we see grace making life easier, we don't see it like Paul (**1 Cor 15:10**)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them

3. Let me make one more point and read one more verse, and we'll be done
 - a. I used to think that grace was the point of the whole book of Romans
 - b. But really, grace isn't Paul point— it's rather Paul main premise
 - 1) This church is struggling with their identities, with being one church
 - 2) Paul goes back to basics and reminds them that righteousness is God
 - 3) We are all saved by grace, and that means that we are all saved alike
 - c. Paul's emphasis on grace is part of Paul's deconstruction

4. His point is explaining grace is for us to therefore live grace (**Rom 12:1-2**)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- a. Anytime you read a “therefore” you need to know what it's there for
 - 1) Grace should never make it easier for us to be more like the world
 - 2) No, grace demands we not conform to the world, but be transformed
 - b. Grace calls us into a living, loving relationship with the God of grace
5. That's Paul's point, and that's our invitation this morning.