

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

God's Response to Human Evil: The Faithfulness of Jesus *Romans 3:21 – 26*

Exegetical Outline

²¹ But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God
has been manifested,
being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,
²² even the righteousness of God
through faith in Jesus Christ [through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ¹]
for all those who believe; [into all those who believe]
for there is no distinction;
²³ for all
have sinned and
fall short of the glory of God,
²⁴ being justified
as a gift
by His grace
through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus
²⁵ whom God displayed publicly
as a propitiation in His blood through faith
to demonstrate His righteousness,
because in the forbearance of God
He passed over the sins previously committed;
²⁶ for the demonstration, I say,
of His righteousness at the present time,
so that He would be
just and
the justifier of
the one who has faith in Jesus.

¹ *pisteos Iesou Christou*: Since this phrase is the subjective genitive ('faith of Jesus Christ') and not the objective genitive ('faith in Jesus Christ' – *pisteos en Iesou Christou*), KJV translates Romans 3:22 and Galatians 2:16, 'by the faith of Jesus Christ.' This stresses Jesus' human life lived with absolute faithfulness to God under the scrutiny and pressure of the Mosaic Law, culminating, of course, in his death. See also T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation* (InterVarsity Press: 2008), p.28 and Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1 – 4:11* (Eerdmans: 2001).

Introduction: Harry Potter

One of the highlights of my summer was seeing my kids love for books develop. On his own, though, my son John read book 7 of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Now I really enjoy Harry Potter for its portrayal of friendship and for its clever literary allusions and historical references. Now for those of you who don't know the story, and for those of you who do but don't quite hear the allusions, I'm going to summarize the story and explain some of the significance. When Harry Potter was 1 year old, the most powerful evil wizard of all time, the Dark Lord Voldemort, killed Harry's mother and father. But when Voldemort cast a killing curse on Harry, it rebounded back onto Voldemort. The reason it didn't kill Harry was because Harry's mother had sacrificed herself first, and thus given a magical protection to Harry. The reason it didn't kill Voldemort was because Voldemort had already split his soul into objects outside his own body, and had achieved a kind of immortality in a very evil way. Voldemort had wanted to lead the wizarding world to conquer the world of Muggles, which is the word for ordinary human beings who don't have magic. He wanted to divide humanity up into two races – the magical race and the Muggle race – and make the magical race supreme. He was a wizard-Nazi. Now the problem that Harry Potter faces is that Voldemort becomes re-embodied. Voldemort regathers his army and starts to take over the wizarding world again. This time, Harry is commissioned to fight the Dark Lord. In book 7, Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione have to find the objects in which Voldemort put pieces of his soul. They have to destroy them. But in the last part of the story, Harry discovers that he has a piece of Voldemort's soul in him. It got implanted by mistake when Voldemort tried to kill him as a 1 year old. And the only way for Harry to destroy that piece of Voldemort's soul is for Harry to die, at the hands of Voldemort himself. And so, Harry goes to face Voldemort, and to die. Here is an excerpt from that story.

'His job was to walk calmly into Death's welcoming arms. Along the way, he was to dispose of Voldemort's remaining links to life, so that when at last he flung himself across Voldemort's path, and did not raise a wand to defend himself, the end would be clean, and the job that ought to have been done in Godric's Hollow would be finished: Neither would live, neither could survive. He felt his heart pounding fiercely in his chest. How strange that in his dread of death, it pumped all the harder, valiantly keeping him alive. But it would have to stop, and soon. Its beats were numbered. How many would there be time for, as he rose and walked through the castle for the last time, out into the grounds and into the forest? Terror washed over him as he lay on the floor, with that funeral drum pounding inside him. Would it hurt to die? All those times he had thought that it was about to happen and escaped, he had never really thought of the thing itself: His will to live had always been so much stronger than his fear of death. Yet it did not occur to him now to try to escape, to outrun Voldemort. It was over, he knew it, and all that was left was the thing itself: dying.

