

# Overview of the Book of Romans

He who understands the Cross aright—this is the opinion of the Reformers—understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ. “Therefore this text—‘He bore our sins’—must be understood particularly thoroughly, as the foundation upon which stands the whole of the New Testament or the Gospel, as that which alone distinguishes us and our religion from all other religions. For Christians alone believe this text. Therefore whosoever believes this article of faith is secure against all errors, and God the Holy Ghost is necessarily with him.”<sup>1</sup>

This exposition of the Book of Romans is not a verse-by-verse commentary, but rather it zeros in on the overall theme of the Book in order to draw attention to God’s plan of salvation for a lost humanity. Before we attempt a detailed study of this Book, we need a brief overview of the book’s central focus. As we approach the Book of Romans, we quickly observe that Paul develops the concept of justification through faith in Jesus, not works. Paul begins with the Gospel (1:1-11:36) and concludes with his exhortation to Christian living (12:1-15:22), along with his final words of encouragement and greetings (15:23-16:27). Yet in chapter 16, we discern that this section is also a hall of fame for women. We cannot read this letter without a consciousness that the major theme of this discourse is about God’s Gospel, that is to say, God’s plan of salvation made available to all humanity “in” and “through” Jesus Christ by faith (1:16-17). This book is about God’s righteousness and how it is imputed, or credited, to humanity. God’s wisdom is that He has made His righteousness available to all who will put their trust in Jesus.

After setting forth God’s means of justification, Paul surveys the condition, or standing, of both Gentiles (1:18—2:16) and Jews (2:17-29). Both groups are sinners and stand in need of salvation, that is, God’s righteousness (3:23). He explains the provision of salvation by God as “in” and “through” Jesus Christ. We receive God’s righteousness by faith, not by works. We always work FROM justification, not TO it. This righteousness that God imputes begins with faith and ends with faith. God’s righteousness is a righteousness that is outside of us. This righteousness can only be credited (*λογίζομαι*, *logizomai*, “count, reckon, calculate; credit, place to one’s account”) to one who believes (Chapter 4). God’s righteousness is something that is done to us; it is alien to every individual. Once we are put in a right relationship with God through faith, we then want to do whatever it takes to bring honor to God. Those clothed with the righteousness of God do good deeds, not as a condition of being forgiven, but in gratitude of forgiveness. For Paul, salvation is only the beginning of our walk with God.

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<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, [1934] 1952), 435, 436.

It is only in the Cross of Jesus that we discover that God has done what must be done to reconcile sinful us unto Himself (5:1-11). Paul demonstrates this truth by calling attention to Christ as the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world. For example, when we are “in Christ,” we are freed from God’s wrath (**Chapter 5**), freed from the dominion of sin (**Chapter 6**), freed from the curse of the Law (**Chapter 7**), and freed from condemnation (**Chapter 8**). In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. As we seek to understand justification, we are conscious that justification is what God does for sinful humanity. In other words, justification is not a change in our moral state; it is what God does—credits His righteousness—for us who put our trust in Jesus. This righteousness that belongs to God is a righteousness that is outside us. **This righteousness from God is not personal holiness or even correct teaching.**

Prior to Paul’s comments in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8, he elaborates on the negatives and the positives of justification by using Abraham as the model upon which to base our relationship to God. Was Abraham justified by faith or by works? Just a perusal of Chapter 4 reveals that he was not justified by works (4:4-8), that he was not justified by circumcision (4:9-12), that he was not justified by law (4:13-15), but rather he was justified by faith (4:16—25). Paul sets forth Abraham’s justification to give credence to his arguments that we can only be justified by faith. Before zeroing in on two kinds of righteousness—righteousness as an attribute and righteousness that is vicarious—we need to pay attention to certain words or phrases that are peppered throughout this Book. For us to grasp the significance of God’s plan of salvation by faith “in” and “through” Christ, it will help to observe the frequency of certain key phrases or key words in order for us to get a brief overall view of this most revealing Book. Our consciousness of the phrases that Paul employs in his Book helps us to focus more clearly on the place—“in Christ”—that salvation is found.

Throughout the Book of Romans, we discover that Paul employs the word *gospel* twelve times (1:1, 2, 9, 15, 16, 17; 2:16; 11:28; 15:16, 19, 20, 25). Another phrase—“**through Him**”—also attests to the fact that salvation can only be in Jesus. This unique expression occurs four times in Romans (1:5; 5:9; 8:37; 11:36). Paul also employs another combination with the word *through*. For example, he writes the following phrase—“**through Jesus Christ**”—five times in this Book (1:8; 2:16; 5:21; 7:25; 16:27). Again, Paul utilizes an additional phrase—“**in Christ**” to capture where salvation is found. He makes use of this phrase five times (Romans 9:1; 12:5; 16:7, 9, 10). “**In Christ**” also appears with Jesus’ personal name “**Jesus**” six times (6:11, 23; 8:1, 39; 15:17; 16:3). Once Paul varies his expression to “**in Jesus**” (3:22) and once “in Jesus Christ” (3:26). The preposition “in” is used to capture the location of salvation. Paul seeks to call attention to the place of salvation with the following phrase, “**in Him**.” This expression occurs five times (4:24; 9:23; 10:11; 15:12, 13). Paul uses other terms to communicate where salvation is found. For example, he uses the phrase “**with Him**” six times (6:4, 5 [2x], 8; 8:32). The word *faith* occurs forty times (1:5, 8, 12, 17 [2x]; 3:3 [2x], 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 [2x], 4:5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16 [2x], 20; 5:1, 2; 9:30, 32; 10:6, 8, 17; 11:20; 12:3, 6; 14:1, 2 [2x], 23 [2x], and the word *justified* crops up eight times (3:24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 8:30 [2x] 10:10).

## THE GOSPEL OF GOD

As stated above, Paul uses the word *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*, good news) twelve times in the Book of Romans. It is significant that Paul utilizes this word *gospel* six times in the first chapter. The Gospel is Good News about God's way of salvation "in Christ" by faith, not works. The Good News is that God has done what is necessary for our salvation. In other words, our acceptance from God has been established "in" and "through" Jesus. In Jesus, we witness the love of God as a gift. The Good News is that God invaded history to free us from the bondage of both sin and guilt. It is in Christ that God has revolutionized our relationship with Him. The Good News is about forgiveness in and through Jesus. The great mystery of the Christian faith is that when we accept what Christ has done upon the Cross, we can accept the forgiveness that God offers through His love and mercy. In the Cross of Jesus, we discover that everything necessary for our forgiveness has been done. The Good News is that God Himself has provided the decisive safeguard for salvation—the Cross of Jesus is that event.

