

“But Now...another way”

Romans 3:19-31

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Romans 3:19-31 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will

be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. 29 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Rules. Regulations. Laws. They all only have a limited effect don't they? After all, currently we are housing roughly 2.3 million people in incarceration in the USA, the largest per capita prison population in the world. In fact, ours is 5 times what most countries are. Oh if only we *could* legislate morality! It's a lot like the proverbial case of "herding cats." It just isn't going to happen...

Paul had spent the better part of 4 chapters telling us...*explaining to us*, how we are all sinners. Now the Jewish response to all that Paul had said for these past chapters is to attempt to stand on the law like it was "safe ground" in a children's game of tag. They felt that where they stood...following the law...following the rules, gave them a free pass. That they were righteous *because of the law*. But Paul's position was that it was that very law that in fact made them **guilty!** Guilty because no one could ever follow the rules, and certainly not perfectly, which was and is the mandate.

The perfect adherence to the law was and is the righteous standard of being able to be in the presence of the righteous and holy living God. Any and every misstep effectively puts you out of the game. James 2:10 tells us that "*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*" So the problem was and is that, outside of Christ Himself, no one has ever done it. The law wasn't to tell you what you had to achieve, it was there to tell you that you never would and never could. Any and all attempts to be right with God by following rules and standards didn't make a person righteous, it made him guilty! And it still does.

Yet throughout the world today mankind continues to try, and continues visually, to *fail*. Even throughout most of the pews of America, we are still trying. No matter how strenuously Paul lays out the truth, there is always the vast majority that will simply look to their left or their right for the "guilty" party. But Paul is not going to let that pass. Paul is telling his brethren just as I am telling you today, that "this means you!" For when the "Judge" enters the courtroom, there will be no "judicial dance" as you see in the TV courtrooms. No one, outside of the cross, will enter that room innocent. Everyone will truly have nothing to say at that point. Paul says "*every mouth may be stopped.*"

You see, every man living on the face of this earth has broken that law. So Paul is saying, "You Jews are guilty. Now shut up. You Gentiles are guilty. Now shut up. The law has condemned you."

Even if you were extremely pious and extremely good at following the Old Testament law or even our modern version of such here in the protestant evangelical world, you will never square things with God. Galatians clearly explains the purpose of the law, and that is to expose our inability to ever earn our right standing with the Creator. In our attempts to be holy without the holiness of Christ, we fail so miserably that in reality we embarrass ourselves trying. What was all of this for then? What was all that Old Testament stuff about? Paul was saying that the point of such an exercise was so that humanity might realize that we are indeed sinners and we cannot ever find our way to God through our own work and efforts.

Verse 20 says, "*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.*" The word "knowledge" there in the original Greek is "epiginosko." That word speaks of a "full knowledge." Not only head knowledge, but a knowledge that is reflected in every aspect of one's life ...a knowledge which confirms what the Law says, that there is sin in your life.

Any religion that preaches works just dies in chapter 3 verse 20. Paul puts them all to death right there. He says, "*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight...*" It's interesting to note that the original text of verse 20 does not include the word "the" before "law." The passage "*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*" is instead "*Therefore by the deeds of law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by law is the knowledge of sin.*" Paul seems to be attempting to include **all** kinds of "**law**" in his discourse! By doing so he pulls all of us, Jew and Gentile, into the courtroom! The law it seems can **convict** men of sin, it can **define** sin, but it cannot **free** man from sin nor can it square things with the judge. Only His forgiving grace can do that.

Therefore, after an all-encompassing verdict of guilt and our inability to rectify such a standing, Paul begins verse 21 with words that should be "music to our ears": "***But now...***"

But now God has provided another way...

Paul now goes on in this scripture to present the open door to not only God's grace, but literally to God Himself. But Paul only shines a light on this door, he does not himself open it. For what is done here is the sole undertaking of God...*through the act of the perfect God/Man Jesus who would step in to do what we could never do*, and that is to "square things with the house." Christ would be the only "perfect law follower" who would achieve such not for Himself but for us and His Father to bridge the insurmountable gap between what **we** really are and what **God** really is. A distance that is by nature light years apart!

For Jehovah God indeed is perfectly holy. He cannot accept sin. He will not stand in the presence of sin. Thus sin must be banished and punished and the punishment is death. Now we must understand this point: God's grace is not overlooking sin, but rather it is providing for us a "stand-in." Someone who would take upon Himself the blame as well as the punishment for us. This is the act of God that is "apart from the law."

But do you understand what that word (in verse 24) "justified" means? It means "acquitted." It means "just-as-if-I-never-sinned." Yet you know you are guilty. That has already been established. Like millions of others perhaps your heart asks "What can I do? What can I do?" But God's position is "Oh, son...daughter, it is not what you can do but what I have done for you. You are guilty. I never have erased the fact that you are guilty, but I have dropped the charges. Somebody has paid the price for you that you deserve." Acquitted. You're free...