'Slowly, very slowly, he sat up, and as he did so he felt more alive and more aware of his own living body than ever before. Why had he never appreciated what a miracle he was, brain and nerve and bounding heart? It would all be gone...or at least, he would be gone from it. His breath came slow and deep, and his mouth and throat were completely dry, but so were his eyes...

'He stood up. His heart was leaping against his ribs like a frantic bird. Perhaps it knew it had little time left, perhaps it was determined to fulfill a lifetime's beats before the end. He did not look back as he closed the office door...

'He could no longer control his own trembling. It was not, after all, so easy to die. Every second he breathed, the smell of the grass, the cool air on his face, was so precious: To think that people had years and years, time to waste, so much time it dragged, and he was clinging to each second. At the same time he thought that he would not be able to go on, and knew that he must.' (selected from J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p.691 – 698).

Relevance

The reason I tell you that story is because it is a good illustration of the Jesus story. In order for Harry Potter to defeat the evil of his day, he had to die because there was a part of the evil in him. Similarly, in order for Jesus to defeat the evil in humanity, he had to die because there was a part of that evil in him. One big difference is that in Harry Potter, the part of Voldemort's soul in Harry didn't act or pressure him from within; it was just there. Whereas with Jesus, Jesus took hold of a fallen, sinful humanity from his conception, and it was always struggling against him. He never gave into it; in fact he fought it every moment of his life, and it was a heroic struggle. Listen to Jesus' story:

Mt.26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'³⁷ And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

³⁸ Then he said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with me.'³⁹

And he went a little beyond them, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will.'⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'So, you men could not keep watch with me for one hour?'⁴¹ Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.' [Luke adds ^{22:44} And being in agony he was praying very fervently; and his sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.]⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ And he left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays me is at hand!'⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Notice that Jesus was fighting something within himself? After his self-sacrifice on the cross – then and only then – could Jesus be resurrected from death as a new type of human being, a God-drenched human being that is free from the stain of sin and evil. Jesus is who we were meant to be. He defeated evil. He defeated self-centeredness. He defeated our willful separation from God. Jesus became and now is the perfect human being, the one good human being, the one whole human being, the God-drenched human being. Only then could Jesus share his new humanity with us, making us new and helping us to live as God always intended. Jesus is who we were meant to be.

Context

Thus far in the book of Romans, we've been in the Hospital of God, feeling defensive but ultimately hopeless. What has the diagnosis told us? We are S I N +. We've seen Paul call forward three examples of humanity: the bad man, the good man, and the best man. Then after proving quite decisively that all humanity is infected by sin and 'under sin,' Paul himself walks over to join the ranks of humanity under sin awaiting God's response. We're going to see that God's response is Jesus, and we'll see what that means. Because the mission of ACF is to call the whole campus to be transformed by Jesus as we ourselves are being transformed by him, we look for ways to ask spiritual questions and share our spiritual lives with others, especially those who don't know Jesus yet.

God's Righteousness Defined: v.21 – 26

In Romans 1:17, Paul said that the 'righteousness of God' is revealed in the announcement that Jesus is the new king of the world. But how is that? Now he gets more specific. The word 'righteousness' appears four times in six verses here: Once in v.21, once in v.22, and twice in v.25. What is 'God's righteousness?' There's a debate in scholarly circles about this (see Appendix A). On the one hand, righteousness seems to refer to punishing evil fair and square.² If that is the meaning, then 'the righteousness of God' means the plain and simple retribution of God; He must punish evil and is satisfied once He does. There are some of you who think that in order to make Jesus sound good, you need to portray God the Father as the holy Judge with a sense of holy justice where He could have just thrown you into hell because He was so offended by your sin. For all He cares, that's what you deserved. And what He did was to punish Jesus instead of you, so that He doesn't have any anger leftover for you if you 'accept Jesus.' Some of you, when you talk about Jesus with non-Christians, present God and Jesus that way. You think that in order to make Jesus sound really, really good, you have to make God sound rather mean. And perhaps that worked for an older generation that just accepted authority. But no wonder it doesn't work today: Your generation doesn't just accept authority, and more importantly, it's not an accurate picture of God. If you are not a Christian, and if someone has presented God to you that way, I want you to know that this is not who God is. The basic question here is that God is not satisfied by simply punishing sin.

