

The Righteousness of God is Revealed

Romans 3:19-28

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Romans 3:19-28 ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin. 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 all¹ 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. ²⁷ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

In our text Paul talks about the revealing of the righteousness of God. But why did it need to be revealed? Why was it hidden? Who was it hidden from? Who did the hiding?

Scripture makes it clear that although God veiled his glory, it is not God but man who attempts to hide it, and when man hides it, God reveals his righteousness as a free gift to men through Jesus Christ.

Previously in Romans 1:17 Paul also talked about the righteousness of God being revealed.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

There is a difference between the revealing in chapter 1 and chapter 3. In 1:17 Paul uses the word "apokalupto" which means to unveil or uncover. We may remember the temple, with the curtain between the people and the glory of God. We also think of Moses who went up and spoke face to face with God and when he came down his face was veiled so that the reflected glory of God would not be seen. In the Old Testament God veiled his glory. In Christ that veil was taken away. Not just the glory of God's righteousness, but also the grace of God was veiled.

This veil did not hide the gospel of Christ but drew attention to it. It could not be seen completely but God made sure that everyone knew what was behind the veil. From the very beginning of

scriptures God declared that the seed of the woman would crush Satan and set his people free from their sin.

Even as Paul says in our text that this "**righteousness of God apart from the law,**" is "**witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.**"

The veil in the temple, the pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the Sabbath, the Passover, the sacrifices, the cities of refuge, the day of atonement and all the other laws of the Old Testament were a veil which did not hide Christ but gave witness to his coming. We find that throughout the Old Testament men of faith longed fervently for the day of the coming one. They eagerly desired that time when the veil would be taken away. They waited not in ignorance. They waited knowing what was under the veil. They desired to see it more clearly.

As Peter declared:

1 Peter 1:10-11 10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Thus, is what Paul is talking about in Romans 1:17. That veil of the old testament was taken away. Christ is clearly seen. In Christ the glory of God is clearly seen.

But now in Roman 3:21 Paul says that once again that the righteousness of God is revealed. This time not veiled by God but hidden in the darkness of man's sin.

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed

IN romans 3 Paul does not use the term "apokalupto" meaning to uncover. Instead, he uses the term "phaneroo," which is properly translated to reveal. That is to make known, or to bring to light. Paul is not talking about a truth which is covered but a truth which is in darkness, which cannot be seen, and which God has brought to light.

This time we do not think of the veil in the temple and of Moses. Instead, we think of 2 Corinthians and the gospel of John.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

And

John 1:4-5 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

It is true that God put a veil over the gospel in the Old Testament, not to hide it but to draw attention to it. But man in his sinfulness has repeatedly covered the glory of Christ in darkness. Not only has man hidden the glory of Christ but repeatedly he has used the law to do it.

Sometimes you buy young kids a present. They unwrap it, and they take it out of the box. Then they forget about the toy, and they play with the wrapping and the box. The veil of the ceremonial law has been removed and discarded. The present of Christ stands revealed. But the Jews were so in love with the veil that they forgot what it was covering. To this day they play with the veil itself and care nothing for that which it was meant to wrap, namely Christ himself.

Yet they are not the only ones. Again, at the time of the reformation the Catholic Church did everything they could to hide Christ and to proclaim the law. Even though the crucifix was in every church and hanging around every neck, they did not see Christ. The catholic church had blinded their eyes, so that they looked beyond Christ. Having the image of Christ not only in pewter but more importantly in the Gospel, they did not see Christ. Instead, their eyes were blinded just like the Jews by their own works.

Yet God would not allow his gift to remain in darkness. As we heard in our reading from Revelation. God has set in the heavens his messenger to proclaim the everlasting Gospel. As Paul reminds us in our text, God has revealed, brought to light, "the righteousness of God," which is ours, "Through faith in Jesus Christ." This is the righteousness, which is obtained NOT by our works, but is freely given to us, because Jesus died for our sins.

Now at this time, today, and always, men are once again working hard to bury the gospel of Christ in darkness.

As examples we could point to the Amish and Mennonites who hide the gift of God under their desire to avoid the technology of the modern world. We could point to the Baptist who so often make politics and earthly goals their priorities and thus obscure the glory of God's redemption. We could talk about the liberals who speak endlessly about love but do not know the love of God in Christ Jesus. All of these use God's own law, or pieces of it, or their interpretation of it, to hide in darkness the light of Christ.

We could talk about them, but we are just as guilty. As our text reminds us "**there is no difference, for all have sinned.**" The most important question is not what others are doing wrong but what are we. How do we hide or obscure the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We hide the glory of Christ when we tell ourselves how much better we are because we are Lutheran.

We hide the glory of Christ when we insist my political views are correct and anyone who doesn't vote the way I do isn't a real Christian.

We hide the glory of Christ when we think, I know that Jesus died for me, I don't really need to hear that in church. I need help with marriage or parenting or my job.

We hide the glory of Christ whenever we come to church and hear the law preached and think, "yeah you tell them Pastor, they need to hear that." Instead of thinking, "I need to hear that."

Yet despite our best efforts to hide in darkness the light of God's gospel, the Lord of Hosts will not allow it. He has set in the heavens his angel with the light of the redemption that is ours through Jesus Christ. As the angel said to the shepherds, he says to you as well, **"To you is born this day . . . a savior who is Christ the Lord."**

Today as in the days of Paul, as in the days Luther, today also the light of God has burst forth in the darkness. This gospel makes known to you, that through Christ Jesus without any work or effort on your part, you have received the righteousness of God. This is the good news that you are made righteous, and your sins are forgiven, so that you, even though you are a sinner may enter heaven and have everlasting life. **Amen**