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The Heavenly Gospel

Romans 3:9-26

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Romans 3:21-26 - ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.[NKJV]

Introduction

Frequently, we tend to forget what the saving Gospel *really is*. We see all manner of variations of this “Good News” being taught and some of them are so far from the original message that it would be hard to call it the Gospel. Additionally, something that also frequently happens is that as Christians come to understand the exhaustive sovereignty of God, they will get confused about how that message is declared to the world. Today, I want to review some of the principles of the Gospel but most importantly, I want us to consider the concept of **propitiation** and come to see how this idea reveals the justice, wrath, kindness, love and mercy of God. Before we get to considering God’s propitiation, we must understand our current condition.

The Standing of the Human Race

We know that the word gospel is translated as the good news and as we have discussed many times, this news is overwhelmingly good because there is other news that is dreadfully bad.

Romans 3:9-20

Paul has taught in the first chapter of Romans that all of the gentiles (non-Jews) are under the wrath of God because of their sin. In the second chapter God teaches through Paul that the Jews are under the same condemnation for the same reasons. In chapter three, we see that in this regard, the gentile and Jew are no different; they are both under the “just condemnation” of God (vs. 8).

These two groups, Jews and gentiles, would encompass the entire human race and to make sure that the point is well understood, Paul quotes from Isaiah to ensure that there is no room for a meritorious salvation. All of the descendents of Adam have come under the curse of Adam and death has spread to all men (Romans 5:12), with one exception—the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Adam.

Although God Himself gave the law, the law itself was unable to save anybody because of the weakness of the flesh. Therefore, there is no one who will obey the law sufficient enough to merit heaven; “...*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight*”. Here we have another very important term – **justification**. This is a legal term which refers to someone who is found to be guilty being made or declared *not* guilty. Someone who is justified is one whose legal standing has changed from guilt to innocence. Obedience to the law of God *will never* bring about this change in legal standing.

Notice that God does not consider grading the “class” on a curve. Although we tend to do this, God does not. We’ll say that we are not sinners but, by that, we mean we’re not as bad as others like those guilty of major crimes. But this is not the mind of God —with regards to our works, God grades us on a pass/fail basis and a 99% is a failing grade. James teaches that whoever is guilty of breaking the law in just one place is guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:8-11). A man does not need to break every law to be deemed a lawbreaker or a criminal. But our tendency is to assume that we’ll have some room for deal-making with God if we can only ensure that more than half of His laws are not broken.

He doesn’t diminish the law, nor does He wink at our sin. He has declared that all are under the judgment and condemnation of the law. Now, we may have gotten to this point and are thinking “Well, how then is possible for *anybody* to go to heaven? From the way you put it, heaven’s going to be empty”. This is a really great question because it indicates that we are starting to grasp the width and depth of the problem. Up to this point, we may have held down in our hearts that God will accept us because of our sincerity or because of where we surely land on the curve.

The Human Race Creates Its Own Gods

We have seen down through time, even up to modern day, man’s attempt to create his own religions. From carving a piece of wood to chiseling a stone into some likeness, man will bow down even to the gods he has made. We have seen devised systems of penance, practices of worship involving sacrifice, asceticism, poverty, debauchery and even murder as ways of appeasing their gods.

Many of these religions have borrowed from each other and may have elements of truth within them but, in the end, a false gospel is not really good news at all. They may have elements of divine standards, feelings of guilt and burdensome demands of the gods. These all bear the mark of a man-centered, man devised system of religion.

The Righteousness of God Apart From Law

Romans 3:21-26

Paul teaches that God’s righteousness apart from the law has been revealed and it was testified to or witnessed to by the Law and the prophets. This means that the Law and prophets were pointing to this righteousness which has now been revealed—justification comes by His grace which was demonstrated in that God’s only begotten Son was set forth as a *propitiation*.

A propitiation is the turning aside or the averting of something. It is not to diminish something; it is to redirect something. In this case, the thing turned aside was the

wrath of God for the Elect which, by law, was due to each and every man, woman and child who has ever lived or who would ever live with and the lone exception of Jesus Christ the only man without sin. When God draws a sinner into His grace, we can not say “Oh look, God has relaxed His standards”. If God were to do this, then He would be a capricious Judge. We would have to hope that we came before Him on one of our best days and also hope that He was in one of His good moods.

God poured out the full force of His wrath upon His own Son both in His physical trial but also in the forsaking of the Son as He was made to be sin. Although Jesus was not a sinner, He was made to be sinful (full of sin) in that all of our rebellion was placed upon Him and the Father’s wrath upon that sin followed (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The last sentence in this paragraph is so significant; God wanted to be just (that is uphold His perfect, holy law) and at the same time be the one who justifies (that is declare the guilty to be no longer guilty). How could He do this? The answer is that He fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law in His Son. He then placed the sin of His people upon His Son and struck Him down by pouring out the demands of justice upon Him. All of those whose sins were place upon Him were in essence struck down as well in Christ. When Christ died, we died.

Once that justice had been satisfied, He then gave the righteousness of His Son to those who by faith believe. Then He raised His Son three days later and declared with power to the furthest corners of the universe that Jesus was indeed His beloved Son and in that resurrection, those who died in Him were raised to new life having been justified.

Only God could have come up with this solution. To simultaneously be just and the justifier, He must be the one who provides the propitiation. It would have been impossible for us and it remains impossible for us to provide anything to Him for our salvation. It is a work of God from first to last because it is by His grace. This is truly good news from heaven.

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