Therefore our righteousness, our justification, our very eternal salvation is acquired by placing our faith in Jesus Christ, and by acknowledging, accepting, and living in the daily light of this act which He has done on our behalf! This “winning ticket” is available for everyone because everyone has sinned and we all lack the “right stuff” to ever stand in the presence of God, let alone live with Him. Not for a minute or for eternity.

Verses 24-25 of our text, gives us the gospel, short and sweet. The NLT renders these verses as follows:

“Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.” (NLT)

Why did God do all of this? Why the years of the seemingly unending saga of the Old Testament? Seems like the ‘long way around’ to me. Why not grace and redemption about 10 minutes after Adam and Eve exited the garden? The answer is because honestly man has always believed he or she could handle it. That we don’t need a savior. That we can educate, legislate, mandate, and advance in science and social development far enough to not only save ourselves but even *thrive*! Perhaps even bask in the glory of who we are and our own achievements! But the fact is our social, political, and mental health is ‘circling the drain.’ Man is still practicing “mind over matter” and denying that society is sick. God was and still is showing mankind that we need a Savior! Because whether we want to deny it or not, we’re drowning. We will never save ourselves! We will never be right in the eyes of our Creator left to ourselves.

But even though we may not be righteous, HE is! The folks that grace those ancient pages of the Old Testament tried kings, prophets, judges and more in attempt to make the world work for them. All of it, as we know, failed miserably! We cannot find our way to God, but that reality simply was not acceptable to a Father that loves His children...His creation! Thus, in His love He paid the fine Himself, the debt that was owed on the accounts of all men and women throughout time. All that is left is our own action. Will we allow that credit to be placed on our account? The choice is ours...

In verses 27 and 28 Paul is emphatically stating that there is nothing you or I can add to this spiritual “symphony.” We are only “justified”, made righteous before God, by our faith in Christ and His payment on the cross for us. Nothing we can do can effect that payment, or sustain that payment, or finish that payment, save for our acceptance or denial of such. We cannot add to it with our good works, render it unnecessary, nor sin it out of existence!

The text here says we are “justified (made right with God) *by faith.*” But perhaps we need to clarify: *for just really what is this thing faith?* Faith, despite what a wide segment of the church is saying today, is not believing God is going to do something we have expressly asked for. Rather faith is trusting God to do what He sees fit and what is advantageous for us, and then resting in the position that He is God and will do what is right and holy. It is not what He will do for us that elicits such a faith, but what He has already done, and what He has promised concerning such!

“...is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

In verse 29 through 30 Paul asks the question that in his day would have effectively put him on the “death list” in the eyes of the Jewish powers that be. But he did not act as the proverbial “bull in the china shop.” He did not just throw such a radical concept out there like a hand-grenade. He had laid out the case, point by point through evidence and intelligent deduction. Paul scientifically presented empirical facts from which he drew his

position. This wouldn't have lessened the Jewish hatred toward him, but Paul was beyond that now. He was beyond the polite and genteel handling of the gospel. He, like Peter (1 Peter 2:8), came to understand that Jesus was indeed the "stone of stumbling, the rock of offense."

"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Finally now it is important to understand that the law...as we read in Galatians also...does not cease to exist because of this scriptural position, because of the truth of God's grace. No, it is still out there doing its job to "hammer the last nail in our coffin." It has and always will concrete our guilt and inability to find righteousness ourselves. With such a reality as this, what stands between us and redemption is not a matter of theological training or the understanding of deep spiritual theories. No, it is just whether we can get past ourselves, our pride, and acknowledge the truth.

The law points the way to Christ and His grace. And in our receiving and the embracing of His grace, we positionally fulfill the righteous standard of the law. Since He himself is righteous, holy, fair, and just, He becomes our "ringer"...our proxy. When we are now judged we are judged by the righteousness of Christ, not our own righteousness.

The facts of this passage are clear. No man will be accepted by God on the basis of his works, no matter how good he thinks he is. God is a holy and just God. He knows the hearts of all men. He knows that we are depraved. Because of Adam's sin, Romans 5 tells us, sin entered the world and death by sin. So, therefore, every man born of man and woman is born with a depraved heart, a depraved nature. Whatever he does and calls good, God says is as filthy rags in His eyes.

But the good news is that someone has paid the bill. Your credit card of sin was maxed out and it was *or is* going to take you an eternity to pay off that bill. How silly is it to keep denying that "you got this?" That you don't need intervention on that account? It's a fact that you know to be true and everyone knows to be true. Let Him pay the bill...because you never will.