

Romans 3:5-8

Overview of Principles

We see the Holy Spirit setting up contrasts for us in the first two chapters of Romans between God and man:

Romans 1: Principles of Righteousness

The righteousness of God in His wrath against sin (Rom. 1:18)

The unrighteousness of man (Rom. 1:18-32).

Romans 2: Principles of Judgment

Man's judgment is hypocritical (Rom. 2:1), and there *is* respect of persons. From Romans 2:3 we get the principle of *relative righteousness*.

The judgment of God is according to truth, and there is *no* respect of persons.

God's judgment is according to man's deeds (Rom. 2:2, Rom. 2:6-11). This demonstrates the principle of *absolute righteousness*.

(No one gets privilege, no one gets special treatment. Everyone is measured up against the same standard of perfection.)

The Law of Conscience - Rom. 2:15

The Law of Moses - Rom. 2:17

Romans 3: Principles of Condemnation and Justification

Since God's judgment is according to man's deeds (Rom. 2:2, 2:6-11), and all have sinned, all are naturally condemned:

Condemnation - Rom. 3:9-10, 20, 23

Justification - Rom. 3:22, 24, 26-28

Justification operational through the Law of Faith

Operational Laws

The Law of Conscience - Rom. 2:15

The Law of Moses - Rom. 2:17

The Law of Faith - Rom. 3:27

The Law of Sin and Death - Rom. 7:23, Rom. 5:12, Rom. 1:32

The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ - Rom. 8:2

Romans 3:5-8

⁵*But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)*

⁶*God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

⁷*For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*

⁸*And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.*

Romans 3:5

But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

This verse occurs on the tail of Paul's statement,

...let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

(V4)

And so our admission of guilt and unrighteousness before God *commends* His righteousness.

To *commend* here means *to acknowledge as praiseworthy*; to be *worthy of notice and approval*; to be *taken notice of as acceptable and right*.

Our unrighteousness calls attention to the perfect righteousness of God.

And so if our *unrighteousness* calls attention to God's *perfect* righteousness, *what shall we say?*

Is God then unrighteous to take vengeance upon mankind?

Paul here includes the parenthetical statement,

I speak as a man.

This is a hypothetical statement from the perspective of natural man, who has no spiritual discernment.

We've all heard people say things like,

No one's perfect, but God still loves us; we're all God's children.

This is the idea—that the natural man, being ignorant of God’s righteousness and demand for absolute justice, is unaware of the truth that God will judge *all sin*, regardless of whether you acknowledge *Him* alone as righteous and yourself a sinner.

Everyone of all time will eventually acknowledge that God alone is True and Righteous and Holy. *Every knee will bow* to Jesus Christ the Lord, of those things in heaven, and in earth, *and things under the earth*. Even the unsaved will bow to Jesus Christ and confess that He is Lord:

Isaiah 45:23

I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

(To swear in this context is an *oath*, or *sworn* declaration to tell the truth in a court of law).

Philippians 2:10-11

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Confession of the Truth however does not change the guilt of humanity. Just like reserving judgment of another doesn't change your guilt either. Whether you acknowledge the wrong or not is immaterial; the wrong was still committed.

The natural man remains largely ignorant of God’s demand for absolute justice, that every action demands an equal and opposite reaction—just as Newton’s third law of motion states; and in this we again see how the visible things of creation testify of God’s eternal power and Godhead (Rom. 1:20). The balance of the mechanical universe testifies of His balanced scales of justice.

The natural man remains ignorant of the reality that if their sins don’t get imputed to the cross, then *they will be responsible for them themselves*, and...*the wrath of God abideth on them* (John 3:36). Even *one sin*, if they are held personally accountable for, will result in eternal damnation in the lake of fire.

...if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?

The simple response is, *God forbid, for then how shall God judge the world?*

Romans 3:6

God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

This is the second *God forbid* statement made in Romans. The first is made in reference to our understanding of *God's faithfulness*:

For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

God forbid...

(Romans 3:3-4a)

God's faithfulness will endure forever.

This second *God forbid* makes clear God's judgment in light of our sinfulness, commending the righteousness of God.

Even if by contrast our unrighteousness makes His righteousness all the more clear, this doesn't change the fact of guilt.

Even if we acknowledge our sin before Him, and praise Him for His righteousness, this cannot change the guilt. As we have seen, the unsaved will also confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

You see then the need for something more.

There must be a propitiation, as we will see explained later.

There must be *payment* to uphold justice.

There must be a *just recompence* (repayment) of reward for every transgression, every act of disobedience.

You see then that simple faith in God, or faith in Christ even, is not enough. You have to have something more, something to pay for the debt, and as we'll see, not only that, but something imputed to that same account to make you acceptable before God the Father, the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

This cannot be obtained by works, therefore it must be accessed *by faith in something*.

Justice is one aspect of God's character that the Law of Moses taught:

Hebrews 2:2

For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward...

God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

The simple answer is Romans 2:6,

...(He) will render to every man according to his deeds.

But it is evident that no man's deeds are worthy before God.

Romans 3:7-8

⁷For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

⁸And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

If my sin calls attention to God's perfection, and to His glory, why then am I judged a sinner? This is the idea we have been dealing with.

The ends never justify the means. God can be glorified *without* sin. All sin, according to God's righteousness, must be judged.

Here in verse 8, we see that some were slandering Paul and the ministry, saying of them that what they were teaching was,

let us do evil, that good may come!

This is the natural, carnal response to hearing the doctrine of grace, as the carnal man is ignorant of the principles that have been laid out for us so far in Romans (the principles of righteousness and judgment). The natural response to grace is *shall we continue in sin that grace may abound* (Rom. 6:1)? To which again the divine response is *God forbid*.