² Take for example Deuteronomy 16:18 – 20: 'You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with **righteous** judgment. You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the **righteous**. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you.' But notice the context of this command is in God's covenant with Israel. Thus, I believe that this form of retributive justice is a subcategory of the larger issue of God's covenant. Righteousness in general in the Old Testament refers to either God or Israel being faithful to the special covenant relationship God began with Israel starting with Abraham. That covenant was God's commitment to love Israel and then the world to perfection, to life, to blessing. That covenant was about transforming people. So whenever Israel or God honored that covenant, it was said to be 'their righteousness' (e.g. Dt.6:25 for Israel, Dt.29 – 33 for God).

Illus: Let me make an analogy. Occasionally, there are times when my son John hits his younger sister Zoe. Or there are times when Zoe ignores John when he's trying to say something. When I see that happen, I get angry because I love the one who has been hurt. In fact, anger is a legitimate feeling that flows out of love: the greater my love for the hurt one, the greater my anger towards the one who hurt her or him. I am not a distant observer; I am deeply invested. So because I love the one who is hurt, I respond to bring about some form of justice: 'Apologize to your sister.' Or, 'Help your brother clean up that mess like he's asking you.' Or, 'Go to your room.' But am I satisfied once I do that? Is my role as a father simply to punish sin, so that when I do, I shake my hands and say, 'Well, I've done my job!' No, of course not. That is not what *satisfies* me. What about the one who did the wrong, the hurt, the injustice? Do I stop loving that one? No. Of course I also love that one too. But in my love for them, I am firmly against the self-centeredness inside them which is cutting them off from relationship with their sibling, and from me. And I want them to be against that, too, so I require them to apologize and change. I love them, but I also want them to be loving for their own sake, for the other person's sake, and for the sake of our relationship. I am not satisfied until they are loving, until their character is formed to be loving, until they come back into alignment with my love for their brother or sister. If they don't, they will continue to experience my love in the form of my anger, but it is still my love. What satisfies God? God is not satisfied by just punishing sin. He is only satisfied when we share His character, His love, and His very nature.

Now let's ask how God views human evil, injustice, and sin. Imagine that you are called before God, the highest Judge in the land, and the Father of all, the One before whom all hearts are laid bare. The charges are very troubling: sin, evil, injustice, and obstruction of justice, perjury and lying through our own self-deception, through our internal thoughts and external actions, through what you have done and what you have not done, through what you have said and what you have not said. The scary thing is that God is actually not impartial. He loves every person you've actively hurt, but not only that, every person you've ignored, silently judged, cheated on, or had contempt for. Also, you have benefited from an unjust social system that has hurt many other people He loves, and God is infinitely angry with that system and all who derive a false identity from it. So what does God do? In moments like this, some of us expect that God will be an exacting Judge and render a verdict, and that verdict is most certainly going to be: GUILTY, SO PUNISH THEM, AND AWAY WITH THEM; OUT OF MY SIGHT. That's scary. Or, others of us want God to be a permissive Santa Claus and just forget about our sin and its ugly consequences. But that's also scary. Why is it that God should leave sin unaddressed? What about all the people who are hurt? Is God some namby-pamby wussy? Because God infinitely loves those people, God's anger with us is intense, and perhaps infinite. Yet He loves you infinitely, too, just as I love the child in the wrong, as well as the child who has been wronged. God loves you; He hates sin; He hates lies; and He will love you all the way until He transforms you into the likeness of Jesus. That's when He will be satisfied, and then He will still love you.

God's Righteousness in the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ: v.21 – 22

This is reinforced in v.22, where Paul says that God's righteousness is found in the faithfulness of Jesus that we can then connect with. Now almost all of your Bible translations translate that phrase, 'through faith in Jesus Christ.' But scholars are debating that, too. I land on the side of translating it 'the faithfulness of Jesus Christ' for many reasons, not least of which Hebrews 12:2 calls 'Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.' If you're interested, you can read my notes and footnotes.

