

“Getting a Grip on The Gospel”

Romans 3:19-26

(Part 1)

Sunday 8 December 2019

Glenvista Baptist Church

Romans 3:19-26 (ESV) ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in 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 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Introduction:

- a) We live in an age where anything goes. Whichever way **you** define things is what really counts. And above that, if it makes you happy and makes you feel good, then it can't be bad – or at least so the argument goes. An age of self-indulgence and self-worship. And this, beloved friends, has a **major effect** on Gospel ministry. Terms have been redefined; what they meant 30 years ago, they certainly no longer mean today, and some claim that in order for the Gospel to be effective, we need to realize that our approach and our message needs to change along with the changing times. Now we should not necessarily have a problem with considering adapting our methodology; but we should have a major problem with the call for adapting our message. The Gospel is the Gospel and it does not change. Man may change; but the message of salvation which he needs to hear does not change, and about **that** we need to be very clear.
- b) However, a stark reality, we need to face and need to be aware of is that certain terms which once had significant meaning have been so redefined by the watering down of the Gospel, that they require constant qualification in a secular world and require the means of adjectives to properly explain what they actually mean. One example is the word **“Aweful”**. This word is an attribute of God. Our God is an Aweful God. Sadly society has so redefined that word that it actually has a negative connotation, which is not

what the word initially sought to convey. Think of the word “**propitiation**”. Most evangelical believers will frown upon this word, for they have never heard it, even though it is pertinently used in verses such as **Romans 3:25**; **Hebrews 2:17**; **1 John 2:2** and **1 John 4:10**. We have therefore not only lost the meaning of words pertaining our theology, but this downward slope has led to a complete depreciation of the value of the Gospel in its entirety. We have replaced the truth for a lie. In a world that calls for compromise the Church would frequently rather go with the culture for fear of offending people, and compromise the true Gospel simply to draw a crowd. Most evangelical believers will not be able to tell you what the Gospel is if you were to ask them to describe it to you in a sentence or two.

- c) If I had to ask you in a sentence or two to tell me what the Gospel is, I wonder what your answer would be? Perhaps your answer could range anything from: the gospel is what we hear about in Church; the gospel is what missionaries tell people about; the gospel is about Jesus; the gospel is about Christ dying; the gospel is a call to repent; the gospel is for sinners or anything like that. And whilst all of those answers **to some extent** capture **some element** of what the Gospel is, none of them accurately describe the essence of what the Gospel truly is.
- d) **So what then is the Gospel?** You will find that even in sound evangelical Bible believing and Bible preaching churches many don't know what the Gospel is and would not be able to adequately answer that question. **Now friends that does not necessarily mean that if you cannot answer this question, that it is an indication that you are not saved. By no means.** It might just mean that you have not yet had adequate teaching on this, and that when you came to a saving knowledge of Christ you were sadly only given the bare minimum of the Gospel. In other words a person's ability or lack thereof to clearly articulate the Gospel is **not necessarily** an indication of saving faith or lack thereof.
- e) **However**, it remains true, that many believers clearly have a very elementary knowledge of the Gospel; and that this is something that needs to be addressed very seriously. ***I believe that part of the reason to this problem is that in many evangelical churches we give unbelievers just enough information to get them to pray a prayer and receive Christ.*** And then we sadly put the Gospel on the shelf because we believe the Gospel is only for unbelievers and not for believers. And as a result of this the Church is impoverished and we do not provide enough teaching on the Gospel. I therefore believe it is crucial for us to stand still at this time and look at some of the basic essentials of the Christian faith and ask ourselves what the Gospel truly is.
- f) I desire therefore to take you with me to **Romans 3** to a passage that most clearly and completely explains the Gospel in detail. It is essential that we grasp what the Gospel is, for I believe every believer clearly needs to understand how essential it is not only that we preach the Gospel to others, but equally significant how crucial it is that we preach the Gospel to ourselves daily.
- g) With that in mind then, come with me as we see the Gospel laid out in some profound terms by the Apostle Paul in **Romans 3**.

Point 1 – “Righteousness does not come by Works of the Law” (v19-21)¹

Romans 3:19-21 (ESV) “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight**, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—...”