### In and Through Christ Jesus

Paul is fond of the words *in* and *through* in association with Christ. These two prepositions help us to focus on the place of salvation offered by God's free grace. After Paul's introduction to the Book of Romans, he develops God's justification from His wrath against all ungodliness. In the fourth chapter, he explains the Good News of God—salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. In chapters five, six, seven, and eight, Paul lays out four main subjects: God's wrath, dominion of sin, curse of the Law, and condemnation. In these four chapters, Paul sets forth God's remedy and escape—Jesus Christ. As we reach the end of chapter five about God's wrath, we observe Paul's way of escape: "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,<sup>21</sup> so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ (δία, *dia*, through) our Lord (5:20-21).

In the sixth Chapter of Romans, Paul labors that humanity is under the dominion of Sin. Sin has dominion over us. Paul's answer to this dilemma is Jesus. Once more, Paul refers to Jesus as the means of escape: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in<sup>a</sup> (ἐν, *en*, in) Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23). In Chapter seven, Paul paints a rather dismal picture of the Law's curse. Yet, in this Chapter, Paul lays down the means of escape: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God—through (δία *dia*, "through") Jesus Christ our Lord (7:24-25)! Then, finally, in Chapter 8, he calls attention to condemnation of those outside Christ. Again, Paul paints a picture of Christ as the only means of escaping condemnation: "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in (ἐν, *en*, in) Christ Jesus our Lord (8:39). In Chapters 5 and 7 it is "through," but in Chapters 6 and 8, it is "in." For Paul, salvation can only be found "through" and "in" Him.

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a Or *through*

## Justified

The word *justified* occurs eight times in the Book of Romans. Its first occurrence is found in Romans 3:24. As Paul leads up to this phrase, he calls attention to righteousness from God that is essential for salvation. He brushes away all underbrush and goes right to the very core of justification:

**But now** a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (4:21-24)

One word that jumps out is the word *freely*. This word is from the Greek word **δωρεάν** (*dōrean*) which means “without cost, as a free gift, for nothing.” This word takes on great significance when one looks at this same word in John 15:25: “But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’<sup>b</sup>” The phrase “without reason” is from the Greek word *dōrean*, which is the same word translated “freely” in Romans 3:24. Paul is saying, in 3:24, that God justifies the sinner without a cause on his or her behalf; it is all of grace. Then, just after this note about “justified freely by his grace,” he again uses the word *justified* for a second time in order to reinforce this concept of salvation by grace: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (3:28).

To reinforce the means of “justification by faith,” Paul introduces Abraham in order to prove beyond the shadow-of-a-doubt that Abraham was justified by faith alone, not works. Paul introduces the subject of justification by dealing with works: “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup>What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness”<sup>a</sup> (4:2-3). How was Abraham justified? Paul says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Paul concludes his arguments with this summary:

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (4:23-25)

After citing the Old Testament to prove his thesis—justification by faith—he begins the fifth chapter by stating: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we<sup>a</sup> have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we<sup>b</sup> rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (5:1-2). To help us understand “imputed righteousness,” we need to begin with Romans 1:17. An

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b Psalms 35:19; 69:4

a Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22

a Or *let us*

b Or *let us*

understanding of this verse will lay the groundwork for comprehension of this most misunderstood way of God saving humanity.

## **RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD: IMPUTED TO ONE WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST**

### **ROMANS 1:17 AND 10:3-4**

The very hub of justification by faith begins with Romans 1:17. **Christians must distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living (Chapter 12) and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is, a righteousness done for us (1:16-17)**. What is the “righteousness from God” in 1:17 and 10:3-4? Is it the righteousness from God that justifies the sinner or is it the righteousness of the Christian life? The question is: Does Paul employ the word “righteousness” in the sense of that which is imputed to men and women or in the sense of that which we perform? Does this righteousness involve our keeping the commandments of God?<sup>2</sup> Or, is this a righteousness that is outside us? Is the righteousness in 1:17 and 10:3-4 imputed or earned?<sup>3</sup> Put another way, how are we placed in a right relationship with God? Is it by imputation or by works? Even though both kinds of righteousness appear in the Book of Romans, the question still remains concerning the proper exegesis, or interpretation, of the above passages. Since Paul employs the word “righteousness” in both senses, we must exercise discriminating judgment in distinguishing between the various nuances, or shades of meaning, based upon context in which the term is used. We must distinguish between the “righteousness of faith” and “the righteousness of holy living” (sanctification).<sup>4</sup> “Active” righteousness is the

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<sup>2</sup> Although Christians are justified by “faith alone,” not faith and works; nevertheless, We are to be pure in our daily walk with the Lord. Paul writes that the grace of God: “Teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:12-14). Again, he pens: “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Romans 6:18). Righteousness of faith always leads to righteousness of life.

Holiness is the legitimate fruit of the righteousness of faith and the proof that faith is the genuine article (James 2:14-18). Sanctification is not optional for the believer. We cannot be saved by sanctification, but we cannot be saved without it. A person who is dead to holiness is not righteous by faith. The Gospel of “free justification” saves the believer to holiness. Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 57, says: “A distinction is made between *justification* and *sanctification* (or regeneration): the former is the work of God outside us, the latter his work within us.”

<sup>3</sup> “Imputed” is from λογίζομαι (*logizomai*, reckon, calculate, take inventory, count, consider) and is employed by Paul thirty-four times out of a total of forty-one times in the New Testament. The Greek word is an accountant’s word. In other words, God “credits” righteousness to believers through faith, not through Law.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 102, captures the essence of “sanctification,” when he writes:

Sanctification, or holiness (the two words are virtually interchangeable), is essentially conformity to the moral character of God. We normally think of sanctification as progressive, as an inner change

fruit of “passive” righteousness. Sanctification (active) is the fruit of righteousness by faith (passive).<sup>5</sup>

In Romans 1-8, Paul develops the theme of justification by faith alone. Even though he stresses justification by faith alone, or imputed righteousness, in the first eight chapters, he, nevertheless, addresses the fact that all Christians are servants of righteousness. God is concerned about holiness in the lives of those to whom He has imputed His righteousness. But the focus of the first part of Romans is imputed righteousness, that is to say, how a man is placed in a right relationship with God. Thus, Paul’s emphasis is upon “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (Romans 1:17). More clearly put, the emphasis is upon the righteousness from God, separate and apart from works of law, imputed to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, the theme of these eight chapters is: How can we be justified? Is it by works or by faith? After Paul’s emphasis on justification by faith,<sup>6</sup> he demonstrates graphically that holiness is the believer’s spiritual worship. Thus, Paul begins Chapter Twelve with emphasis upon holy living, not for justification, but as the means of presenting our bodies as living sacrifices which is our worship. Once we are free from God’s wrath through Jesus Christ, Paul then emphasizes the behavior of us who through faith are righteous. We are to be pure in our daily walk with the Lord (Titus 2:12-14).<sup>7</sup> “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness,” said Paul (Romans 6:18, KJV). We in Christ are “servants of God,” and therefore, we are to “have fruit unto holiness” (Romans 6:22, KJV).

