

CONCERNING THE WAY

August 31, 2010

LESSON 110: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS



Chapter 3 – The Verdict and the Solution

In chapter 2 Paul made it clear that Israel's Law, their circumcision, and their birth could not save them. Now chapter 3 verses 1-8 Paul anticipates some arguments from Jews in response to this. You'll see the theoretical objections in the even-numbered verses, and Paul's answer to each objection is in the odd numbered verses. Why does Paul keep going on and on about the Jews and the Law? Because religion had taken over the Jews (Judaism). There's nothing more seductive than religion - pietistic, "look-how-good-I-am" religion.

Romans 3:1-2 *Therefore what advantage does the Jew have, or what is the value of circumcision? (2) Actually, there are many advantages. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

So, if the Jews are condemned along with the Gentiles, what good is it being the chosen people of God, and what value is there to circumcision? Paul answers that there are many. He gives a list later in chapter 11, but just gives us one example here. **The Jews were "entrusted", or were the "custodians" of the words which God had spoken.** The Greek word translated "oracles" here is "logion", which comes from "logos" (the word), and Strong's defines as the "utterance of God". Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 5:12 confirm that the "Oracles" of God are the Old Testament scriptures – the Law and the Prophets. What a great privilege that is! It was not given to anyone but the Jews. They were responsible for hearing it, writing it down, and transmitting it. That is of immeasurable worth. Of course, having it doesn't do you much good if you don't read it and obey it.

Romans 3:3-4 *What then? If some did not believe, does their unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? (4) Absolutely not! Let God be proven true, and every human being shown up as a liar, just as it is written: "so that you will be justified in your words and will prevail when you are judged."*

Even though the Jews were entrusted with the Word of God, many of them did not understand it or obey it. So, since they were God's chosen people, does their failure mean God is unfaithful? Since Israel failed in the Old Testament, does that mean God failed? Paul's answer is absolutely not! **That was human failure and meant to be an example to us.** God is still true. Paul is continuing to discuss the issue that he started in chapter 2 of people blaspheming God because of the Jews unfaithfulness. In verse 4 he is quoting Psalm 51:4. This concept of God's faithfulness in spite of Israel's unbelief is developed more fully in Romans 9-11.

We must never look at people to evaluate God's word and God Himself. People, including Christian people, can do crazy or hurtful things and can let us down. People can disappoint you. **Stop looking at people and start looking at Christ.**

Romans 3:5-6 *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is he? (I am speaking in human terms.) (6) Absolutely not! For otherwise how could God judge the world?*

The Jewish failure actually shows God's righteousness. The more sinful the human race the greater contrast between us and God, and the more glory God gets. Verse 5 is a clever but illogical argument. It's twisting scripture to make what is evil appear to be ultimately good. It's basically saying that God doesn't have the right to judge the human race, since our evil just highlights God's goodness. Paul's answer is again, absolutely not! **If God cannot judge people, then who can?**

Even if the whole human race fails and is completely wiped out, God is still justified. If God judges the human race, does that make Him unrighteous? Does that make Him a mean God? No, God is right in inflicting His wrath on the human race. Paul says "I am speaking in human terms" because only foolish human reasoning would ever question God's justice.

What, exactly, was the Jews' unrighteousness?

1. **National disobedience to God's oracles from Sinai onward.**
2. **Such neglect of these oracles, that at times (as in King Josiah's day), a single copy of the Law was a rarity!**
3. **Pride over their position as the possessors of these oracles, even the despising of nations that didn't have them, instead of ministering the oracles to others (as Psalm 67 shows was Israel's real business).**
4. **Appalling ignorance of the spiritual meaning of the Divine oracles, and of the "voices of their prophets," so they even killed their Messiah! (Acts 13:27)."**

Romans 3:7-8 For if by my lie the truth of God enhances his glory, why am I still actually being judged as a sinner? (8) And why not say, "Let us do evil so that good may come of it"? — as some who slander us allege that we say. (Their condemnation is deserved!)

This is something that the Jews had accused Paul of teaching. Since he was teaching that we're not under the Law any more, the Jews assumed he was teaching that you could just completely disregard the precepts of the Law, and had license to sin. If God gets glory when I sin, then why shouldn't I just keep sinning, so God can be glorified even more! Let's do whatever we want to do! Paul says people who think that way will be condemned and deserve it.

