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Declaring His righteousness

by Evan Schaible

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:21-26)

The Moral Government view of this passage focuses itself upon verses 25 and 26; and directs its attention upon the phrase, "to declare His righteousness" and "to declare at this time, I say, His righteousness".

I have been recently presented with a rather skewed and, I dare say, heretical view of these passages, particularly with reference to the atonement of Christ and the nature of the same. We need to ask ourselves, first, what does it mean to declare the righteousness of God; secondly, what is the righteousness of God; and lastly how is this accomplished within the context of the passages we are addressing.

I. First, What does it mean to "declare the righteousness of God"? The NASB translation more fully and simply brings out the structure of the sentence in verse 25, "This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed".

The fundamental question is this: How can God be righteous and yet pass over sin? Herein lies, one could say, the 'problem' of justification, "he that justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord", "I will by no means clear the guilty". This is also reiterated in the next passage in question when the apostle states, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus". If God is just He cannot justify the wicked.

To declare God's righteousness is to make the work of the cross, as the Greek says, "an evident token" of God's righteousness. So when the apostle says God is just and yet the justifier, and also that He in His forbearance passed over sins that were past, the work of Christ must be an evident token of this very thing. The question is now - How is the cross an evident token of God's righteousness as it pertains to the redemption of man.

II. Secondly we must address, and examine what exactly, in this context, is the righteousness of God. This phrase is used in a variation of ways throughout the new testament, "we are made the righteousness of God in Him", etc.; but we must always remember context, especially in dealing with essential doctrines of the Christian faith, and the diction and style of the apostle Paul in this particular epistle.

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested" "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ". It is clearly taught in our passage that the righteousness of God, especially in regards to the atonement, is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we are made the righteousness of God in Him, and how the righteousness without the law is manifested, in fact true gospel righteousness is only and always by simple faith, and simply that. We are brought not into our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus. So this is, in its simplest and most basic portrayal, the righteousness of God.

III. Now we must inquire how this declaring of the righteousness of God can be accomplished within the context of God justifying the wicked, passing over sins that are past, and delivering His Son up to the cross by His determinate counsel.

We must remember that essentially the faith of Jesus Christ is being declared when we read "declaring the righteousness of God". This means that every iota of what we are reading has its focus, foundation and emphasis on Jesus Christ.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

We can see by the emboldened scriptures that our former questions, How can God be just and the justifier of the wicked, how can God simply pass over sins that are past, are in direct correlation, and must be reconciled in order to uphold the very character of God. Thanks be to God that He has not left this task to me, the most ignorant of all the laborers in His vineyard, but has Himself provided a way.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation" - the word propitiation holds with it extremely deep principles, the most prominent of which is this: an atoning victim in its concrete sense, and as it is presented here as a person, and not simple as a thing as in the sense of the mercy seat. This word propitiation also holds a note of appeasement and is used in pagan cultures with regards to appeasing the wrath of a god or demon. This can accurately be applied in this sense, as well as the Strong's definition.

Jesus was the atoning victim of the judgment and wrath of God in order to appease that same wrath and judgment and procure the way of escape for all who will repent and believe. This fulfilled the justice of God so that He can be Just and the justifier of the wicked.

He shed His blood for the remission of sin; as the scripture says, without the shedding of blood there is no remission. The wages of our sin is our death, and Jesus died that death, and through faith in that blood He becomes the propitiation; as the scripture says, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" "by grace are ye saved, through faith".

This my dear Moral Government friends is gospel salvation and is the only possible view point in which God is just and the justifier of all who, through faith in the blood of Christ, receive the propitiatory work of Christ, and the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God, and in all declare the righteousness of God, which is the faith of Jesus Christ.

God hath set forth Jesus Christ, His very Son, to die the death that we justly deserve and bear the wrath that should fall on our heads as the atoning victim, and propitiation through faith in His blood. When any man places His faith in this, and calls out to the Lord of glory, he then, and only then, receives the benefits of the work of Christ on the tree, and the propitiation, and the redemption, and the atonement, and we "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" can be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Re: Declaring His righteousness -schaible - posted by UniqueWebRev (), on: 2007/3/10 7:50

This is the kind of article where I am looking for the other shoe to drop, but it doesn't.

At the end, the prospect of propitiation through Christ's blood, the sacrifice of the New Covenant, in which we are imputed with Christ's righteousness, even as in exchange He takes our sins, comes through clearly.

To me, it really is:

Nothing but the Blood
Nothing but the Blood
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

What can wash away my sin

Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

What can make me whole again

Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

How precious is that flow
That makes me white as snow
No other font I know
Nothing but the Blood of Jesus

Many Blessings, Greg.