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of our character whereby we are conformed more and more to the likeness of Christ. That is certainly a major part of sanctification, but that is not all of it. Scripture speaks of both a holiness we already possess in Christ before God and a holiness in which we are to grow more and more. The first is the result of the work of Christ for us; the second is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The first is perfect and complete and is ours the moment we trust Christ; the second is progressive and incomplete as long as we are in this life.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent discussion concerning “active” and “passive” righteousness, see Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness of God*, (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 9-25, 57-74.

<sup>6</sup> Justification means to declare righteous, not to make subjectively righteous. Justification by faith in Jesus the Messiah changes our relationship to God, but justification is not a change in our moral state. Justification is what God does for us. Justification does not indicate a change in us, but it does constitute a change in the way God views us. Justification must not be merged with sanctification. We *must not* shift the ground of salvation from the vicarious righteousness of Christ to the personal righteousness of the believer—vicarious means it is done for us, not in us. It is by faith that we accept the vicarious Atonement of Jesus, that is to say, Jesus as the righteousness of God. Yes, justification is by “faith alone,” but sanctification is NOT by “faith alone.” “Faith alone” means that the righteousness of God’s arrangement is everything essential for redemption. Living a life of purity depends on faith, but not faith alone.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Brinsmead, *Sanctification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980, 7, where Brinsmead expresses himself most forthrightly in his comments on sanctification:

We have taken a strong stand for the Pauline doctrine of justification by an outside-of-me righteousness as opposed to the subjectivism of the current religious scene. But Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith did not do away with the law. It merely put the law in its right place (Rom. 3:31). Our purpose is not to exalt justification and degrade sanctification. We want to put sanctification in its proper place so that we can give it the great emphasis it deserves.

But the word “righteousness” (*δικαιοσύνη*, *dikaiosynē*) in Romans 1:17 and 10:3-4 is much more comprehensive than personal holiness or even correct teaching.<sup>8</sup> This righteousness is the righteousness of the new aeon—the righteousness of God<sup>9</sup> revealed through Jesus Christ. When Paul writes about the “righteousness from God” in Romans 1:17 and Romans 10:3-4, he is not using the word *righteousness* as an activity on the part of man, but rather, he is employing the word as an activity on the part of God. Perhaps to better clarify, God gives us Christ as “righteousness.” This “righteousness” is not the “righteousness of law,” but the “righteousness from God.”

The Law of God can never, under any circumstances, be a way of salvation, not even for one “in Christ” (Romans 7:14-25). Paul differentiates between the “righteousness of law” and the “righteousness of faith.” If we are to have a correct understanding of the “righteousness of God,” without Law, it is essential that we distinguish between righteousness as an attribute of godly living and the righteousness that is vicarious, that is to say, a righteousness that is done for us, not in us.<sup>10</sup> **This righteousness begins with faith and ends with faith, not good deeds performed, or works of the law, or a correct understanding of Scripture.**

Imputed righteousness is entirely outside the behavior of the believer.<sup>11</sup> It is the *doing* and *dying* of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Adding anything to this substitutionary (Christ died as a substitute for humanity) work and calling it our righteousness by faith is blasphemy. We work FROM justification, not TO it. Justification is the mother of sanctification.<sup>13</sup> Before justification, man

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<sup>8</sup> Some Christians relate these two passages to a so-called worship service. In other words, if we utilize individual cups in the Lord’s Supper, instrumental music in Sunday morning worship, Sunday school for different ages, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on, it is argued by some that we are not submitting ourselves to the righteousness from God if we adopt any of the above practices. Thus, the “righteousness from God” is identified with correct mental understanding of the Scriptures, not the righteousness made available by God through faith in Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> It is called the “righteousness from God” because His grace provides it. The “righteousness from God” is God’s redemptive act in Christ.

<sup>10</sup> See Robert Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), where Brinsmead draws attention to this great truth:

The Bible makes clear that God’s righteousness did something in the Christ event. Sin was dealt with, Satan was defeated, death was destroyed, and redemption was accomplished. This mighty action of God, which transcends every other action for all eternity, was not a work done in us (moral). It was a work done outside us in the person of Christ (legal).

<sup>11</sup> Throughout Romans 3 and 4, Paul examines righteousness being imputed rather than the believer’s holiness of life. On the other hand, in the next four chapters (5-8), he turns his attention to the life that righteousness by faith demands. In chapters three and four, He sets forth the righteousness from God as something objective to us, reckoned to us, or set to our account; therefore, this righteousness is not internal work.

<sup>12</sup> In Romans 1:17a Paul speaks of faith. In writing about faith, Paul uses the double expression “through faith for faith” (*ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*, *ek pisteōs eis pistin*). This is Paul’s way of excluding the thought of a righteousness of our own, attained through law and works. By this joining of phrases (from faith to faith) the last crumb of works-righteousness is uprooted.

<sup>13</sup> Sanctification means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service (2 Corinthians 6:17). Sanctification is a continual cleansing and separation from sin; it is a

was the “servant of sin,” but after justification, he is a “servant of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-22).

## **THE GOSPEL OF JESUS AND THE LIFE OF HOLINESS**

### **ROMANS 6**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is concerned about right conduct,<sup>14</sup> even as the law is.<sup>15</sup> This is self-evident from Paul’s arguments in Romans, Chapter 6, about “free from sin.” No Christian has the right to set himself above the Law. It is not in that sense that a Christian is “free from the law.” But it is only “in Christ”<sup>16</sup> that the Law is fulfilled in us (Romans 8:4). This fulfillment is not something accomplished by us, but by God in Christ. Even though we are “free from sin,” nevertheless, we are exhorted to “yield” our “members servants to righteousness unto holiness (Romans 6:19b, KJV).” Since we cannot keep the Law perfectly, Christ’s right conduct is credited to us through faith.<sup>17</sup> The Gospel is insistent upon holiness in

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continual growth in the attributes of the divine character. See also Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 13, where Brinsmead aptly stresses the centrality of sanctification:

So, on the one hand, sanctification means separation from sin, from unholy fellowship, from the abomination of the heathen, from the world and its allurements, from the ways of the ungodly. And, on the other hand, it means separation to a life of obedience to God, to fellowship with Him, to devotion to His glory and service.