"But if we, professing Christians, consign this whole passage to the Jew, we fall directly into the same terrible trap. Whole multitudes today in Christendom, sheltered in their imagination by the fact that they have "joined" some church, resent the very doctrines that Paul here insists on. Thousands of so-called "church-members" not only have never been brought under real conviction of sin and guilt and personal danger, but rise in anger like the Jews of Paul's day when one preaches their danger directly to them!

Now if God paid no attention whatever to the claim of the Jew to be exempt from judgment because he was a Jew, neither will He pay any attention to the claim of the "Baptist" or "Presbyterian," "Episcopalian" or "Methodist,"—as such. For all men are alike guilty, common sinners! What avails before a holy God the special religious names sinners may call themselves? This book of Romans will do you and me no good if we apply it to Jews or Mormons only!" William Newell

All right, Paul has brought accusations against the pagan Gentiles, moral people, and the Jews. He

has said that they are all lost. Now Paul is going to begin his summary to this whole section about sin that he began in chapter 1.

Romans 3:9 *What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin,*

Paul is probably referring to his fellow Jews when he asks “Are we better off?” Jews have advantages over Gentiles but God does not give them preferential treatment. Everyone is condemned. We’ll see Paul later in chapter 6 speak of being “under grace” with our sins pardoned and ourselves justified. This expression “under sin” is an unusual one. We see the same expression and context in Galatians 3:22:

Galatians 3:22 *But the scripture imprisoned everything and everyone under sin so that the promise could be given — because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ — to those who believe.*

“under sin” is a larger expression than “guilty of sin,” or, “in bondage to sin.” It is a general state described, as of convicts in a prison, or disease-stricken people “under quarantine.” An even stronger expression concerning human beings, Gentiles or Jews, is later in Romans:

Romans 11:32 *For God has consigned all people to disobedience so that he may show mercy to them all.*

C. F. D. Moule says, *“Being brought under sin, (as the Greek bids us more exactly render), giving us the thought that the race has fallen from a good estate into an evil.”*

Now Paul brings the “indictments”. In a courtroom, an indictment is “a formal written statement framed by a prosecuting attorney and found by a jury charging a person with an offense.” Every indictment must have at least one count. The more counts, the more serious the crime. This is about all of us, not just Jews (verse 9). Paul uses a series of Old Testament passages to indict the human race on fourteen counts!

Romans 3:10-18 *just as it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one, (11) there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God. (12) All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one." (13) "Their throats are open graves, they deceive with their tongues, the poison of asps is under their lips." (14) "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." (15) "Their feet are swift to shed blood, (16) ruin and misery are in their paths, (17) and the way of peace they have not known." (18) "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Verses 10-12 (the first six counts) are from Psalm 14:1-3:

Count 1 - *There is no one righteous, not even one* - Remember that God’s standards of righteousness and our standards of righteousness are not even close. It doesn’t matter how much good you do, if you have committed one sin, you are unrighteous. We just don’t have the righteousness that is necessary to live with God in His eternal home.

“No human being has in himself ever been righteous. Even Adam was not righteous: he was innocent—not knowing good and evil. Let us put far from our minds the fond falsehoods of philosophy,

science, and human “religions,” that there have been men of our race who have attained to a standing before God in righteousness. ‘ Newell

Count 2 - *there is no one who understands* – understanding here is not mental, but a spiritual understanding. The lost just can’t “get it” spiritually, they are completely lacking in spiritual discernment (Ephesians 4:17-18).

“Now humanity, by nature, “understands” nothing of God. Men think they do, and write vast books on the subject; but God’s sentence remains: “There is none that understand.”” Newell

Count 3 - *there is no one who seeks God* – How can this be true when we have a world filled with churches and temples, and billions of people who flock to them? Surely some people are truly seeking God, even if they’re looking for Him in Islam or Hinduism, aren’t they? Well, God says here that no one is seeking the one true holy God, creator of the universe. That’s a tough one to swallow, isn’t it? We know that many people in Christian churches are seeking God, but they have been drawn by the Holy Spirit, that’s the only reason they are seeking. Many others are not there because they are seeking God, but for their own selfish reasons. As far as people in other religions are concerned, we can look to 1 Corinthians 10:20 for the answer:

1 Corinthians 10:20 *I mean that what the pagans sacrifice is to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons.*

People in other religions are not seeking or worshipping God, but demons.

The third count in this indictment is the basis for the theology of the depravity of man. Innately, we have no “spark”, or “guiding light” from God, nothing in us that would make us want anything to do with God. David says this also in Psalm 53:1-3. This is why the term “seeker-sensitive” church is so silly. Innately, there are no seekers of God. Anyone who seeks God has been drawn by the Holy Spirit.