- a) **V19-21** The apostle Paul brings to the fore seven essential elements that lay out the gospel. We seek to highlight all of these over the next number of Lord's Days. And we seek to view these from the perspective of the Superiority of Christ and the command to make Christ known in and through the Gospel.
- b) As we start off I want to point out in **verses 19-21** that the apostle Paul uses the word “law” in two different ways, which is easy to spot, simply because in the first instance he refers to the “law” (note the lower case being used) whilst in the second instance he refers to the “Law” (note the capital letter being used). **In verses 19-20 he uses the word “law” four times and each time it is spelt with a lower-case letter.** This means he is in this instance not referring specifically to the Law given to the nation of Israel through Moses. Rather the term is used here in a more general sense to refer to the transcript of God's nature and the rule of obedience that God requires of all human beings. God's character and holiness becomes that standard or the law by which judgment takes place. In the second instance in **verse 21** though when the apostle speaks of the “Law and the Prophets” (note the capital being used) he is evidently referring to the Law God gave to Moses.
- c) **V21** That being said we need to understand the meaning of the word “righteousness” which is being used here. **Righteousness means that a standard is set by God, which requires exact and perfect conformity to the law of God, and the standard of obedience, which the law requires, dear friends, is absolute perfection.**
- d) See how **James 2:10** tells us, “¹⁰ For whoever **keeps the whole law but fails in one point** has become guilty of all of it.” In **Galatians 3:10** the apostle Paul says essentially the same thing when he writes, “¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide **by all things** written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Can you see, dear friends, how very high the standard is that God sets? **Only perfect obedience is acceptable to God. Nothing less will do.** The standard in other words is humanly unattainable. For who can do this? Who can perfectly keep the law? Who can truly love God with all his heart, and strength and mind? Who can truly unselfishly and even sacrificially love his neighbor as he loves himself? The answer to that is a simple “**no one**”.
- e) However, it is tragically sad and is seen regularly in evangelism that when the average non-believer is asked about his religion or his so-called standing with God, he often presents an answer which sets himself in perfect standing with God as a moderately good and generally decent kind of guy – good enough to merit the approval,

¹ Credit is given for the use of the outline to Romans 3 to Jerry Bridges in his book – *The Discipline of Grace – God's Role and our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* – (NavPress 1994)

acceptance and merit of God. In light of this the average understanding of God's requirements have become so diluted that many believe that if you don't drink, dance or steal that you are OK and that you will be in heaven when God comes again. What a tragic view! What a horribly diluted misappropriation of the Gospel.

- f) **As believers we ought to know better. We ought to readily acknowledge that we cannot attain a righteousness of our own by works of the law or by any good deeds.** Yet, loved ones, as much as we ought to know these things, we often live our lives in pursuit of God's acceptance and we forget that in Christ, all who believe and have repented are thoroughly accepted in the beloved. And because we so misappropriate this truth we often play the "He loves me – He loves me not" game, depending on whether we have had a good day or bad day. If the day has been bad, and we did not read our bible and we did not pray, and we were perhaps not so patient in traffic or kind to the beggar at the traffic light, we tend to think God is not so happy with us, and perhaps we have not been saved. Whilst when the day was good and our religious performance came out of the top drawer, we are convinced we are saved and we are convinced God must be pleased with us, and smiles upon us this day. And so in essence, we are not much better at most times, **if this is our thinking**, than the average unbeliever that thinks he is OK in God's sight.
- g) Of this type of thinking, dear friends we must rid ourselves if we are to live by grace. No works of the law can ever save us or attain any form of righteousness for us. This is the work of Christ alone, and this is the first of seven truths you need to see pertaining the Gospel.

Point 2 – “Righteousness comes from God, Apart from the Law” (v21)

Romans 3:21 (ESV) ^{“21} But now the righteousness of God has been manifested **apart from the law**, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—....”

- a) **V21** So what we have therefore seen firstly is that we cannot attain a righteousness of our own, and therefore by implication this can only come to undeserving sinners by a means outside of themselves. Paul calls it here “the righteousness of God” meaning it **belongs to God** and **comes from God** to undeserving sinners upon repentance. It is a sufficient righteousness, which God has provided for us. And God has provided this for us through His Son. Jesus gives us His righteousness, which is a perfect righteousness, which comes through His sinless life, as well as His death in obedience to the Father's will, through which He perfectly fulfilled the law of God. So, it is a righteousness, which comes as a result of Christ's perfect conformity to the law of God over a period of 33 years as the Son of God, God Incarnate, perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law. **In His humanity, Christ lived a life of perfect obedience, and therefore He alone was qualified with righteousness from God, and it is only this righteousness, which is acceptable to God.**
- b) Throughout the Book of Romans a contrast is set between the sin of Adam ^(the first Adam), and the righteousness of Christ ^(the second Adam). For just one example of this comparison, hear what we read in **Romans 5:17-19** - ^{“17} For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of

righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." This comparison causes us to stress the importance of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law of God, **both in its requirements as well as in its penalty**. Our Lord did what Adam failed to do – and that is, He rendered perfect obedience to the law of God, without fault, failure or sin. And what He did through His death, was that He completely paid the penalty of a broken law, for when the law is broken only death can appease for it. However only the death of a perfectly sinless righteous substitute could settle this score, and that's why Christ's perfect obedience to the law, was the necessary sacrifice for this purpose. **So Christ not only perfectly obeyed the law, He also perfectly paid the penalty of the broken law.**

- c) By implication then, when God declares sinners justified, He does so on the merit of the accomplished righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is in turn imputed or credited to us through faith in His Son. And friends you need to see this is a righteousness that is imputed to us forever; from the day you trusted in Christ as your Savior throughout all eternity we stand before a Holy God clothed in the righteousness of His Son.
- d) All of this of grace, undeservingly being poured out effectually by Christ's merit on all who believe. What a great God we serve. Truly we can say this morning that the Gospel indeed is Good News unto all who believe and repent of their sin.
- e) So not only then does the Gospel teach that righteousness does not come by works of the law, but it clearly proclaims that righteousness comes only from God.