<sup>14</sup> The reformers stressed the distinction between the legal and moral aspects of redemption, that is, between justification and sanctification. Paul negates Law as a method of salvation, not as a valid demand of a righteous God. See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 27. Where he captures the legal and moral aspects of redemption: “Any reformation of life and conduct not based on God’s law is fraud. Jesus said, ‘If you love Me, you will obey what I command’ (John 14:15). While the law points us to Christ, Christ points us back to the law.”

<sup>15</sup> Since the subject of justification by faith is not very well understood by many Christians, it is necessary to use the literary technique of “repetition” to instill this vital teaching into the hearts of God’s people. In fact, there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

<sup>16</sup> To be “in Christ” is to be beyond the pale of the Law’s power. It is to be free from the “curse of the law” (Galatians 3:10-13). The person that is outside the realm of faith, that is, Christ, the realm of the law still rules. To be under Law is to be under “wrath,” “sin,” and “condemnation.” This is where the “Good News” comes into play. Paul writes: “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4).

<sup>17</sup> Christ fulfilled the covenantal stipulations of the Ten Commandments; Christ kept God’s commandments (John.15:10); He fulfilled the Law (Matthew. 5:17); He was obedient (Philippians 2:5-9; Hebrews 5:7-9); The obedience of Christ to the Law of God constitutes His righteousness. The obedience of Christ was consummated in His death on the Cross (Philippians 2:8). We might also say that Christ’s act of Atonement is the righteousness of Christ.

the presence of God. We can only stand in God's presence through Christ who is our holiness. Even though we are justified by faith in the finished work of Christ, nevertheless, the Gospel still demands ethical conduct that glorifies God. Remember, sin is still a transgression of God's Law. The Gospel does not do away with law as an expression of God's will.<sup>18</sup>

Paul, in essence, says this very thing in Romans 3:31: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." We do not dismiss the Law, the Gospel establishes it. "To Paul there can be no thought of the law dying. It is not a case of the Christian's decision to regard the Law as repealed and nonexistent . . . . Nor can it be said that, with the coming of Christ, the law was outdated and abolished," says Nygren.<sup>19</sup> There is a distinction between the "law dying" and the believer "dying to the law."

In Romans 7, Paul specifically states that the believer is "dead to the law" and is "delivered from the law" (Romans 7:4, 6).<sup>20</sup> This death to the Law is the only way we can escape the "wrath of God." Even though we are "Not under law"; nevertheless, we delight in God's Law. Paul sets forth the question: "Is the law sin?" (Romans 7:7). No, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12). The Christian delights in the Law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). Paul not only delighted in God's Law, but he also served the law of God. For example, he writes: "with the mind I myself serve the Law of God" (Romans 7:25, KJV). Even though Paul served the law of God, he did not serve the Law of God for justification. We work not TO justification, but FROM justification.<sup>21</sup> Paul stresses that God's grace teaches us to live holy lives:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

## PURPOSE OF GOD'S GOSPEL

What is the Gospel of Jesus Christ meant to do? What is it supposed to achieve? Is the Gospel merely to forgive sinners and deliver them from hell? No! The end of the Gospel is to reveal an answer to Job's question: "How shall a man be just with God?" (Job 9:2). The business of the Gospel is to make persons righteous in His sight, to make people acceptable to God, to enable individuals to stand in the presence of one's Holy God. How does God accomplish this feat? It is only by the fact that we are in Christ that we can stand in the presence of a Holy God. Christ has become for all everything that the Law of God requires of us.

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<sup>18</sup> See 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

<sup>19</sup> Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 272.

<sup>20</sup> The Greek text states: "you were put to death (**ἐθανατώθητε**, *kethanatōthēte*) to the law" (verse 4), and "we were discharged (**ἐθανατώθητε**, *kethanatōthēte*) from the law" (verse 6).

<sup>21</sup> Brinsmead, *God Righteousness of God*, 106.

Justification is the central purpose of the Gospel of God. In the Gospel, God reveals righteousness apart from Law. The “righteousness apart from law” is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The righteousness from God does not make void the just requirements of the Law; rather it establishes the Law’s goal.<sup>22</sup> It is this righteousness apart from the Law that Paul calls the “righteousness from God.” Thus, the status of righteousness that the Law sought to bring about is now realized in anyone who accepts Jesus as God’s appointed means of salvation. To restate this truth concisely, “the righteousness from God” comes to us through faith in Jesus.

Can we be just with God through law keeping? No! If we are “under law,” any law, Old Testament or New Testament, then, before we can be placed in a right relationship with God, the law of God must be kept perfectly in every respect. James, brother of Jesus, explains this thought in this way: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). The Law condemns. Under Law we are under God’s Wrath (Romans 5), under the dominion of Sin (Romans 6), under the curse of the Law (Romans 7), and under Condemnation (Romans 8). How can we escape the *wrath* of God, the *dominion* of sin, the *curse* of the law, and God’s *condemnation*?<sup>23</sup> There is only one way; namely, “in and through Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> This is what the Gospel is all about. This is the whole glory of the Gospel. Why did Paul rejoice in the Gospel? He gives us his answer: “For in the gospel (ejn aujtw’/ ejn aujtw, “in it”) a righteousness from God is revealed” (Romans 1:17).

In our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and belief in His Resurrection, we receive the “righteousness from God,” apart from Law. God does not loose the just requirements of His moral Law,<sup>25</sup> but He upholds His demands through Jesus. In our acknowledgment and acceptance of Jesus as God’s way of salvation, God imputes,<sup>26</sup> that is to say, credits, to us the

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<sup>22</sup> See Romans 3:31: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.” See Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 8, where he correctly says: “We want to make clear that justification by faith alone is not an alternative to personal holiness but the only basis for it.”

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Anders Nygren for calling attention to these concepts in his *Commentary on Romans*.

<sup>24</sup> Paul concludes chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 with “in and through Jesus.” Chapter 5 is “*through Jesus*” (verse 21); chapter 6 is “*in Jesus*” (verse 23); chapter 7 is “*through Jesus*” (verse 25); chapter 8 is “*in Jesus*” (verse 39).

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told His disciples:

Do not think that I have come to abolish (καταλῦσαι, *katalysai*, “to abolish”) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:17-19).

<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament, this doctrine of “imputation” is given far-reaching attention. It is alluded to in Romans 4:6-25 concerning Abraham’s faith and his justification. Also, Paul mentions this in his second letter to Corinth: “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). James also makes notice of “imputed righteousness” when he writes: “And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was

righteousness of His Son. Where justification is exalted, the Law of God is elevated. Justification by faith makes the Law and the sinner friends: “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Romans 7:22).