“No human being has ever sought the holy God. Conscious of his creature weakness, and also of responsibility and guilt, and filled with terrors of conscience, or terrors directly demon-wrought; or perhaps under the delusion that some “god” (really, demon) might grant him this or that favor, man has built his temples and conducts his worship. Banish from your mind the idea that any human being has ever had a holy thought, or love for a holy God, in his natural heart!” Newell

Count 4 - *All have turned away* – God has given mankind a Way, a route, to obtain eternal life. But we have turned away from that route, and gone our own way. The picture in the Greek is like a camel caravan in the desert that strayed from the route and can’t return to the proper path.

Count 5 - *together they have become worthless* - Notice it says “become” worthless. The human race didn’t start that way. They were created perfectly, in God’s image. But they have become useless, like salt without its flavor or fruit that has become rotten. This doesn’t mean humans are useless in the world. But humans can’t do anything useful to contribute to their salvation. And they can’t produce anything which pleases God.

Count 6 - *there is no one who shows kindness, not even one* – now wait a minute, lots of unbelievers do good, don’t they? Sure, people can do good in the world. But no one can do anything that has spiritual or eternal value. The world’s goodness is nothing compared with the goodness of God. Remember this is God’s evaluation of humanity, not ours. Everyone thinks they’re a good

person, partially because we've been telling every child that in public schools for so long, no matter how they behave.

But here it is, folks, from the mouth of God. **There is no human goodness that measures up to God's goodness.** As far as righteousness is concerned, our goodness is nothing but filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). There is no true goodness in our lives without the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even as believers, we struggle with our motives, doing good for the right reasons.

Verse 13 (the next 3 counts) come from Psalm 5:9 and Psalm 140:3.

Count 7 - *Their throats are open graves* – this is very specific, and is the main way that we sin outwardly – with our mouth. It is a very graphic way to describe the way the world uses their mouths. Do you question this? Have you watched any TV or movies lately? Jesus spoke of the problem with our mouths in Matthew 15:11.

Count 8 - *they deceive with their tongues* – speaking of television..., how about commercials? The wholly accepted methods of advertising today try to make something out of nothing and make promises that can't be kept. This is simple deception, as is our own personal attempts to deceive, and that's proof of the world's unrighteousness.

Count 9 - *the poison of asps is under their lips* – the natural man's speech is compared to venom of a snake which is located in a pouch under its lips. They have poison ready to be injected into another person when they want to strike.

Count 10 - *Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness* – from Psalm 10:7. The mouth that was created to praise God and speak the truth has been perverted to speaking like Satan. You don't have to teach a person to curse – it comes naturally out of our sin nature. It shows the bitterness and sin inside a person.

Verses 15-17 (the next three counts) is a quote from Isaiah 59:7-8. Paul turns from speaking of people's words to their actions.

Count 11 - *Their feet are swift to shed blood* – man's history of wars and violent abuse of his fellow man is proof of this accusation. Just read your daily papers to get all you want of this. Also read Proverbs 1:8-19).

Count 12 - *ruin and misery are in their paths* – this is what sinful man not only creates wherever he goes, but also will definitely receive. Calamity and misery always come to a sinner who seeks happiness and fulfillment apart from Jesus Christ (see James 4:2-3).

Count 13 - *the way of peace they have not known* – people can never find lasting peace with others until they have made peace with their creator. The United Nations and peace efforts in the Mideast are all doomed to failure, because the people who are involved in those efforts are not at peace with God.

Count 14 - *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* – from Psalm 36:1, this final count is the most terrible, the source of all the other counts. All the characteristics of humans we have seen listed here come from the fact that they do not fear God. The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, so in not fearing God the world has rejected wisdom altogether. Only the external force of

the Holy Spirit of God can break the cycle of humankind's ignorance, arrogance, and guilt.

"To fear God consists in having such a due sense of the majesty and holiness and justice and goodness of God, as shall make us thoroughly fearful to offend Him. For each of these attributes of God is proper to raise a suitable fear in every Christian mind." Newell

"This great passage then, (verses 9 to 18) needs to be pondered, prayed over, thoroughly believed, and preached continually, in these last days, when God-consciousness is dying out. It is no kindness, but a terrible wrong, to hide from a criminal the sentence that must surely overtake him unless pardoned; for a physician to conceal from a patient a cancer that will destroy him unless quickly removed; for one acquainted with the hidden pitfalls of a path he beholds someone taking, not to warn him of his danger!" Newell

Romans 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

Paul left no basis whatsoever for Jewish readers to say that his point that Jews are sinners contradicts the Old Testament! But also, the law is a standard that not only measures the Jews, but also stands as a measure for the whole world. It shows how far everyone has fallen short of the standards of God.