The natural, carnal man is ignorant of God's absolute righteousness, of His standard of absolute perfection. He is thus relegated to the realm of *relative righteousness*, which insulates him in his mind from his own true guilt.

Your conscience could thus be clear if one holds to a relative standard of righteousness.

The scripture calls attention to the fact that God's omniscience will take *everything* into account when He judges:

1 Corinthians 4:4-5

For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

In this context, Paul is not speaking of justification unto eternal life, as this of course is in reference to the justified Body of Christ, and is not in reference to a judgment for sin. (Notice that it says, *every man shall have praise of God*—that is, to the extent they were edified and conformed to the image of Christ. To trust the gospel is the first step in this process, so even the most base among us will receive praise to some extent.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 4 is speaking of the ministers of Christ as stewards of God's mysteries, and how it is required of a steward that they be found faithful. But the Body of Christ is still going through a judgment, and according to 1 Corinthians 4, it's what was being formed in the inner man that is going to be evaluated and judged (hidden things of darkness and counsels of the heart), not a man's works. Works, we will see in Romans, are excluded.

The apostle John, writing to the remnant of Israel, makes an inverse application of this truth:

1 John 3:20

For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

John is saying that if their heart condemns them, even in it's limited understanding, how much more do you suppose you stand condemned before the God of creation who knows all things and judges them according to an absolute standard of righteousness?

Those who hold to a standard of relative righteousness are often those who go about to establish *their own righteousness*, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, which is the *exact indictment against Israel* in Romans 10:3:

Romans 10:1-3

¹*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*

²*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.*

³*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

Man, therefore, being carnally minded, and religious in their flesh, oftentimes become ministers of Satan, promoting self righteousness, who's end shall be according to their works:

2 Cor. 11:13-15

¹³*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

¹⁴*And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.*

¹⁵*Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.*

This is what Paul warns of in Philippians 3, likely with the unbelieving Jews in mind, calling them dogs, evil workers, and the concision. These are *the concision*, those who are *cut off*, because they did not receive their Messiah, and so, that unbelieving part of the nation is going to be cut off from the promises. We, Paul writes, are the circumcision, because we've been baptized into Christ and have been separated from the body of the sins of the flesh (Col. 2:11).

Romans 3:8

⁸ And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

Here we see that Paul and his ministry were being slandered, even as early as acts 20, when Romans appears to have been written.

Paul's ministry was particularly slandered because it taught justification apart from the Law. The believing remnant of Israel appears to have dwelt at Jerusalem in relative peace all those years between Acts 12 and Acts 21, unbothered by the unbelieving Jews, because they kept the Laws and customs of Moses.

Acts 21:19-21

¹⁹ And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

²¹ And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

Acts 21:27-29

²⁷ And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

²⁸ Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

²⁹*(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

We see part of the indictment from the unbelieving Jews was that Paul taught against the Jews, the Law, and Jerusalem and the temple. And yet the apostles of the circumcision were apparently at liberty to continue to dwell there and worship there.

This is because Paul's ministry as we've discussed before was distinct, and reflected a change in times and seasons, so to speak, a season of which was specifically hidden from ages and generations and not made known unto the sons of men (Col. 1:25-26), but was a mystery hid in God (Eph. 3:9).

Colossians 1:25-26

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints...

Ephesians 3:8-9

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ

Paul was specifically imprisoned for teaching the mystery of Christ:

Colossians 4:3

...Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds...

Paul was not imprisoned for preaching Jesus Christ, but for preaching the doctrine surrounding *the mystery of Christ*.

Paul also was considered a heretic for simply believing the Scriptures:

Acts 24:14

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets...

Don't be surprised if the religious world of Christianity also deems us heretics for believing the Scriptures; man's Adamic nature hasn't changed, and neither are we any better than Paul.

Paul speaks of how the true ministers of Christ are to conduct themselves, knowing full well the accusations against not just them (us), but against the message and ministry itself:

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

³*Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:*

⁴*But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,*

⁵*In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;*

⁶*By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,*

⁷*By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,*

⁸*By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;*

⁹*As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;*

¹⁰*As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

This is exactly what Paul says when testifying before Governor Felix in the passage of Acts 24 that we recently looked at:

Acts 24:16

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

We see here a *slandorous report*—an evil report, as 2 Corinthians 6 says.

What is the invariable response from the self righteous when you communicate to them salvation by grace through faith without works?

You're saying I could just do whatever I want then?

You're giving people a license to sin.

These are slanderous reports, because the doctrine of grace properly understood and applied to the life of the believer produces righteousness unto holiness:

Titus 2:11-12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world...

We see what grace should produce described in the pastoral epistles, and how this manner of living gives good testimony to the doctrine:

1 Timothy 1:6

Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

To the aged women:

Titus 2:5

To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

To the young men:

Titus 2:7-8

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

To the servants:

Titus 2:10

...Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

And so when people make accusations against us, as Grace believers, oftentimes these accusations are uninformed and inaccurate. Not to get too ahead of the doctrine here in Romans, but as we will see, grace is more than just a judicial pardon from sin and the gift of eternal righteousness, it is also a power that allows one to live in functional righteousness unto God in this present life.

When Paul says, “who’s damnation is just,” again, this is not referring specifically to eternal damnation in the lake of fire. Damnation simply means blame, just as the word *salvation* or *save* has different connotations in the Bible, damnation also can be used more generally, referring to a man’s guilt or blame assumed in a certain matter.

We see con-demnation in Romans 8:1, for instance, for the believer walking after the flesh. That word condemnation means *with damnation*. Con (with), demnation being damnation, from Old French (11th century) condamner or condemner, which came from the Latin word condemnare.