Even though Paul expresses his delight in the Law of God, he does not delight in the Law of God for justification. Why? In Romans 3:19-20, Paul sets forth the terrifying aspects of the Law. He says that the Law of God shuts every person’s mouth, no one can boast. But the Apostle Paul does not leave us in despair; he gives hope to sinful humanity. Paul reveals how we can be righteous before a holy God. Immediately, he develops this righteousness from God, apart from Law. Paul’s assessment of man’s situation is full of hope, he writes:

But now a righteousness from God apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:21-24)

## “BUT NOW”—THE HEART OF GOD’S GOSPEL

### ROMANS 3:21-24

“But now” (**Νὺν δέ**, *Nyni de*) is the heart of the Gospel of Christ.<sup>27</sup> This “but now” is how faith answers the indictment of the law, the accusations of the conscience, and everything else that would doom and demoralize us. There are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than these two words—“but now.” No one ever has provided or ever will provide a righteousness that will satisfy God and the demands of His holy Law. Well, is there hope for humankind? Can nothing be done for humanity? Is everyone irretrievably doomed? The apostle answers these questions. How? “BUT NOW!” Yes, God’s grace provides the righteousness His Law demands. The Gospel is about God’s activity of redemption for us “in” and “through” Christ Jesus. “But now” is our defense against the curse of Law. This “but now” is the heart of the Gospel.

The Gospel tells everyone about a “righteousness from God”—a righteousness **provided by God**, *in* and *through* our Lord Jesus Christ (3:24). Jesus has satisfied the Law of God on our

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credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend” (James 2:23). This word appears over one hundred times in the Hebrew Bible—examples are: Leviticus 7:18; 2 Samuel 19:19; Psalms 32:2.

<sup>27</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Lloyd Jones (1899-1981) for much of my insight concerning justification by faith. The late Dr. Jones, one of the ablest and most respected Bible expositors of the twentieth century, wrote several volumes on Romans. For an illustration of his ability to express clearly the teachings of Romans, see D. M. Lloyd Jones, *Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 27 where he says:

‘But now.’ This is the essence of the Christian position; this is how faith answers the accusations of the Law, the accusations of conscience, and everything else that would condemn and depress us. These are indeed very wonderful words, and it is most important that we should lay hold of them and realize their tremendous importance and their real significance.

behalf. He fulfilled the Law of God perfectly. When Paul speaks of this saving, justifying righteousness, he means a righteousness that is *external* to man, a righteousness that is *alien* to man, a righteousness that is *passive* to man, a righteousness that is *imputed* to man.<sup>28</sup> This righteousness is so infinite, so incomprehensible that it is even beyond the ability of the angels to comprehend it.<sup>29</sup> But God unfolds it and presents it on display in the Gospel of His crucified Son. Christ's crucifixion for guilty sinners is the Gospel. In this act of crucifixion, God reveals His way of redeeming sinners and upholding His holiness. Paul movingly captures this truth when he pens:

God presented him a sacrifice of Atonement, **through faith in his blood**. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice presently, so as to be just and the one who **justifies those who have faith in Jesus**. (Romans 3:25-26)

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<sup>28</sup> Christian writer Leon Morris has penned some compelling words that need to be heard. See Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1983) 187, where he says:

An important idea in the New Testament is that righteousness may be imputed. There are grounds for imputation in an Old Testament passage, that in which we read, 'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness' (Gn.15:6). This presents a problem to some modern people, because we so firmly believe that righteousness is an ethical quality. It is 'being good.' In that sense it is nonsense to talk about righteousness being imputed. Everyone who aspires to this kind of righteousness must merit it for himself, by right living. It cannot be 'credited' or 'reckoned' or 'imputed' to him other than in some fictitious and fanciful sense. But when we see righteousness as basically legal, as 'right-standing', it is another matter. A standing or status can be conferred. The narrative says that God conferred this status on Abraham because of his faith. Paul uses this as his classic example of justification by faith. Abraham received his 'right-standing' not on account of any meritorious action but simply because he trusted God.

<sup>29</sup> Peter writes about the angels' intense desire to know something about this salvation:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (I Peter 1:10-12).

# IMPUTATION AND SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

## ROMANS 3:25-26

Justification by faith is a legal transaction<sup>30</sup> related to God's Law and to Divine jurisprudence (The philosophy of law; the science that seeks to ascertain the principles on which legal rules are based.). The idea of imputation (righteousness that is credited to man) is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary Atonement (Christ died as a substitute for men and women).<sup>31</sup> Imputation and substitutionary Atonement of Christ stand together. The ultimate act of salvation is in the Christ event. Thus, it is fitting to call God's redemptive act in Christ "the righteousness from God." **This righteousness is furnished by God, devised by God, made obtainable by God.** It is God's salvation from beginning to end. The prophets testify to this event. Jeremiah (627 BC) says: "This is the name by which he will be called: **The Lord our righteousness** (Jeremiah 23:6)." Isaiah (739 BC), through the Holy Spirit, writes:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:5, 11-12)

Not only is the "**righteousness from God**" that which belongs to His Son Jesus that comes to every individual through faith, but Jesus is the "Righteousness from God." Paul, in Romans 1:17 and 10:3-4, is not talking about acts of righteousness, or the doing of good deeds, but rather the issue of "imputed righteousness"—righteousness bestowed upon us through faith in His Son Jesus. If we are to understand "**imputed righteousness,**" we, first of all, must

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<sup>30</sup> See Brinsmead, *The Legal and Moral Aspects of Redemption*, 21, where he points out that:

The Atonement was a satisfaction made to the divine law (legal) as well as a demonstration of God's love to change our hearts (moral). Salvation consists in a change in our standing before the law, which is called justification (legal), as well as a change in our state, which is called sanctification (moral).

<sup>31</sup>The following extract from Brinsmead, *Sanctification*, 52, may explain more clearly the substitutionary work of Christ:

The work of the Second Person of the Godhead was *substitutionary*. He lived for us a sinless life. He stood in our place in the judgment of God and was wounded for our transgressions. He rose again for our justification. And as our Representative, Substitute and Surety, He now presents the merits of His life and death on our behalf in the presence of the Father. These glorious redemptive acts are substitutionary. They were done for us. They were done outside us and without our effort or aid.

understand how we become sinners before God. Sensitivity to this question will shed great light on how we become righteous before God.

Paul speaks of this righteousness as coming **from God**, not us; he describes it as “God’s righteousness.” Very succinctly, or concisely, he writes about “a righteousness from God, apart from law” (Romans 3:21). This “righteousness from God” is Christ’s faithfulness, truthfulness, and obedience to God’s Law. These attributes of Christ are *credited* to us as our own. Paul uses *credited* (λογίζομαι, *logizomai*) eleven times in Chapter four of Romans.