In most courtrooms the accused has the opportunity to mount a defense, using witnesses, muddling of the issues, conflicting evidence, and convincing speeches. But at the final judgment bar of God, there will be no defense. Anyone who thinks they will be able to defend themselves or bargain with God is in for a rude shock. No one will have an answer, every mouth will be silenced.

Romans 3:20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

The charge has been made, and the indictments have been read. The only thing left is the verdict. There's no defense, because no case can be made to support humanity. **The verdict is guilty. Case closed.**

Two very clear statements here – NO ONE is declared righteous by keeping the law. There is no law anywhere that can justify a person. The other is that one of the purposes of the giving of the Law was to teach us what sin was. It shows us what a Grand Canyon gulf there is between us and what God demands. Verse 20 is so offensive to the mind of fallen man. We would prefer to have a list of things we must do to be righteous. Newell says it best:

"Christendom has become fixed in its defense of its "religious" convictions. Scripture names, doctrines and ordinances—falsely explained—have seized hold upon the convictions of men, so that it is more difficult to dislodge them from their position than the heathen themselves. We know from Scripture, for example, that "days, seasons, months and years," do not belong to the Christian position in the least degree, but are Jewish or pagan in origin. Christmas, Lent, Easter, the whole "church calendar," forms, ritualism, the confessional, the mass, clergy,—where are these found in the Epistles of the New Testament? They are not found! Yet try once to dislodge them from those in whose hearts they have been planted! For their heart-hopes are bound up with these false traditions." Newell

I know we have said some of these things over and over. An old German educator said: "The first

principle of teaching is repetition; and the second principle of teaching is repetition; and the third principle is repetition.”

The Solution

Now finally, after we've been beat up by Paul for the last 63 verses, he finally gets to the amazing good news. The pagans are guilty, the moralists are guilty, and the Jews are guilty. No law can save us, we can't save ourselves, and we can't possibly be good enough. What can be done for us? Is there no hope?

Romans 3:21-24 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed — (22) namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, (23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (24) But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The phrase “But now” is very important. All of these things Paul has been saying are true. Paul uses this term 18 times in his epistles, when transitioning from a dark, gloomy picture, to something wonderful that God does for us! We're in such a deep hole that only God can get us out. God has to enter our world so we can enter His world.

Verse 21 is saying that this righteousness, the righteousness of God, is apart from any law. Never forget that! Totally separate from any law-performance, or any works of man whatsoever. Verse 22 says that this righteousness has been revealed by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). And that righteousness is only available to all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.

“If you put believers under law, you must put their federal Head, Christ, back under law; for “as He is, even so are we in this world.” To do this you must reverse Calvary, and have Christ back again on earth “under law.” For law, we repeat, was not given to a heavenly company, but to an earthly nation. Scripture says it was to redeem that earthly people (Israel) who were under law, that Christ was “born under the Law” (Gal. 4:4). You must thus, if you are “under law,” be joined to a Christ belonging to Israel, a flesh and blood Christ; and must consent to be an Israelite—to which nation He was sent. But alas! You find that such a Christ is not here! That He said He must “abide alone,”—like the grain of wheat unless it “fall into the ground and die.” To an earthly, Jewish Christ, you therefore cannot be united. And so your vain hope of having Moses and Christ is wholly gone. Therefore you must be united with a Risen Christ, or with none at all!” Newell

There is no distinction with God, by race, color, religion, social status, or works. All that counts is that you believe in Christ's work on the cross for your sin. Why is that? Paul says in verse 23 because ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What is the glory of God? In the Old Testament it was His presence that was present in the Jewish temple. But now the glory of God resides in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14).

The glory of God is Jesus Christ. You can also see passages that speak of this in Acts 7:55, 2 Corinthians 4:6. So Paul is simply saying that no one measures up to the sinlessness, the righteousness, of Jesus Christ. **The standard of God today is not the Mosaic Law, but the person of Jesus Christ. We can try to live righteous lives, but we can never measure up to His perfect righteousness.** Anyone who thinks that we can live perfect lives doesn't understand God's standard

– they are bringing the righteousness of Christ down to our level. That’s totally missing the point. We can never measure up. That’s why we need the righteousness of Christ.