Point 3 – “Righteousness is Received through Faith in Jesus Christ” (v22)




Romans 3:22 (ESV) “...²² the righteousness of God *through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...*”

- a) **V22** As we have seen that righteousness cannot come from the law, but can only come from God, I want you to see that the third tenet of the Gospel, which the apostle Paul highlights here, is that righteousness only comes as a gift as received through faith in Jesus Christ. ***Faith then is the hand that receives that which God blesses with, and by means of faith this righteousness of Christ is received. Yet even though faith is the hand by which we receive the righteousness of Christ, it is crucial that we know that God even opens our hand to receive that gift.*** Faith itself in other words has no merit; in fact, the very nature of faith itself is self-emptying.
- b) When the righteousness of God is received through faith in Jesus Christ, it involves a complete renunciation of our own righteousness and an entire reliance on the perfect righteousness and death of Jesus Christ. **Faith in Christ and a reliance on ourselves, even to the smallest degree, are mutually exclusive.** It is important to note that the word “faith” is a noun that has no verbal form in English. Instead the word “believe” is used – for example we read in Acts 16:31 ³¹ And they said, “***Believe*** in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” So the question which really ought to be asked then, is what does it mean to ***believe IN Jesus***? Or, what is it that we ought to believe?
- c) **We are to believe that as the Son of God, very God Himself, Jesus condescended to earth, that He lived a perfect life demonstrating complete obedience and fulfillment of the law, that He then died on the cross as the substitute for sinners; that all are guilty of sin, and are commanded to repent; those that repent are graciously given the gift of eternal life; and those who don't are condemned to hell forever; all this to the glory of**

God the Father. This message is called the gospel. This is the Good News about Jesus Christ.

- d) **V22** The call here is for “**faith in Jesus Christ**”; that simply means that Jesus is always the object of the believers' faith. This the most basic tenet of the Gospel; we are to trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, and without acceptance of this basic fact there is no salvation. **Outside of Christ, and without repenting and trusting in Christ alone for rescue, there is no possibility of salvation whatsoever.**
- e) Yet the Good News is that **ALL** who trust in Him, casting aside any hope or trust in themselves, and **ALL** who call on the Name of the Lord, repenting of their own wickedness, and calling upon the Only Name on earth and under the heavens by which man must be saved, will indeed receive pardon and forgiveness, as they approach God through faith in Jesus Christ and so are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.
- f) There is salvation in no one else, other than Jesus Christ, and this truth not only makes the Gospel so exclusive, but is clearly presented in the Gospel. And as much as a believer is saved at a particular point in time, it is crucial that the belief in Christ continues on a daily basis. We are in other words to live by faith in Christ on a daily basis. This righteousness of Christ comes to all who believe and remains with all who demonstrate their belief, by keeping on believing until that time that Jesus Christ comes again.

Conclusion:

- a) So in conclusion then this morning as we ask what the Gospel is – we have seen so far in clear terms that the apostle Paul systematically lays out for our understanding three tenets of the Gospel –
-  **The Gospel brings to undeserved sinners upon repentance a righteousness that cannot be attained by works of the law.** No works, no good deeds, no charity, no effort on the part of man, can attain for him any merit whatsoever in the sight of God. All the law does, is it highlights how far man falls short of the glory of God, and it puts man in a position where he is enabled to see his utter need of Christ. There is no righteousness by works of the law.
 -  **The Gospel brings to undeserved sinners upon repentance a righteousness that comes from God, apart from the law.** This righteousness comes through Christ, who lived a life of perfect obedience unto the law. Through His obedience He attained for us what the first Adam failed to do, and in Him as second Adam, all who believe are justified in the sight of God and in the sight of the law by the merit of Christ.
 -  **The Gospel brings to undeserved sinners upon repentance a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone.** Aside from Christ there is no hope of salvation. Faith is the hand that receives this righteousness, which comes as a gracious gift from the Lord, yet even the act of receiving this righteousness cannot happen unless the Lord sovereignly opens the heart and the eyes of the sinner.
- b) All this points no doubt to the fact that the Gospel of Christ indeed is the Good News. And we will see over these weeks as we get a firm grasp on the Gospel that we have a responsibility to make this Good News known. I trust you will be so captured by this Good News that it brings about in us such a desire that we make every effort to know Christ and to make Him known.
- c) Ultimately the Gospel is Good News because in it the Father had devised a plan in which a sinful world can be reconciled to Him through the glory of His Son, and every sinner

that turns to Christ in repentance brings to Him glory and a rejoicing in Heaven that words cannot describe.

d) The Gospel is Good News because it presents to us a Gracious Great Savior.

e) Praise God for such a Savior. Praise our Savior for the Good News of the Gospel.

Amen!

Soli Deo Gloria (For God's Glory Alone)

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