

INI

Text: Romans 3:19-24

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. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, whose precious word brings us the blessings of His Father's grace, dear fellow redeemed:

What is your honest impression and opinion of the *Bible*? Do you consider it to be a rather big book...with no pictures? Do you find yourself intimidated by the many long names in it that are hard to pronounce? Do you perhaps find some sections of the *Bible*, quite frankly, boring and pretty hard to apply to your everyday lives—like all those chapters on the Old Testament ceremonial laws in Leviticus? Do you read certain sections of Ezekiel or the Revelation, shake your head, and think: "I have no idea what that means?" I would imagine that each of us has at times had those or similar thoughts regarding the *Bible*.

Yet in spite of such challenges, I am confident that we all view God's word as something precious and holy! Why? Because the Word reveals a solution for our greatest challenge—death, and bestows upon us everlasting life! God's word reveals solid truths upon which to base our lives. Today, I would encourage you to remember that, in spite of all of the challenges we meet in our *Bible* studies, **GOD'S WORD IS** clear and simple, for it is fundamentally **A MESSAGE ABOUT SIN AND GRACE!** The apostle Paul informs us in our text that **through His law God reveals our sin, while through His gospel God bestows His grace!**

I.

Paul writes, "*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. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" In our text Paul speaks of the primary purpose of God's law, when he says that it is intended to reveal to us our sin.

All people in this world are "*under the law*," for as beings created by God we are subject to Him and responsible before Him for our actions. Because God's law establishes a standard of perfection for all conduct—in thought, word, and deed, there is no one who can stand up before God and claim to be righteous. As Paul points out later in our text: "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!*" Is there anyone here today who would walk boldly into God's presence and claim never to have sinned in thought, in word, or in deed? Are there any of you men who would do so? If so, may I call on your wives as a witness? Are there any of you children? If so, may I call on your parents as witnesses? Those who know us, if honest, will testify to our sins!

Oh, there are people who in their ignorance claim perfection. Think of the Pharisee in the temple, of whom Jesus speaks. He stood there and boasted in God's presence, "*God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.*" He then rehearsed his supposed good deeds: "*I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess...*," but what does Jesus say? It was the tax-collector, who confessed to being "*the sinner,*" who went down to his house justified! (cf. Luke 18:9-14)

Men, women, and children like the Pharisee are alive and well today! They approach God, however, not on the basis of His law, but rather upon the basis of their own formulations. "God, I have done more good than evil in my life!" "God, I have tried my best to live a good life—surely my efforts will gain Your favor!" Or, perhaps even—"God, I have suffered so much in this life, I deserve Your favor in the next life." But what does Paul say? The law of God stops the boasting of every mouth—every mouth, for as the apostle James puts it ever so plainly: "*Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all*" (2:10). There is no balance of good and evil in God's courtroom! Mere attempts to be good do not count, nor are there appeals to our supposed great suffering! No, God's law, with its demands for complete and utter perfection strike down all such pretense and leave us standing guilty before our God—guilty and deserving of death! **GOD'S WORD IS A MESSAGE ABOUT SIN** and **through His law God reveals our sin!** What, my dear friends, can we do? Quite frankly, there is nothing that we can do. Our situation by nature is desperate! Our only hope is in what God has already done for us to rectify the situation.

II.

Let us rejoice, then, in the fact that **GOD'S WORD IS** not just **A MESSAGE ABOUT SIN**, but it is also a message about **GRACE**, for **through His gospel God bestows His grace** upon us! My dear friends, do not let your souls despair as the relentless mirror of God's law reveals your sins, but rather listen to the apostle, who says: "*Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe!*"

Both the law and the gospel speak of "*the righteousness of God.*" The law demands, as we have seen, a perfect righteousness from us—"be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). It is a righteousness we could never achieve, the demands for which would drive us to despair, were it not for the fact that the gospel speaks of "*the righteousness of God*" as a gift. Yes, the gospel bestows a gift given completely apart from the law. It bestows a gift connected to the promised Savior and identified in the Old Testament Scriptures, for as Habakkuk states, "*The just shall live by his faith*" (2:4b). Yes, it is a gift received through faith and given without fail to all who believe in Jesus as their Savior!

How can this be? How can a just God, who knows that we have sinned, bestow upon us His own righteousness? Paul explains, "*There is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus!*" There are four key phrases in that verse that you and I want to impress permanently upon our minds and hearts. The first is "*His grace.*" God is a just God, but He is also a gracious God. God condemns our sins, but then He mercifully forgives those sins, not because of any merit or worthiness in us, but rather in view of His grace—His love which is completely undeserved.

But, how can God be both just and gracious? The second key phrase explains: “*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*” We were lost in our sins, but Jesus has redeemed us. He purchased us making the necessary payment to remove our sins. This He did, as Peter so movingly explains, “*not...with corruptible things, like silver or gold,...but with (His) precious blood..., as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*” (1 Peter 1:19). Through His death on Calvary’s cross Jesus paid the ransom price.

Yes, Jesus—the very Son of God—died in order to pay the price to buy our souls back from sin and death. That work of redemption having been accomplished, we are told in the third important phrase that we have been “*justified freely*” by our God! God has declared the sinner not guilty in view of Jesus’ sacrifice. We, who stand guilty before God and ready to be condemned to eternal death, rather hear God declare us to be not-guilty and, therefore, righteous in His sight by faith!

But can this be true? Does God’s grace really extend to you and to me—to all of us here today and to those whom we both know and love? Yes, it does, for the fourth key phrase is not a phrase at all, but a single word that brings Satan to his knees—the little word “*all!*” Yes, “*all*” have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, but “*all*” have likewise been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Not a single sin remains unpaid, for Jesus said: “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30) The writer to the Hebrews says concerning Jesus: “*This Man...offered one sacrifice for sins forever!*” (10:12) Not a single sinner remains unredeemed, for as Paul told the Corinthians: “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself!*” (2 Corinthians 5:19) As John states in his first epistle: “*(Jesus) Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*” (2:1). Do not, my dear friends, doubt that you too have been included in God’s plan for salvation, for you are part of the “*all*” for whom Jesus died and rose again, even as you are part of the world whom God loved by sending His Son to be our Savior! Simply believe and the gift is yours!

Yes, my dear friends, the *Bible* is a big book, and my edition has no pictures at all! The names Mephibosheth and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz are hard to pronounce. I, too, have a hard time finding the proper application to my daily life when it comes to the differences between Old Testament burnt offerings and trespass offerings, and I, too, must confess that I scratch my head at times as I read the Revelation. But the *Bible* remains precious to me and I trust to all of you, for it contains **GOD’S** precious **WORD**, which **IS** vitally **A MESSAGE ABOUT SIN AND GRACE**—a most important message indeed, a message filled with blessing! Amen.

—Pastor Paul D. Nolting