What was the faithfulness of Jesus? It was Jesus' lifelong faithfulness to God to struggle against the fallen humanity he was wearing and realign his humanity into the love of God. We see this in different places in Scripture, but the clearest two are when Jesus was beginning and ending his public career. At the beginning, we see Jesus go into the wilderness to battle against the devil, yes, but also to battle against the temptations of his own humanity. At the end, we see Jesus go to the Garden of Gethsemane, to wrestle with the self-centered part of him that resisted dying. Those two incidents are bookends. I don't think those were the only times Jesus struggled; it's more that they characterized his struggle, which was throughout his life.

I've often wondered what that was like for him. We have very little idea what it means to resist the evil and self-centeredness within ourselves, because we give into that self-centeredness fairly early on. Like how many of us really press into the racial tension here at BC for the good of the campus? Or do we just give up? How many of us say, 'Mom and Dad, I don't want to go shopping; I want to give that money to children in poverty'? How many of us really try to understand other people's taste in music out of love for them? We just pop in our headphones. The only way we know how strong our own evil is, is to resist it. And the longer we resist it, the more we feel it. If you read the saints of the past, they were really aware of their self-centeredness because they were pushing so hard against it.

We're not really aware of our self-centeredness because we pamper ourselves so quickly. We eat when we want, change the channel when we want, customize our play list and our shopping list to our comfort. We have comfort food. We have no idea how self-centered we can be because we protect ourselves from it.

That means that Jesus understood human sin even more than we do, and firsthand. How many of you believe that Jesus' body craved sexual satisfaction? Physical comfort? How many of you believe that Jesus' tongue was like ours, prone to speak vicious things about others? How many of you believe that Jesus' hands were like ours, wanting to take a sword and plunge it into the body of a Roman soldier? But he never, ever turned in that direction. He understood what would happen if he did.

How many of you believe that Jesus had a mind like ours, prone to think private thoughts apart from God?

When his own humanity wanted to just have an easy life, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to lash out at his enemies, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his own humanity wanted to sin, Jesus said, 'No. I belong to God.' He constantly took his own humanity and redirected it to God, to receive the love of God to the fullest, to love God absolutely.

Illus: The best way I have of understanding this struggle is to look at Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo carried the Ring of Power, another object that held the soul or power of the enemy. The closer the Ring got to Mordor, the stronger it became. It became heavier on Frodo. It put fear and hate in his mind. It made him do crazy things. It poisoned him. Jesus' struggle must have been a little like that. But he resisted it, every moment, all the way to the end. And Jesus couldn't just put down an object like the Ring. It was part of him. So he gave himself up as a sacrifice, becoming victorious over sin, and cleansing it out of his own humanity.

That makes Jesus Christ absolutely unique. All other religious systems cannot change humanity. All they can offer is more laws, more morals, more attempts at life through reincarnation. Don't you get tired of hearing about all that stuff??? Only as a human being can Jesus claim to change humanity, because he first changed his humanity. He did it as a human being through his spiritual dependence on God. And from God's perspective, look at how awesome it is: God completely judged and condemned all human sin through the human life and the human choices of Jesus. Yet God also loved the humanity of Jesus to perfection. Jesus' faithfulness is God's righteousness.

Now does that help us? YES IT DOES!!! Because Jesus can take the Spirit of his new God drenched humanity and put it into us. Look at verse 22. 'Even the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ INTO all those who believe.' Focus in on the word 'into.' In Greek, that word is 'eis' (epsilon iota sigma) In the NIV that word is translated 'to all who believe.' In the NASB, the word is translated 'for all who believe.' But given that 'eis' most often means 'into,' I'm going to follow the lead of my mentor and translate it that way. Therefore, the righteousness of God comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ INTO all those who believe.' God takes what Jesus has perfected by his faithfulness – a perfected human relationship with God – and places that into us. That is how God is righteous!!

