

ROMANS – Righteousness

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What defines us? When people look at us, what comes first in their minds? Mark Twain saw two types of people. He once stated, “There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.” I work with someone who lies all the time. I work with another who tells you like it is – doesn’t sugar coat it. When I see him, first thought is he’s an honest man. The first man I try to avoid altogether. What we believe does shape who we are and we do at times live out these beliefs for the world to see. We started on Paul and his letter to the Christians in Rome last week. We talked about how he described himself as a servant/slave for Jesus and how he wanted the Roman Church to be a holy people. We also talked about how this letter by Paul was done through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God had given Paul a message to the Church like God gave messages to the prophets of the Old Testament. So, now we’re going to look at something that had shaped Paul’s theology and he wanted to make sure the Church didn’t waver with this belief since there was so much false teaching going on during the early days of the New Testament Church.

Romans 1:16-32

English Standard Version

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith,^[a] as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”^[b]

God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,^{1d} in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (ESV)

The Roman Empire was very pagan. Many of the people worshipped many different gods. So, Paul is making sure here that the Christians in Rome remember who the God

they worship really is. Paul makes the comment that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. In verse 4, Paul calls this the power of the spirit of holiness that does resurrection work. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will make those who believe in Jesus anew or will bring salvation to that person. It is the power of God through the gospel message that brings salvation to those who believe. We must spend some time here picking this apart. Paul uses the Greek term "soteria" for salvation. It means: rescue, deliverance and the state of believers being safe from righteous wrath in a proper relationship with God (Strong's Concordance). This is why many times in Psalms, king David would use the title "God of my salvation". David knew God had rescued him from the life of sin and death. When we confess our sins and allow Jesus into our hearts, we are rescued from the righteous wrath of God and because of the Holy Spirit that comes within us because of salvation: we can continue to have that proper relationship with the Lord without sin.

Now, let's look at this "righteous wrath" that is involved with the gift of salvation from Jesus. Righteousness is a major theological point with Paul in Romans. The term "righteousness" is used more in Romans than any other book / letter in the New Testament. So, Paul tells us through the Holy Spirit that within the plan of salvation, the righteousness of God is revealed. So, the first item we must understand is that God/Jesus/Holy Spirit are "righteous". The Greek term for "righteousness" used by Paul is "dikaiosyne" and it means justice, what is right, act of doing what is in agreement with God's standards and being in proper relationship with God (Strong's Concordance). Plus, when we hear about a righteous person, it means a people that is in accord with God's standards. In other words, righteousness comes from God and for us to be righteous, we must live out His standards of living. We must realize as well that God being righteous is very important. Part of salvation is being safe from the righteous wrath of God. This is why God sent His Son Jesus to the cross so that our sins can be forgiven. Sin is disobedience against God and because God is righteous, sin blocks God's righteousness for our lives. You can't live in sin and be righteous. You need Jesus to wash those sins away with His blood that was shed on the cross so that God's righteousness can flow through us and we can have a proper relationship with Him. If

God is not righteous, there would be no need for the cross of Jesus. Righteousness is the very nature of God. So, because of this righteousness, God has to punish sin. If God didn't do this, there would be no need for Jesus and we would be totally lost in sin with no hope. We need a righteous God so we know what sin is. However, since God is righteous, He has the right to judge His creation. The gods of Rome were not righteous gods. If you do any study of the gods of ancient Rome, they were corrupt as the humans were. Our God is holy and righteous. Paul states this to Timothy, a preacher in 2 Timothy 4: 8, "And now the prize awaits me – the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return. (NLT, 1944)" This is why God gave us the gift of salvation through His Son Jesus. Since God is righteous, sin has to be judged. I don't know about you, but I don't want to go to a Heaven where sin is. Part of salvation is knowing how evil sin is and how it destroys everything it touches. Sin has to be judged and those who want to live in sin will be judged as well as those who want to live a life of righteousness. There are only two destinations – Heaven or hell. Scripture is very plain on that. This is why Paul wanted Timothy to know there is a prize waiting for those who live and want to live a righteous life.

Paul wants the crown of righteousness. In fact, if we go back to Romans 1: 17, Paul lets the Christians in Rome know that since God is righteous, the righteous will live by faith. In other words, Christians are to be righteous as well. Now, in verse 17, the term "righteous" can also be "just", depending your translation. The Greek term used here is "dikaios" which means upright, just, God's proper standards and actions, someone in accord with God's standards (Strong's concordance). Peter preaches the same thing through the Holy Spirit in 1 Peter 3: 12, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (ESV)" Peter is quoting from Psalm 34: 12 – 16 here. This tells us that the Lord wanted His people to be righteous in the Old Testament and now that continues in the New Testament times which we live in. Peter also uses the same Greek term as Paul does for being just or righteous. This means we are to be upright, just, living out God's proper standards and actions in the time we are living in. So, let's put all of this

together. The Lord (Trinity) is righteous and the Lord is the righteous judge. Peter tells the Church this in 1 Peter 4: 17, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (ESV)" Peter is telling us the Lord will judge His Church and all people. The only way this can happen is for the Lord to be Righteous. He is perfect and holy and He is able to judge sin. So, if we say we are followers of Jesus, then we are to live out the Lord's righteousness through our lives. We want to live out His standards and His Holy Word tells us what His standards are through the Holy Spirit. We are called to be righteous like our Lord is. I do want to add that you can't be righteous until your past sins have been forgiven through Jesus and then His Spirit moves into your heart and mind and then His Spirit helps you to be righteous which is part of Holy living. His Spirit helps you to know and reminds you of God's standards for living on this earth. There is some false teaching going on right now that goes against the righteousness of God.

In the 1990's, a new theology started to be taught in some Christian schools. It's called Open Theology. They emphasize divine love and how people respond to it. They push the love element to the point where some who teach Open Theology say there is no hell because the Lord is not mean and that is not love to send people to hell. Now, there is other teachings that go along with Open Theology, but we'll just stay with the love verses hell part. If we say there is no hell or say there will be a special place for unbelievers where there is no suffering, it's already going against God's Word. We had just talked about what Peter said in 1 Peter 4: 17 about the Lord judging His Church and the sinner. Peter wouldn't lie to us because he is being lead by the Holy Spirit. This Open theology actually breaks down the righteousness of God. A righteous God has to punish those who He loves that sins. If God didn't punish, how could He love? A good parent punishes a child who does something bad so that they don't do it again. To me, real love can only come from a righteous God. The reason some are starting to embrace this new theology is because if God doesn't punish for unforgiven sin, then we can continue to sin or we can water down sin so that it doesn't sound bad. Many who

embrace Open Theology support the gay movement and other sin that this culture is embracing. I actually question their love for God here. If they are all about love, we don't want to practice sin that will hurt the Lord. We have to love the Lord with everything we have before we can love people correctly (Mark 12: 29 – 31). This theology also cheapens God's grace and cheapens the event of Jesus and the cross. Like we said earlier, Paul wanted to make sure the Church in Rome remembered about God being righteous because the gods of Rome were not. Paul would tell us the same thing today. This new teaching does have some truth in it about love, but they pick and choose from Scripture to fit their false teaching. It goes against Paul's teachings. God is the righteous Judge and we should be thankful for that.

I don't know about you, but as I see this world becoming more sinful, the more I want to live a righteous life. I want to live out God's standards not the standards from a new theology that is made from human thought and not from the leading of the Holy Spirit. To do this, I must ask for help from Jesus and He is faithful. His Spirit will help me to live out God's standards for a moral and Godly life. It is the only way to live. Ask the Lord to help you to want to be righteous like He wants you to be.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001