The central thought in justification is that, although we clearly and totally deserve to be declared guilty (4:9-19), **God declares us righteous through the doing and dying of Jesus Christ**. Jesus is “our righteousness.” Paul aptly stresses the centrality of the Gospel: “It is because of him that you are in Christ **Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, **our righteousness, holiness and redemption**. Therefore, as it is written: Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). Jesus is our Righteousness, our Holiness, and our Redemption. This is the only means by which sinful humanity can stand before his God. We can only boast in the Lord, not our own works of righteousness. Jesus is our “everything” in our relationship to God. In the words of a popular song: He is our “everything.”

## ABRAHAM AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

### ROMANS 4

Brinsmead captures the essence of imputation and the substitutionary Atonement of Christ when he writes:

The whole concept of imputation is tied to the biblical doctrine of a substitutionary Atonement. Imputation and the substitutionary Atonement of Christ stand together. An attack on one is an attack on the other . . . . God laid our sins on Jesus Christ by imputation. He “was numbered with the transgressors (Isa. 53:12). This is how He was made . . . to be sin for us.” There was nothing in Him worthy of death. But He was condemned by the righteous judgment of God, for He had been made to be sin by imputation. In this sense it was right that Christ should suffer the wrath of God. He had to be treated *as if* He were a sinner.<sup>32</sup>

Paul expounds upon the principle of justification by faith by using Abraham (2166-1991 BC) to prove that the “righteousness from God” is *credited* to men and women “through faith.” Since the Scripture is its best interpreter, we should look to the phrase, “it is written,” for our understanding of what God reveals to His people through the Holy Spirit. Note the following Scriptures:

Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation. (Romans 4:4).

His faith is *credited* as righteousness. (Romans 4:5)

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA., 1980), 87.

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works. (Romans 4:6)

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him. (Romans 4:8)

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. (Romans 4:13)

The words “it was *credited* to him” were not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Romans 4:24)

Again, we should reflect upon Paul's letter to the Corinthians as he contemplates the “righteousness **from God.**” For example, “Christ Jesus . . . has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). This “righteousness **from God**” is JESUS CHRIST. Remember, “the Scriptures foresaw,” says Paul, “that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: All nations will be blessed through you” (Galatians 2:8). The Good News is that God made Jesus our Righteousness, our Holiness, and our Redemption. Yes, that is the Gospel of God in a “nutshell.” Paul very vividly describes the “righteousness that is by faith”:

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But **the righteousness that is by faith** says: The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, **the word of faith we are proclaiming**: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:5, 6, 8, 10)

Paul encounters the belief from some Jewish believers that one could not be justified unless one was circumcised as taught by Moses (see Acts 15:1). Earlier, in the Book of Romans, Paul writes about Abraham's circumcision (Romans 4). In this examination of Abraham's justification, Paul asks a pointed question about his justification—before circumcision or after circumcision. Listen to Paul as he sets forth his response to those who sought justification through Law and circumcision:

Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! <sup>11</sup> And **he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.** So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. (Romans 4:10-11)

Paul relies upon his information from the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 12:4, Moses says that Abraham was seventy-five years old when God called him. Since Abraham was born in 2166 BC, the one would subtract 75 from 2166, which means that Abraham was justified by faith in 2091 BC. It was twenty-four years later (Abraham was now ninety-nine). Moses states that Abraham was circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old (17:1), which means he

received circumcision in 2067 BC (2091 minus 2067 equals 24 years). He was justified in 2091 BC and circumcised in 2067 BC. Moses comments upon the purpose of circumcision:

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. (17:9-11)

God told Abraham that circumcision would be “the sign of the covenant between me and you” (17:11). Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, interpreted these words: “he received the sign of circumcision, **a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith** while he was still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11). For the twenty-first century church, we are confronted with the subject of baptism. Are we justified before or after baptism? Paul reasons that “the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham” (4:16). During the Jerusalem conference recorded, by Luke, in Acts 15, Peter addresses the assembled group:

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup> He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:7-19)

Acts 10 is the background for Peter’s statement in Acts 15. Peter, in his sermon to Cornelius and his household, told the gathered group that “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (10: 43). They believed the Good News that God presented Jesus as Atonement for the sins of the world. Upon their acceptance of this truth, God demonstrated His acceptance by giving them the Holy Spirit. They were justified before baptism. After justification, they were baptized (10:47-48). Surely baptism is also a sign, or seal, of that which has already taken place when one puts his or her trust in Jesus as the Savior of the world. If this is not the case, we wonder why Peter said, “He purified their hearts by faith” (15:9). Paul does not drop this subject concerning Abraham’s justification and the believer today. Pay careful attention to Paul as he concludes his remarks about Abraham’s justification and his descendants:

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (Romans 4:23-25)

We must be careful that we do not fall into the same error of the Jews who were seeking to establish their own righteousness through Law keeping. It is not uncommon for believers today to seek justification through “absolute perfection” in knowledge and obedience (sanctification) to God. We may be mistaken about many things taught in the Scriptures, but our salvation is NOT contingent upon absolute freedom from error in knowledge nor is our

salvation conditional upon perfect obedience to Law. Our salvation is dependent upon our acceptance of Jesus, who is God's Righteousness, the Savior of the world. If the head is righteous, then the body is righteous. Christians rely upon the finished work of Christ upon Calvary for salvation. Jesus is the believer's Righteousness, Holiness, and Redemption. Just a cursory reading of Isaiah 53 reveals that God's way of saving sinners—Jew or Gentile—is Jesus. The moment we trust Christ, God lays upon Christ our sins. In other words, they are no longer upon us who put our trust in Christ.

To state more fully, this righteousness is **unattainable by obedience to any law**, old or new, or by merit of our own initiative, or any other condition than that of faith "in Christ." It *begins* with faith and *ends* with faith (Romans 1:17b). Nygren pinpoints this truth: "Faith is the beginning and the culmination."<sup>33</sup> We who trusts in Christ become "the righteousness of God in Him."<sup>34</sup> We become "in Christ" all that God requires us to be, all that we could never be in-and-of ourselves. Thus, we must conclude that we are justified "freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). Freedom from *wrath, sin, law, and condemnation* is *in* and *through* Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21b; 6:23b; 7:25b; 8:39b). Is it any wonder that Paul writes "Therefore having been justified by faith, peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Faith alone"<sup>35</sup> means that the righteousness of God's provisions is everything necessary for our salvation. It is "from faith to faith," said Paul (Romans 1:17). Paul stresses, as stated above, forcefully this truth with double prepositions: it *begins* with faith and it *ends* with faith. Robert Brinsmead correctly states:

Imputation. The words *impute, reckon, account, credit* all come from the Greek word *logizomai*, which is used eleven times in Romans 4. The believer has righteousness imputed or credited to him (Rom. 4:6). This is "the righteousness of One," even Christ (Rom. 5:18, KJV). Paul is not talking about the believer's experience but about his status in the judgment of God. Imputation of our sins to Christ (Rom. 5:19-21) and of His righteousness to us deals with legal realities. Neither the imputation of sin nor of righteousness means a change of character of the object. But it does change the way the object is regarded. Surely Calvary is the proof of this.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 78.