Illus: Now what is this like? During Christmas times now with my kids, and even back when I hung out with at-risk kids in California, we watch the Christmas cartoon classic, 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas.' We all got on the couch. We saw the cranky old Grinch. And the song came on, 'You're a mean one, Mr. Grinch. With that evil leering smile...' Then Dr. Seuss pulls up an X-ray of the Grinch's heart, and sure enough, his heart is three sizes too small. He was too evil and cold. So true to his nature, just before Christmas, the Grinch slithers through the town of Whoville and steals everyone's presents. He drags his heavy sleigh up to the top of Mount Crumpet. There, just before pitching the sled over the edge, his ears hear the sound of singing: the far away singing of the Who's down in Whoville singing Christmas songs even though they didn't have any presents. Then, suddenly, the Grinch's scowling face softens and his heart is changed. It goes from being three sizes too small to literally bursting through the X-ray screen. Then he turns around and slides down Mt. Crumpet just in time to carve the Roast Beast. I think that is an apt analogy for what happens to our hearts when Jesus Christ brings his faithfulness into us. God's very life – His own righteousness – floods into us, filling our hearts to overflowing.

Innocent and Redeemed Through Christ: v.24

What happens then? Paul says in verse 24, we are 'justified.' That is a term which means 'to be declared innocent, to be acquitted.' We thought God the Judge was going to pronounce us guilty beyond a doubt, but all we hear is: 'Not guilty.' In our case, why is this? Is it God gave up taking sin seriously? Did His team of lawyers just up and

quit? Did we get a second chance to prove our good deeds? No. We didn't prove anything. So what is the basis for God saying, 'Not guilty?' Look at the rest of verse 24: 'through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.' These two words, justified and redeemed, are related, though sometimes we don't see the connection between them. Paul says that the basis for being justified in the redemption, so let's look first at redemption.

Now the word 'redemption' had a very rich meaning also. When the Jews spoke of redemption, they thought of the Exodus, where God redeemed Israel out of Egypt. It was a transfer from one state to another. When the Romans spoke of redemption, they thought of being bought out of the slave trade. Some scholars estimate that there were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, so they would definitely have recognized the imagery here. Redemption means 'being set free from slavery.'

But notice that the redemption is not 'through' Christ Jesus, or 'because of' Christ Jesus, but 'in' Christ Jesus. Jesus redeemed his own humanity and now redeemed humanity exists *in* him; it *is* him. Think of it this way: All of us have a disease in our bodies, a poison called evil or sin. We need healing from it. We are enslaved to it, in the same way that someone with AIDS or cancer would be enslaved, and need to be set free. The reason why God became a human being named Jesus was to take on a human body that had our disease. He came to ACQUIRE OUR DISEASE. Second, it was to have a human body in which to DEVELOP THE ANTIDOTE to the disease. Jesus resisted every shred of self-centeredness living in that body, struggling against it, fighting it internally, and pushing it all the way to its death. He CLEANSED THAT HUMANITY so that it conformed perfectly to the love of God. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God gave Jesus a fresh, God-drenched humanity perfectly fused with the divine. And God made the resurrected Jesus the antidote to our sin. When we have faith in Jesus, God connects us to Jesus spiritually, and God can now place in us a cleansed spirit, a new spiritual heart, the beginning of a fresh new humanity that is just like Jesus because it comes from him. To sum up: In Jesus, God worked out the healing to our disease so that we could all share in that healing. He shared in our nature that we might share in his. He became one with us that we might become one with him. That's why the phrase is 'the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.' Redeemed humanity exists only in Jesus. It is physically in Jesus, as the early Christians and the Eastern Orthodox Church continue to correctly talk about 'physical redemption.' So he can offer us the redeemed humanity that is in himself.

