

Intro:

In our study of Romans, we are now rejoicing in the ‘without-law’ kind of righteousness given by faith to all who believe. This is truly an amazing doctrine – I am now righteous in the sight of God without any work on my part!

Last week we had a bit of a digression as we examined what it means to believe. It isn’t just some kind of agreeing with the facts concerning Christ, but in fact it is a wholesale commitment of the self to Christ, repenting of sins, turning from the old life to the new life, empowered by the Spirit of God.

As a result, a great change takes place in the believer’s life.

But we must add, the change is not complete, is it?

Every believer comes to a very soon realization that faith in Christ, salvation by faith, ‘without-law’ righteousness and all is wonderful, but it is *not an automatic and constant cure of the sin problem in my life.*

I have an illustration that comes from one of my old illustration books, I think one that Harry Ironside used to use:

He tells the story of a Native Indian who was converted to Christ. This Native was talking to some evangelist about the constant struggle with the flesh.

He said, “It’s like there are two dogs fighting inside me. One is black and one is white. Sometimes the black dog wins and sometimes the white dog wins.”

He was asked, “How do you know which dog is going to win?”

“Whichever one I say ‘sic-em’ to.”

The illustration resonates with us because we know he speaks the truth, this is our experience (no forked tongue!).

As we are working through our passage, I have come to a startling realization about it. Part of this passage we think we understand, we use it all the time, but in the context it is saying something entirely different from the way we use it.

But as we stop and carefully examine it, I think we will find in it a very powerful statement to us concerning the assurance of our salvation even though we continue to struggle with sin. I have given our message this title:

Assurance for Constant Sinners

Comprehensive and Constant - All and Always

Read Rm 3.19-24, text vv. 22-23

Proposition: “Without-law” righteousness amazingly applies to people who continue in sin.

I. The ‘Overture’ [a note about passage structure]

In operas, there is a section of music that is played before all the singing parts start. It is called ‘the overture’. In this piece, the instruments play a summary of all the musical themes to come in the opera. Sometimes overtures are better than the operas they introduce and become ‘stand-alone’ pieces in their own right.

I want to offer a little introductory ‘overture’ to help you see what is going on in the passage. Maybe a better word would be ‘prelude’, but what I want you to do is see how the passage works before we get into explaining it.

- A. The attention of Paul and his readers made a dramatic turn from the doctrine of sin to the manifestation of the ‘without-law’ kind of righteousness (21)
- B. Further information about the ‘without-law’ kind of righteousness follows
 1. This righteousness is obtained *through* faith (22a)
 2. This righteousness is obtained *by all* who believe (22b)
 - a. There is no distinction among the many who believe (22c – ‘difference’, ‘discrimination’) [this explains something about the all who believe]
 - b. Because (‘for’) all the ones who believe fall under the category of hopeless sinners (23) [this further explains something about all who believe]
 3. The obtaining of righteousness by all who believe comes through their being justified in a particular way (24)

I hope that you see what I am talking about, and that the rest of our message will make this even more clear.

II. The meaning of ‘all’ – identifying the subject of our passage (22-23a)

- A. The premise of my message today is centered on understanding the word ‘all’ in Rm 3.23
 1. Paul has *already* spent two whole chapters (1.18-3.20) proving that all men generally are sinners – the case is closed

2. Paul is not referring back to these same people in making the statement of 3.23 [Romans road notwithstanding]
 3. Paul has limited the discussion in 3.22 to a subset of all people to ‘unto all and upon all them that believe’
 - a. It is these people about whom there is no distinction
 - b. It is these people who have all sinned, etc.
- B. The verdict for the trial against sin is ‘Guilty!’ — unless some new argument can be made (1.18-3.20)
1. But now! — a new argument is made, ‘without-law’ righteousness (3.21)
 2. Who has that ‘without-law’ righteousness? ‘all who through faith believed’ (3.22)

This phrase “stresses the fact that this righteousness is always operative when there is faith.”¹

- C. The new verdict is available to sinners ‘without discrimination’ (‘for there is no difference’)
1. A five year old boy raised in a Christian home can have this righteousness
 2. An eighty year old man (or older) who has wasted his years in ‘riotous living’ can have this righteousness
 3. Anyone in-between these extremes can have this righteousness

‘There is no difference’ *if* they have believed.

- “When I was a young preacher I thought that the grace of God had to go way down to reach the bad sinners but didn’t have to go down so far to reach others who weren’t so bad. But now I know that God’s grace has to go all the way to the bottom to get all of us. Each one of us is completely lost outside of Christ. Either you are absolutely saved in Christ, or you are completely lost outside of Christ. All of us need the righteousness of Christ. There is no difference.”²

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 112.