“it is God’s righteousness; it is apart from our right-doing—that is, law-keeping altogether; for keeping law would be the only way man could get a righteousness of his own. But the moment we mention righteousness here, people can hardly be restrained from the notion that they are to have a new quality bestowed upon them. Since they have themselves lost this quality of righteousness, they are anxious to get it back,—the consciousness of it. But this is really self-righteousness,—and that at its worst.” Newell

Notice the tense in verse 23. “All have sinned”, past tense, and “fall short” in the present tense. We continue to fall short. Complete and total justification through Christ’s work on the cross is the only cure for that.

Verse 24 brings up another huge point. This justification is given freely. It is a gift, given by the grace of God. It is not something we earn or deserve. Something can’t be earned by merit and be a gift at the same time. It is one or the other. **The word never means to make one righteous, or holy; but to account one righteous. Justification is not a change wrought by God in us, but a change of our relation to God.** Like any gift, all we have to do is accept it.

It is free to us, but not free to God. It was bought by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It was His sacrifice of blood that paid for it (Matthew 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 1 Peter 1:18-19). He was sacrificed once for all. The price was paid in full. The gift of justification is also given to us once and in full. There’s nothing we can do to earn it and there’s nothing we have to do to keep it.

Does Christ need to do something else to be accepted by the Father? No, He is accepted for all eternity. And so are we when we trust Christ. There is nothing else we have to do, we are accepted for all eternity. We are in Christ, and nothing can take us out of Him. (John 10:10-30) **Our relationship now to God is that of standing in the same acceptance as Christ; and we have the same Spirit of sonship as Christ!**

“We do not need therefore a personal “standing” before God at all. This is the perpetual struggle of legalistic theology,—to state how we can have a “standing” before God. But to maintain this is still to think of us as separate from Christ (instead of dead and risen with Him), and needing such a “standing.” But if we are in Christ in such an absolute way that Christ Himself has been made unto us righteousness, we are immediately relieved from the need of having any “standing.” Christ is our standing, Christ Himself! And Christ being the righteousness of God, we, being thus utterly and vitally in Christ before God, have no other place but in Him. We are “the righteousness of God in Christ.””
Newell

These are giant theological verses. Martin Luther said these verses are the very center and kernel of the letter of Romans. Paul is saying that the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been given to all who believe in Him. “Justified” means legally acquitted, declared innocent of wrongdoing, or righteous. It is much more than just being pardoned, a thousand times more than forgiveness. If you do me wrong, I can forgive you. But I can’t justify you. Only God can do that. **When God justifies a person, He says, “I pronounce you a righteous person. From now on I am going to treat you as if you never committed any sin.”** This concept was first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 15:6:

Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. (NASB)

Now everyone who thinks of righteousness tends to think of good deeds. But that's not the point here. God declared Him to be righteous and so he would go to heaven. Did that make Abraham perfect in his daily walk? No, it obviously did not. It didn't change his behavior, but his relationship with God. This is the basis for salvation all the way through the Bible. It's about believing in what God has said. It's only the object of belief that has changed. Abraham did not know Jesus Christ back then, but he believed in the promises God had given him.

It is the same with us today, only our object of belief is the Lord Jesus Christ. If we believe in what God has said about His son (Isaiah 53:10-12), which includes trusting in His death for our sins, then **God DECLARES us righteous (that's what justified means), it is put to my account. This has nothing to do with behavior. God from then on sees Christ's righteousness, not my own.** There's an exchange here. I give Christ my sins, and He gives me His righteousness and eternal life in heaven. Oh, thank you, Lord!

"Take the Reformers: God brought them back, in principle, to the Scriptures as their only guide. But, after mounting up to Heaven as it were, in personal grasp and use of the truth of justification by faith apart from all works, yet the Reformers put Christians back under Moses as a "rule of life," under law..."

Godly and earnest men have thus held; but the only question is, what are the words of Scripture? We must "prove all things" men write, in the light of Scripture: for God says we are not under law: and that the "rule of life" is, that we are a new creation (Gal. 6:15, 16). Is the Pauline revelation that we died with Christ from all earthly "religious principles" (Col 2:20), (such as God declares the Mosaic system now to be: Gal. 4:9)—is this glorious fact once set forth in all the reformed "standards"? By no means! Believers were not seen by the Reformers as having had their history ended at the cross, and being now wholly in a new creation. Neither did the Puritans enter into this truth. This Pauline doctrine was not fully recovered until God wrought,—again in a reviving, almost a Reformation power, through godly and devoted servants of His, 300 years after Luther and Calvin." Newell

Romans 3:25 **God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed.**

Some translations may use the word "propitiation" here instead of mercy seat, but that's what the word means, a place of mercy. Remember what the mercy seat was in the Old Testament? It was the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God met mankind. The Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy of Holies in the temple, where the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled for sin. This action by the priest was to satisfy the holiness of God (remember that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin - Hebrews 9:22). Jesus Christ became our place of mercy, and that mercy is only available through faith - not by law, not by works.