Don't you want it? Let me help you understand why this is so monumental. When you graduate from BC, you're going to receive bills in the mail asking you to pay the debt you owe for the loans you took out. It will say, 'Jane, please pay \$200 per month for the next 20 years,' or something. For you freshmen, it'll be higher! Well sin is like a bill. All of us are plagued by things we regret and feel guilty about. And there are things we may not feel that way about, but are nevertheless objective problems in the sight of God. Imagine that, for all those things, you owe some money. The more stuff you've done, the more you owe. And when the bill comes, it's staggering. But imagine that when you come to Jesus, he changes your identity, because he comes to live inside you and changes the fundamental part of who you are. So that when the bill comes with your name on it, you can say, 'Excuse me, but I'm no longer that person. I've fundamentally changed!!!' That's what it means to be redeemed, delivered out of bondage, and therefore justified, declared innocent.

Does this come because of something we've done? Of course not! It comes because of Jesus' faithfulness, thus, as Paul says next, 'as a gift.' And this gift comes 'by His grace,' which means, His unearned favor and empowering love. Once again, the righteousness of God is the faithfulness of Jesus poured *into* us, because God is satisfied when we share His character and His love, so He has to put it *into* us.

The True Satisfaction: v.25

But why does this satisfy God? Why does this uniquely satisfy His character and fit within His way of doing things? Paul answers that in the next great word-picture in verse 25: Jesus became the one and only sacrifice. 'Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith.' Now Paul is making a connection to the Jewish sacrifices, and the word translated 'propitiation' here is the Greek word 'hilasterion.' That is the noun form of a verb that means 'to sacrifice.' So it's 'to satisfy by a sacrifice.'

Now why does Paul bring up the Jewish sacrificial system? Because the Jewish sacrifices symbolized how God would suck sin out of us. In Leviticus 6 – 7, there were three basic types of sacrifices you could offer, and what made them different was who ate them. You could offer a burnt or grain offering, which God would eat, symbolically by consuming it with fire (Lev.6:8 – 13). You could offer a peace offering, which you would eat (Lev.7:11 – 15). Or you could offer a sin offering, which the priests would eat (Lev.6:14 – 18, 25 – 26).

Symbolically what was happening with all this eating and sacrificing was that God was communicating to Israel how He would deal with human sin. He would let you eat the peace offering. You get to swallow, eat, or internalize peace from God. But with regards to sin, if you were Jewish, you would lay your hand on the animal or the offering, symbolically saying that it was your sin, and God would suck it out of you. He would eat it. He would take it from you. Even in the case where the priests 'ate the sin' symbolically, they accumulated it in themselves as a group, and then the High Priest would send the sin to God once a year during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Once again, the misconception we can have is that the God of the Old Testament is just bloodthirsty and wanted a sacrifice to appease His anger. So He kills an animal instead of a human being, symbolizing how, in the New Testament, He would kill Jesus instead of human beings to appease His anger. But that's not what's happening. God is symbolizing the fact that He is the sin eater. He takes our sin into Himself, which He did in the physical body of Jesus. And He ate it. He cleansed it through the human choices of Jesus. The reason why it required Jesus' blood to be shed is because that's what had to happen. Like Harry Potter had to die to kill that piece of Voldemort's soul in him, Jesus had to die to kill the sinful humanity in him. So the cross, where Jesus shed his blood, was his victory. God is satisfied when He consumes human sin and destroys it in Himself!!!

Jesus Displays All of Who God Is: v.25 – 26

Finally, Paul explains again why Jesus is God's righteousness. The rest of his thought reads, 'to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed, for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be [two things] just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.' Paul is saying that this is why God didn't just wipe out human beings because of sin, nor was He really satisfied by the Jewish sacrificial system either. He was patient until the time came that He would deal with sin in Jesus. And with Jesus, He is just, in the sense that He condemned sin, absolutely, no exceptions, and at the root – hook, line, and sinker. Through Jesus' own human choices to put sin to death in himself, God condemned sin in humanity. Every obvious crime was condemned by Jesus because he refused to do it: every murder, every slaughter, every act of negligence, every betrayal. And every hidden, heart-level sin was condemned by Jesus because he refused to do that, too. So whether it be the abuse you endured as a child that you told no one about, the heartless word you said to that person, the way you handled that relationship, or the way you were handled, Jesus has condemned it. God is grieved and angry to the core that these things have happened, and GOD MUST CONDEMN SIN. Otherwise God would not be true to His character of justice.