² J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, Based on the Thru the Bible radio program.,

- “There is no difference among men with regard to their moral state, their relationship to God, their need of salvation, or how to receive this salvation. What one man needs, all need; and what is appropriate for one is appropriate and sufficient for all.”³

One more quote that will lead us into our next point:

- “The words that close verse 22, ‘for there is no distinction,’ should be joined with verse 23: ‘for all sin, and are falling short of the glory of God.’ ... There is no distinction between sinners —between great offenders and small, with respect to this matter of sinnership. Not the degree of sin, but the fact of sin is looked at here. If you should visit a penitentiary, you would find some imprisoned for terrible crimes, and others for lesser offenses, but you would find, in the eyes of the law, no innocent men!”⁴

III. Reality for all – all believers continue to fall short (23)

Hold these thoughts in your mind as we turn our attention now to v. 23:

- A. ‘For’ – because all believers are sinners, that is why there is no distinction
 1. The word that begins the verse connects the thought with what has gone just previously
 2. The concept is that there is no discrimination between those who believe, because v. 23 is true of all believers
- B. Note the Comprehensive Condition of all believers (‘all sinned’)
 1. Almost every one of my English translations translate this the same way
 - a. “All *have* sinned” (17 out of 18)

electronic ed., 4:665 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981).

³ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, p. 85.

⁴ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse*, p. 112.

- b. “All did sin” – Youngs Literal Translation (J. N. Young, 1862, 1887, 1898)
2. The verb tense differs between Greek and English
- a. English ‘all have sinned’ – perfect tense: past action, continuing results
 - b. Greek ‘all sinned’ – aorist tense, viewing the totality of action
 - 1) Present tense: ‘all sin’ or ‘all are sinning’ – this is true, but this is not what Paul is saying.
 - 2) Perfect tense: ‘all have sinned’ – this is also true, but it is also not what Paul is saying here
 - 3) Aorist tense: ‘all sinned’ – viewing the lives of ‘all’ as a comprehensive whole from beginning to end
3. Connect the words: “all” – all the believers “sinned” – considered in their totality of life
- a. This is why there is no distinction
 - b. Every one of the believers is someone who considered in the totality of their life is a sinner
 - c. When we say ‘believer’ we are also saying ‘sinner’
 - d. No one gets the ‘without-law’ righteousness by any internal merit, by any good work they have done
 - e. All who receive the ‘without-law’ righteousness are sinners

Please note, I am not really quibbling with the English translations here (they all agree):

- “In English we may translate this ‘have sinned’ in accordance with the idiom of the language, which prefers to use the perfect where a past fact or series of facts is not separated by a clear interval from the present.”⁵

⁵ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 84.

What I am trying to do is bring out the force of the Greek for you – the great glory of this new kind of righteousness is seen in this fact: those who get it *totally don't deserve it – in fact, they deserve something else.*

So the comprehensive condition of all who believe is that they are all sinners.

C. But note also the Continuing Condition of all believers ('come short')

1. In this phrase, the Greek present tense is used: "are coming short of the glory of God"
2. This views the condition of 'all who believe' not comprehensively but constantly:
 - a. The day you repent and believe, you are falling short of the glory of God
 - b. The day after you repent and believe, you are falling short of the glory of God
 - c. Today – for you who have repented and have believed – you are today falling short of the glory of God
3. This falling short of God's glory speaks of several possible notions
 - a. A failure to give God glory
 - b. A failure to receive God's approval (the honour that God might give)
 - c. A failure to perfectly reflect the glory of God in you as a creature made in his image**
 - d. A failure to come to the level of the glory believers will have at the return of Christ

Of these, the third one is probably the best rendering here.

- You are a sinner who believed
- You are a sinner comprehensively (looking at your whole life)
- You are a sinner constantly (looking at your daily life)

You fail to live up to what you were made for: the image of God – you are constantly coming short of God's glory...

But there *is* glory to God in this! Because there is...

IV. Righteousness for all – all who through faith believed (22-23)

- A. No distinctions: all who believe are by faith receiving something they totally do not deserve
1. You are a sinner
 2. You are coming short of the glory of God
 3. You by faith have ‘without-law’ righteousness

... if you have believed

- B. What about your comprehensive and constant failure as a believer?
1. You don’t live up to God’s image
 2. You don’t live up to your new testimony of faith, even
 3. But if you have believed, you have ‘without-law’ righteousness

Conclusion:

Listen, there is also a promise in this. You are a sinner. You fell short of God’s glory the day you believed, you fell short of God’s glory the day after you believed, you are falling short today.

But one day, because of the ‘without-law’ righteousness, there is coming a time when you will fall short no longer!

If you believe!

Do you believe?

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