

The Righteousness of God Revealed

According to verse 21, more wonderful news awaits us!

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” (Romans 3:21)

Purposefully, the phrase, *“the righteousness of God,”* is inserted twice in Romans 3:21-22. Neither is it accidental that *“His righteousness”* is recorded twice in Romans 3:25-26. Paul’s goal is to prove that God is righteous and, in the process, disprove his critic’s argument in verse 5—that his (Paul’s) teaching led one to believe that God is unrighteous.

To be righteous means “to be right.” God has always been righteous (right), a righteousness (rightness) that will continue throughout eternity future. He is correct, accurate, just, exact, precise, and more in all matters, regardless of what accusation man directs His way. In fact, His righteousness and holiness result in glory being manifested when He appears—as demonstrated in Exodus 24:16-18, Exodus 40:34-35, 1Kings 8:11, Ezekiel 1:28, 3:23, 8:4, 9:3, 10:4, 10:18-19, 11:22-23, and additional Old Testament passages. God’s glory was manifested often during Old Testament times, each appearance validating His *“righteousness”* (Romans 3:21).

God’s *“righteousness...has been manifested”* (Romans 3:21) even more magnificently through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. According to New Testament Scripture, Jesus is *“God”*:

But of the Son He [the Father] says, “THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.”
(Hebrews 1:8)

Jesus is, therefore, *“righteous”*:

My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (1John 2:1)

Accordingly, Jesus possesses the same *“glory”* as that of *“the Father”*:

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Paul wrote that Jesus is the visible manifestation *“of the invisible God”*:

And He is the image of the invisible God,... (Colossians 1:15)

Thus, Jesus could state with much boldness:

... *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*;... (John 14:9)

Jesus is, hence, “*one*” with “*the Father*”:
“*I and the Father are one.*” (John 10:30)

Not only was the Father’s righteousness “*revealed*” through Jesus’ life, but His righteousness was also revealed through Jesus’ death— which explains Paul’s words of Romans 1:17:

“*For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...*” (Romans 1:17)

The necessity of the cross is progressively revealed to those who passionately pursue truth. So, God’s “*righteousness...is revealed from faith to faith*” as we mature in the faith.

Because the God of the gospel is righteous, Paul describes the Scriptures (God’s letter to man) as “*holy*”:

which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, (Romans 1:2)

Peter describes the Scriptures as “*pure*”:

long for the pure milk of the word, (1Peter 2:2)

Jesus describes the Scriptures as “*truth*”:

...*Thy word is truth.* (John 17:17)

Therefore the gospel is unadulterated truth, free of contradiction. Otherwise, it is error—a fact disregarded by an increasing number of “so called” believers. Should the gospel contain contradiction, God would be a contradiction—and thus unrighteous. Praise God that the gospel, when studied in context and according to all the Scriptures rather than a select few interpreted out of context, is free of even the slightest inconsistency. Otherwise, God is not the righteous, holy, just, and sovereign Ruler of the universe He claims to be.

God must be righteous, for His “*righteousness*” (Romans 3:21) is what allows Him to make the repentant, believing sinner righteous. In other words, remove God’s righteousness and He can make no man righteous.

God’s righteousness was vividly displayed through both the giving of the Law and the cross of Christ. However, a great disparity exists between what either could accomplish.

God’s righteousness was powerfully manifested on Mount Sinai as He spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel (Exodus 20:1-19). However, their response exposed the weakness of the Law:

And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."
(Exodus 20:18-19)

Instead of the conditional covenant of Law drawing the Israelites to Jehovah, it hampered their fellowship with their Creator: "*but let not God speak to us, lest we die*" (Exodus 20:19). This fact proves that even though God's righteousness has been revealed through the Law, the Law is incapable of establishing an intimate relationship between God and man. Thus, the deeds of the Law can never result in salvation:

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

Although the sacrifices offered under the Law covered sin (when offered in faith), they could never remove sin:

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
(Hebrews 10:4)

If the Law is broken in one point, it is broken in all points:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (James 2:10)

Actually, the Law was given not so we might earn our salvation through keeping its requirements, but as a means through which God could break us—show us our need for a Savior:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

In fact, the Law was given so we might sin more, and in turn, recognize our sinful state:

And the Law came in that the transgression might increase;... (Romans 5:20)

Therefore, the old covenant of Law is inadequate to save:

who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter [Law] kills, but the Spirit gives life.
(2Corinthians 3:6)

Yet, "*the Law is holy*":

So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (Romans 7:12)

“*The Law is holy*” because it functions in the manner that God prescribes: It convicts the depraved of their need for a Savior. This truth makes Paul’s words of 2Corinthians 3:7-11 extremely intriguing:

But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. (2Corinthians 3:7-11)

The old covenant (Law) “*kills*” and is, thus, totally incapable of making a person righteous. Therefore, it came with “*fading...glory.*” The new covenant of grace, however, empowered by God’s “*Spirit,*” came with “*even more...glory,*” “*glory...which remains*”— which explains John’s words in John 1:17:

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

These passages also explain the transformation that occurred in the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Having chosen to repent and believe prior to Acts 2, they (on Pentecost) were empowered by the Holy Spirit so they might understand the accomplishments of Christ in light of the Old Testament Scriptures. This fact is confirmed by Peter’s words in Acts 2:14-26, where he used Old Testament passages to validate Jesus’ Messiahship. Even Jesus, prior to His ascension and, thus, prior to Pentecost, showed two traveling companions every instance where He is mentioned in the Old Testament:

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27)

The only “*Scriptures*” available at that time were those of the Old Testament, for none of the New Testament books were yet written. Even Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 was inundated with Old Testament truth. Stephen’s closing words included this statement:

“Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; (Acts 7:52)

Yes, the Old Testament “*prophets...announced the coming of the Righteous One.*”

Conclusion: The Old Testament “*Law*” and “*Prophets*” are filled with truth regarding the suffering Messiah and the new covenant that would follow. As a result of the new covenant, our righteous God makes us righteous subsequent to our exercising repentance and faith while depraved. Thus Paul writes:

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” (Romans 3:21)

Paul’s point in Romans 3:21 is that God’s righteousness is bestowed to man “*apart from the Law,*” a truth “*witnessed by*” the portion of the Bible known as “*the Law and the Prophets.*” For example, Abraham came on the scene in the book of Genesis, a section of the Bible known as “*the Law,*” consisting of Genesis through Deuteronomy. Abraham is first mentioned in Genesis 11:26-32. God declared him righteous on the basis of his (Abraham’s) faith (Genesis 15:6) prior to issuing the Law in Exodus 20—proving that God declared Abraham righteous “*apart from the Law*” even though it is mentioned in one of the five books of the Bible titled “*the Law.*” Romans 3:21 makes an extremely valid statement.

This “*righteousness of God*” “*apart from the Law*” is also “*witnessed by...the Prophets*” (Romans 3:21). For instance, Isaiah the prophet “*witnessed*” (prophesied) that a suffering Savior would die for the sin of man, Jesus being the avenue through which “*righteousness*” would be bestowed (apart from the Law) to those who repent and believe while depraved:

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:6)

By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? (Isaiah 53:8)

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)

Jesus’ sacrifice, not the sacrifices offered under the Law, allowed Him to “*justify*” (Isaiah 53:11) us—make us as righteous as Himself. Thus, Isaiah spoke of the bestowal of God’s righteousness upon those who repent and believe in the portion of the Old Testament known as the Prophets.

Romans 4:6-8 also teaches that David, a prophet, spoke “*of the blessings upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works,*” that is, “*apart from*” the “*works*” of the Law.

God communicated through the prophet Jeremiah that a day would come when He would establish a “*new covenant*” that would replace the old covenant of Law:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

This new covenant came about as a result of Jesus’ death, which is recorded in New Testament Scripture:

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. (Luke 22:19-20)

The “*new covenant*” is also addressed in the book of Hebrews, the writer quoting Jeremiah 31:31-33:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, “BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. “FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM UPON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. “AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, ‘KNOW THE LORD,’ FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. “FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.” When He said, “A new covenant,” He has made the

first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:6-13)

This “*new covenant*” ushered in the age of “*grace*,” which allowed Paul to state that the New Testament believer is “*not under Law, but under grace*”:

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

We live in the age of “*grace*” because Jesus, our high priest, serves under a different priesthood than is required by the Law. The priesthood associated with the Law is the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus, on the other hand, is a “*priest...according to the order of Melchizedek*”:

For it is witnessed of Him, “THOU ART A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.” (Hebrews 7:17)

Based on the book of Hebrews, “*when the priesthood is changed,*” the “*law*” changes as well:

for when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. (Hebrews 7:12)

Through becoming “*partakers*” of the new covenant of “*grace*” (Philippians 1:7), we live under the “*law [or principle] of the Spirit*”—which brings “*life*.” We no longer live under “*the letter*” of the old covenant of Law—which results in “*death*” (Romans 8:2; 2Corinthians 3:6):

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. (Philippians 1:7)

For the law [principle] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:2)

who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2Corinthians 3:6)

By means of the new covenant, therefore, God imparts His righteousness to all who repent and believe while depraved:

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2Corinthians 5:21)

The fact that God would impart His righteousness to the repentant sinner apart from the Law is taught not only in the portion of the Old Testament known as the Law but also in the portion of the Old Testament known as the Prophets (Romans 3:21).

Isn't it wonderful to know that once you were placed in Christ, subsequent to repenting and believing while depraved, you were made as righteous in the Father's eyes as Jesus is righteous in the Father's eyes? Wow! This subject is covered in great depth as we continue, so magnificent news awaits us. Furthermore, Romans 3:21 lines up perfectly with the full counsel of God's Word.