The second sentence there explains that the sins that were brought to the mercy seat in the temple were not actually forgiven and done away with. The sprinkling of blood did not actually satisfy His holiness, but God in his patience passed over all the sins committed in the past before the death of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ was passed back upon all the people's sins previously committed. Christ's death is the only thing that pays for sin, which actually satisfies God's holiness.

Why did God not always punish sins in the past? Does this mean He is not righteous after all?

Previously Paul said God was forbearing because He wanted to lead people to repent (Rom. 2:4). Here God is said to be forbearing because He anticipated His provision for sins in the death of Jesus Christ. Such forbearance was an evidence of His grace (cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30), not of His injustice.

God's divine dilemma was how to satisfy His own righteousness and its demands against sinful people, and at the same time how to demonstrate His grace, love, and mercy to restore rebellious, alienated creatures to Himself. The solution was the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, and the acceptance by faith of that provision by individual sinners. Christ's death vindicated God's own righteousness (He is just because sin was "paid for") and enables God to declare every believing sinner righteous. John Walvoord

Romans 3:26 This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness.

The sacrifice of Christ not only atoned for all past sins, but all present and future sin as well. So God will permanently justify anyone who places their faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:27-28 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith! (28) For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law.

This gift of justification completely blows away our ability to boast in our works, our righteousness. Forget about it, you can't boast in yourself (also Ephesians 2:9). You're only righteous because of your faith in Christ. If you could work to keep your justification, then you would have reason to boast. And Paul states clearly again that a person is declared righteous by faith, not by obeying the commandments of the law.

Are you getting all this? It's not hard to understand, is it? Paul is making it as clear as day. But, sadly, people still get it wrong. They always want to add something to it.

Romans 3:29-30 Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of the Gentiles too! (30) Since God is one, he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

In case there are Gentiles reading this that might be thinking this is just about the Jews, or Jews who are questioning that the Gentiles can also receive this grace, Paul reminds us that God is God of all of us, and all of us can be justified by faith, no matter who we are.

Romans 3:31 Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! Instead we uphold the law.

So if we're acquitted by faith, is the law useless? Do we throw it away? No, the law is fulfilled through Christ in me. Since we have Christ's righteousness, it is He who fulfills the law, not us. So, actually, by confessing our sins and asking God to forgive us through the work of Christ, we are upholding the Law. The purpose of the Mosaic Law is fulfilled and its place in God's total plan is confirmed when it leads an individual to faith in Jesus Christ (see v. 20; Galatians 3:23-25).

We'll wrap up chapter 3 with Newell's excellent summary of how this relates to us today...

RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS

If God announces the gift of righteousness apart from works, why do you keep mourning over your bad works, your failures? DO you not see that it is because you still have hopes in these works of yours that you are depressed and discouraged by their failure? If you truly saw and believed that God is reckoning righteous the ungodly who believe on Him, you would fairly hate your struggles to be "better"; for you would see that your dreams of good works have not at all commended you to God, and that your bad works do not at all hinder you from believing on Him,—that justifieth the ungodly!

Therefore, on seeing your failures, you should say, I am nothing but a failure; but God is dealing with me on another principle altogether than my works, good or bad,—a principle not involving my works, but based only on the work of Christ for me. I am anxious, indeed, to be pleasing to God and to be filled with His Spirit; but I am not at all justified, or accounted righteous, by these things. God, in justifying me, acted wholly and only on Christ's blood-shedding on my behalf.

Therefore I have this double attitude: first, I know that Christ is in Heaven before God for me, and that I stand in the value before God of His finished work; that God sees me nowhere else but in this dead, buried, and Risen Christ, and that His favor is toward me in Christ, and is limitless and eternal.

Then, second, toward the work of the Holy Spirit in me, my attitude is, a desire to be guided into the truth, to be obedient thereto, and to be chastened by God my Father if disobedient; to learn to pray in the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, and to be filled with a love for the Scriptures and for the saints and for all men.

Yet none of these things justifies me! I had justification from God as a sinner, not as a saint! My saintliness does not increase it, nor, praise God, do my failures decrease it!

William Newell