<sup>34</sup> Second Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

<sup>35</sup> By "faith alone" I mean justification through faith on account of what Christ accomplished for mankind through His Atonement. We are passive and God is active in our justification. The righteousness that God imputes to us through faith is "alien righteousness," that is, it is something given to us *in* and *through* Jesus Christ. God offers salvation as a gift through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God in and through Jesus. Faith is the earthen vessel, or channel, that conveys the treasure of Christ to sinful man.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Brinsmead, *The Pattern of Redemptive History* (Verdict Publications: Fallbrook, CA, 1980), 45.

# SINNERS THROUGH ADAM

## ROMANS 5:15-19

To appreciate more fully the subject of righteousness through imputation, we must reflect upon Paul's analogy between the first Adam and the second Adam (Romans 5:15-19). We do not become a sinner because of something that happens within; but we are sinners because of something that took place outside us in another person, namely, Adam. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:15-19). Adam was the first father. He stood as the federal head. The whole human race is constituted in him. When Adam fell, it was the same as if every man and woman had fallen.<sup>37</sup> Paul maintains that through one man (Adam), death reigned, and through one man (Jesus), the gift of righteousness reigns:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:15-19)

In Romans 5, Paul develops imputation from Adam as well as imputation from Christ. God reverses the fall of Adam by giving the human race another Father, as it is written:

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)<sup>38</sup>

Just as the whole race is included by implication in Adam, so God includes all faithful humanity in His Son. Jesus became the new Head, the Representative, and the Father of the fallen race. Robert Brinsmead captures the essence of the righteousness **from God**, when he says, "Jesus was the total outlay of heaven's treasure, the accumulated love and wealth of eternity, the totality of God's righteousness."<sup>39</sup> Paul burst forth in rapturous language when he writes: "**It is because of Him** that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). In Paul's Second Letter to Corinth, he captures the very essence of the Gospel:

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<sup>37</sup> For an excellent and insightful analysis of the two *aeons*, see Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, 16-37.

<sup>38</sup> See also Romans 10:1-17. Jesus is God's way of Righteousness, not works!

<sup>39</sup> Robert D. Brinsmead, *Justification*, 29.

That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:19a, 21)

## THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD: JESUS

### ROMANS 10:1-17

Again, we must ask the question: What is this righteousness? IT IS JESUS! God's righteousness is revealed historically and completed in the Christ event.<sup>40</sup> Paul makes abundantly clear that God's righteousness did something in the Christ event. The believer is credited with Christ's righteousness because Christ obeyed, even unto death. In the time of Christ and the Apostles, the Jews, as a whole, did not comprehend this external righteousness that is credited, or imputed, to men and women. They went about to establish their own righteousness rather than submit to God's righteousness, which is Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

When we speak of the righteousness from God, we are addressing the subject of justification by faith. In analyzing justification by faith, Paul discusses the relationship of the Law to the believer. The believer is dead to the Law. The believer is free from Law. Paul

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Brinsmead seems to have fully assessed the Christ event. See Robert Brinsmead, *Justification* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1980), 63, where Brinsmead captures the Christ event:

In no sense is God's gift of justification something done in man. We may correctly say that the righteousness of God in the Christ event is communicated to the believer by *imputation* (Rom. 4), but it is scandalous to say that it can be communicated to us by *impartation* (infusion). The righteousness of God is a once-for-all event which took place two thousand years ago. Even God Himself cannot reenact it outside of us, to say nothing of doing it in us. But what Christ did He did as our Substitute. Therefore, His life was really our life, and His death our death. God counts them as ours. That is what justifies. Or to put it another way, what He did He did as our Representative, so that we lived and died and rose again in Him.

<sup>41</sup> See Romans 10:1-3. The Jews sought justification through obedience to law, not Jesus as God's way of salvation. It is not uncommon for us also to seek our "own righteousness," or justification before God, through complete understanding of the Word of God, not Jesus as God's appointed means of right-standing. Many Christians have a zeal for legitimate-standing before God, but not in agreement to God's plan of imputed righteousness based upon faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Today, among many believers in the Messiah, righteousness is pursued by exactness in knowledge and by perfection in obedience to a so-called "new law," that is to say, the New Testament Scriptures. The so-called "new law" generally is associated with the various five-acts of a so-called worship service.

Flawlessness in knowledge is the battle cry; but freedom from error is not a condition of salvation, else all would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to an assured ratio of knowledge, otherwise all, too, would be ruined. We are not saved by accomplishment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ. It is by belief of facts related to Him and not by grasp of abstract truth that we are justified before God. Our justification before God is neither by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge, then, we hang ourselves on the very gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming we know as much as God.

argues that “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 10:4). But the Jews were pursuing righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Thus, Paul deals with this illegal use of the Law, namely, a pursuance of righteousness by works, instead of righteousness by faith. Paul further elaborates this issue in his Epistle to the Galatians. He asserts that:

A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

Paul’s concern for the Jews lies in the fact that they were going about to establish their relationship to God upon their works rather than upon the work of Christ. He does not reject obedience to the Law,<sup>42</sup> but rejects righteousness by works, that is, the attempt to use the law to put God in one’s debt. Paul writes: “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20). From the negative viewpoint, God declares the person not guilty. From the positive viewpoint, he declares him righteous. Again, Paul exclaims: “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24).

Although all are sinners, God declares everyone who puts his or her trust in Jesus not guilty, but righteous. This legal declaration is valid because Christ lived a perfect life and died to pay the penalty for our sins; thus, His righteousness is credited to us. This imputed righteousness is the central theme of Romans, as Paul expresses this truth in 1:17: “For 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.’”

## CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, the primary objective of this overview is to unfold God’s plan of salvation in and through Jesus. This in-depth study is not intended to be a verse-by-verse

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<sup>42</sup>No Christian has the right to set himself above the law. Every believer is “free from the law,” but not above the law, see Romans 7. The Law is given by God, and is an expression of His holy will. McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 117, is especially helpful in this area when he writes:

The gift of our justification lays upon us the *obligation* to live in accordance with our new status. We are *made children* of God through our justification as an act of free grace -- and now we must act in accordance with this transformation. The slogan ‘Become what you are!’ neatly summarizes this situation and encapsulates the essence of Pauline ethics with some brilliance. In justification we are made to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:15-16): therefore we must shine out as lights in a dark world, as a city on a hill (v. 14; Phil. 2:15). Our justification brings about a new obedience—an obedience that would not be conceivable before our justification and that ultimately rests on the grace of God.

exegesis of the Book of Romans, but rather the primary objective has been to set forth the central theme of the Book—justification by faith in Jesus. This analysis of Romans also focuses on holiness in the life of the believer. In other words, we are called to become in our daily living what we already are “in Christ.” God demands actions as well as believing. Faith expresses itself in obedience. In Romans 12:1—16:27, Paul turns to the practical application of justification by faith. This does not mean, as shown earlier, that he had not already pointed out the necessity of Christian living (Chapters 6—8), but, beginning with Chapter 12, he goes into detail to show that Jesus Christ is to be Lord of every area of our lives.

Paul stresses in Romans 3:31 that being set free from Law in and through Jesus does not liberate us from obedience to God’s Law. Paul writes: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (3:31). Even though we delight in God’s Law, nevertheless, we can never earn our salvation through law keeping. Listen once more to Paul as he explains: “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (3:27-28). Again, the words of Paul ring out loud and clear: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (3:20).

If we cannot be justified through the law, How does God justify the ungodly? Brinsmead, once more, goes right to the heart of the matter when he says,

How can a Judge who is supremely just justify the ungodly? Paul’s answer is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. It is true that the believer is wholly a sinner in himself and will in this life continue to fall short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). But God imputes to him the righteousness of Jesus. And on this basis God can declare him righteous and treat him as if he were righteous.<sup>43</sup>

For us to be justified, we must be obedient to the faith (Romans 1:5; 10:3; 10:16). But what does it mean to be “obedient to the faith”? What does it mean to “submit to the righteousness from God”? What does it mean to “obey the Gospel”? All three phrases are synonymous. It means to submit ourselves to the “righteousness” made available through the redemption that is “in Christ Jesus.” The Jews sought a salvation through law keeping, that is, “righteousness by law,” rather than salvation through faith in the Christ event, that is, “righteousness through faith.” The Jews, as a whole, did not “obey the Gospel.” To state more forcefully, they did not submit to God’s way of salvation—Jesus.

Paul’s argument is that our righteousness cannot be built from below, but from above. God’s imputed righteousness is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ. The only righteousness is the righteousness of faith. “A righteousness of God IN IT [Gospel] is revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1:17). Paul employs, as mentioned above, two prepositions to emphasize the faith principle: *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν* (*ek pisteōs eis pistin*, “from faith to faith”). Paul drives home the point of one’s justification—this righteousness from God **begins** with faith and **ends** with faith. **It is God’s righteousness**, not our righteousness through compliance with the

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<sup>43</sup> Brinsmead, *Righteousness by Faith*, 76.

teachings of God. The following passage is worth quoting in full, showing as it does the proper definition of faith:

We must be careful, however, about our definition of faith, and what faith does, and where faith comes in. Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. That is where that teaching I have just been denouncing goes wrong; it says that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's Cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which links us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.<sup>44</sup>

The righteousness from God, in Romans 1:17 and 10:3, is the righteousness *prepared* by God, *made available* by God, and *imparted* by God to us through faith. In these Scriptures, Paul is writing about the righteousness that God declares to us, not our holiness through holy deeds. The paramount thought is the state of being “in the right,” not by works, but by Jesus. The only way we can be in union with God is through God's anointed One. No amount of good deeds can put us right with God—only Jesus can accomplish this performance. How does God's righteousness come to men and women? The Scripture says “through faith.”<sup>45</sup> Faith always points away from itself to God; faith rests for salvation on Christ's union with God. Faith is the channel or instrument through which God's righteousness is imputed, that is to say, credited or attributed to us.

The law is *not* the answer to the problem of sin, but *Jesus is*. The Law of God is not life, but *Jesus is*. Grace bestows mercy, but the law demands death. Yes, the written code demands death, but the Spirit gives life. It is Christ or law, not Christ and law. The Christian is not under law, but under grace. The Christian still delights in the Law of God. The believer still serves the Law of God, but not for justification. Remember, Paul argues the ethical implications of the Law in Romans:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but

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<sup>44</sup> D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20—4:25, Atonement and Justification*, 120.

<sup>45</sup> See Romans 4:5, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Again, Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Finally, Romans 3:22, “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—obey whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:12-18)

As stated above, we are called to become what we already are in Christ. We cannot have Christian morality without having faith in Jesus, the Savior of the world. Are we really living in the love of God so that we reflect the rays of His light in our lives? We cannot read the Book of Romans without awareness that Paul desires that in the inner life of us that Christ come to birth in a real and meaningful way. This life, according to Romans 12, is not intended to be merely inward, but to manifest itself outwardly. Christ has been given in order that a transformation may also come about in our lives.

The life of every believer is meant to be a life that mirrors the image of Jesus. **Just a casual reading of Romans 14—16 reveals that God desires that Christians live in love and in fellowship with one another, not in isolation from each other. We are to receive one another in the same way that Christ receives us—warts and all (Romans 15:1-7).** Paul lays down the principles of Christian living in unity and love in Romans 14—16. In Romans 6, Paul discusses the ethical implications of our dying with Christ. We must ask the question: How can we appropriate the gift of redemption and live a life in defiance of God's rich grace?

Humanity is fast stuck in the mire of sin so that we cannot deliver ourselves from God's wrath, from the dominion of sin, from the curse of the Law, and from God's condemnation. **It is God's act in Christ that gives humanity a new standing.** The Cross of Christ flashes like neon lights with the following picture: In Christ, God's love meets us. God's love is not just an attitude; God's love is not just an act; God's love is the very essence of God. In the words of Paul: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). The Book of Romans is about how God comes to humanity "in" and "through" Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ annihilates boasting on our part (3:19-20). Paul drives home the point that we do not find a way to God, but rather God comes to us in and through Jesus (3:21-31).

The message of hope for salvation is Jesus. We cannot read this powerful presentation of the Gospel by Paul without being wrapped up in wonder and awe and impelled to bow in humble adoration and praise for such grace (1:8-10). Again, we should remind ourselves that salvation is not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. **It is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin separating us from God is removed.** For us to live in faith in the Son of God is to live in a spirit of thankfulness (16:25-27). The Gospel is about God's love, and God's love takes hold of us in Christ. This love of God manifested in our lives can only be grounded in Jesus. The only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance is love grounded in Jesus (Chapter 14—16). **The righteousness from God that we receive is through faith in Christ.** Remember, Jesus came not only preaching the Gospel, but He is the Gospel of God. Jesus is the Good News of God concerning salvation—salvation begins and ends with faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Tree for redemption.