



## Lesson 7

### The Justification of Man Romans 3.9-31

*“For we maintain that a man is **justified** by faith apart from works of the Law”*

**Romans 3.28**

## Man Cannot Be Justified By Works Of The Law (vss. 9-20)

Romans 3:9–20 (NASB95)

9What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

10as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

11THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

12ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

13“THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”;

14“WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”;

15“THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,

16DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,

17AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.”

18“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

19Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

20because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

1. Let's begin by recalling what we've covered so far. Paul's aim was to proclaim the gospel. The basic elements of the gospel were laid out in Romans 1.1-7. The gospel is the message of Christ (a message revealed in the prophets) that should bring about the obedience of faith (even among the Gentiles!) making them God's "called", "beloved", and "saints". Truly, the gospel is where salvation and God's righteousness (faithfulness to His covenant) are found (1.16-17). And as we saw in the remainder of chapter 1, the Gentile world desperately needed the gospel! By leaving their Creator they were experiencing the wrath of God, the terror of living in sin and darkness!
2. But what about the Jew? This has been Paul's focus since the beginning of chapter 2. The Jew (literally "praised one") thought he was safe and secure, not because he had kept the

Law perfectly, but because of the very fact that he had the Law! He was in covenant with God, as evident by the mark in his flesh (circumcision). But Paul went to great lengths to expose their faulty logic: God is impartial (2.1-16) and He will judge each according to what he does! Furthermore, the Jews had brought dishonor to their God by violating the Law (2.17-24) and so their circumcision was really uncircumcision (2.25-27). Impartial God wants people with circumcised hearts (2.28-29)! Those are the true people of God, the true Jews!

3. Having dealt with a series of objections (3.1-8) Paul sums up the point he has been trying to get across: We (the Jews) are no better than the Gentiles. Sure, it's easy to look at the wicked Gentile world (1.18-32) and conclude that they are deserving of God's wrath, but the plain and simple fact is that we are all under sin! (3.9).
4. To further emphasize his point, Paul uses a series of Old Testament passages, all showing the sinfulness of man. For reference sake, the quotations are as follows:
  - Vss. 10-12 (Eccl. 7.20; Psalm 14.1-3)
  - Vs. 13 (Psalm 5.9; 140.3)
  - Vs. 14 (Psalm 10.7)
  - Vs. 15-17 (Isaiah 59.7-8)
  - Vs. 18 (Psalm 36.1)
5. These passages are from the Jewish Scriptures, they are part of their Law, hence written to the people of the Law. These condemnations were to have the effect of closing every mouth and making all (Jews included) accountable to God (3.19).
6. Because justification cannot be found in works of the Law (3.20)!
  - It's important to define what Paul means by "works of the law". Luther, Calvin and most commentators since the reformation have treated this as legalism, i.e. salvation through law keeping. But that wasn't an issue for the Jews. They knew they sinned, and they regularly made sacrifices to have those sins forgiven! Furthermore, the issue was never about whether Jews or Gentiles should obey the revealed will of God. In fact, Paul has already stressed several times that they should! (see 1.5; 2.7,10,26).
  - Their problem was that they found security in the Law, it was what marked them as God's people. The Law, and particularly circumcision, had given the Jews a false sense of justification (i.e. right standing before God) and helps to explain why some Jewish Christians were insistent that the Gentile also follow the Law, namely circumcision (see Acts 15.1). As one commentator writes (and I believe accurately), the phrase "refers to a religious mode of existence, but a mode of existence marked out in its distinctiveness as determined by the law, the religious practices which set those 'within the law' (v 19) apart as the people of the law."
  - No, the Law could not justify. Rather, the Law actually showed the people just how sinful they were! (See also Galatians 2.16; 3.11; Romans 5.20; 7.7-11)

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**Justification Is Through Christ (vss. 21-26)**

Romans 3:21–26 (NASB95)

21But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,  
22even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;  
23for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,  
24being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;  
25whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;  
26for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

1. Recall that in 1.17 it was in the gospel that God's righteousness is revealed. Clearly, Paul has returned to that thought in this passage. You will note that God's righteousness is referenced 4 times in this passage. Recalling that God's righteousness is the means by which He keeps His covenant promises, Paul's point is clear: if justification isn't found in Law, then it is found in Christ. It is in Christ that God's righteousness is found!
2. That Paul is trying to convince Jewish brethren of this is clear by the number of Old Testament references found in the passage.
  - This was witnessed by the Law and Prophets (vs. 21). A host of Old Testament passages could be referenced here, but recall that many of them spoke of the inclusion of all people (Gen. 12.3; Psalm 2; Isa 49.1-8; etc.)
  - Redemption (vs. 24). The concept of being redeemed was significant to the Jews as their history was one of being redeemed by God (see Deut. 7.8; 9.26; Isa 41.14; Psalm 25.22; etc.)
  - Propitiation (vs. 25). Rendered literally as "mercy seat" in Heb 9.5. No doubt referencing that on the annual Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat so that Israel's sins could be forgiven (see Leviticus 16).
3. Each and every reference is to make clear that these Old Testament principles are only realized in Christ (not the Law!). We have all (Jew and Gentile) sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But God has been gracious and redeemed us in His Son. It is His Son that has made the sacrifice that has forgiven sins (those current, and those that had previously been passed over). And it can be had through faith! Faith is referenced 4 times in the passage, emphasizing that God's righteousness is found by faith in Jesus, not the Law. It is by faith in Christ that God is both just (faithful to His covenant promises) and the justifier (making both Jew and Gentile acceptable).

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## No Room For Boasting (vss. 27-31)

Romans 3:27–31 (NASB95)

27Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

28For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

29Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

31Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

1. What a pity it is that this passage is viewed by so many as setting faith opposed to works of obedience. That was the furthest thing from Paul's mind! Paul had no problem with obedience, in fact he stressed obedience as being necessary for salvation (1.5; chapter 6).
2. What Paul has done is describe two systems that are opposed to each other.
  - The Law of works was the Jewish concept that their Law is what set them apart as the people of God. The primary work in their mind was circumcision, a matter already discussed by Paul in 2.25-29 and to which he returns in this passage and the discussion of Abraham in chapter 4. Paul IS NOT talking about the necessity of obeying God's commands of baptism, repentance, etc.!
  - The law of faith is set opposed to the Jewish Law because this law is inclusive. Not all received the Law, but all can come to God through faith in Christ. True faith in Christ calls for one to give his life in sacrifice to Christ (12.1), to be His slave (6.16), to obey Him (1.5).
3. None can boast because all are on equal footing. This boasting was not an individual boasting of his merit, but the Jew boasting in his national covenant, a Law that set him apart from the Gentile world. Paul has refuted that concept, all reason for boasting is gone. After all, God is the God of the Gentiles too (3.29) and He is one who will justify both circumcised and uncircumcised by faith (3.30).
4. In vs. 31 Paul is probably answering a familiar charge against him, that he spoke against the Law (see Acts 21.21). Such was the furthest thing from Paul's mind. Paul was seeking to show the Jew that God's acceptance of all (Jew and Gentile) was at the heart of the Old Testament scriptures, it's why the Son of God came and is the basis of His rule (Psalm 2; Daniel 2.44-45). In doing so, Paul didn't nullify the Law... he established it by showing it's true purpose.