But also with Jesus, God is 'the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.' That is, He is the one who justifies, or declares innocent, anyone who has faith in Jesus. Jesus is the only way for God to condemn the sin and transform the sinner into someone who is becoming more and more like Jesus.

That is why Jesus, especially on the Cross, tells us who God is: more than His act of creation in Genesis 1; more than what science can suggest to us based on the universe; and certainly more than any abstract philosophical statement. Jesus shows us all the aspects of God's love, which is like a diamond of perfectly balanced faces, growing out from one clear and pure point. In Jesus, we see all of GOD'S HOLINESS, which demanded perfection of character, meet all of GOD'S COMPASSION, which demanded embrace with the sinner!! We see all of GOD'S JUSTICE, which demanded that sin be condemned, meet all of GOD'S MERCY, which demanded that humanity be liberated!! Jesus is where all of who God is meets all of who we are, in all of our unholiness, in all of our lack of compassion, in all of our injustice, and all of our unmercifulness!! We've seen our selfish, unloving character in Romans 1:18 – 3:20, and we're surrounded by it all the time. NOW IN JESUS, AND IN HIM ALONE, WE SEE GOD'S LOVING CHARACTER IN ALL OF ITS DIMENSIONS. JESUS SHOWS US ALL OF WHO GOD IS, WHO GOD TRULY IS.

So when you see human sin in the world and wonder, 'Is God causing it?' The answer is no. He is not causing it. 'Is God allowing it?' No. He is not allowing it either. He is totally and completely against it and calls for every human being to be against it as well. If I were old enough to be your dad, and you were dating someone that I didn't like, would I be 'allowing' you to date that person? No, because by definition the choice is yours, and the word 'allowing' is not appropriate to describe our relationship. I am not allowing it; I would be completely against it, and make it known! The same is true for God. God has dignified your choices; that is inherent to the way He made us and relates to us AND HE IS COMPLETELY AGAINST OUR EVIL DOING. So He is not 'allowing' sin and evil. HE IS COMPLETELY AND UTTERLY AGAINST IT AND CALLS US TO BE AGAINST IT TO!!! HE DOES THAT IN JESUS!!! JESUS IS GOD'S RESPONSE TO HUMAN SIN. WHAT HE IS DOING IN THE WORLD

RIGHT NOW IS NOT MANIPULATING POLITICS AND NATIONS BUT BRINGING PEOPLE TO JESUS AND TRANSFORMING US. THAT IS WHY WE ARE CALLED TO INVITE PEOPLE TO JESUS!!!

As you reflect on this, compare yourself to Jesus. We human beings became independent and arrogant. Jesus became God-dependent and humble. We were self-centered. Jesus was God-centered and self-sacrificing. At every point, Jesus directly confronted and undid our sin. This was God's way of saying, 'You are not self-sufficient. You do need me. SPECIFICALLY ME!' We can put our faith nowhere else but Jesus.

This is why Jesus is the only remedy in the Hospital of God. God now has the antidote for sin, evil, and injustice. If you want to know God, contemplate Jesus. You can spend a lifetime doing that, and it would not be a wasted life, because you'd learn more and more about both God and us. Who is the center of attention in the Christian life? Jesus. If you have friends who want to know more about God, tell them to look at Jesus.

Appendix A: An Exegesis of ‘Righteous, Righteousness’ in Romans

New Testaments scholars D.A. Carson and N.T. Wright are among those who have debated what the phrase ‘the righteousness of God’ means. Carson argues for the conservative Protestant view that God’s righteousness means ‘His holy and wrathful response to human sin’, which would mean that God must punish sin and that Jesus’ death is God’s way of absorbing His own wrath for humanity – laying the groundwork for the ‘penal substitution’ theory of the atonement held by Carson. Wright argues that God’s righteousness means ‘His faithfulness to the covenant’ that He made to Abraham and extended to Israel, which could and (in my view) must involve a punishment for sin (in narrated form as Israel’s exile of Dt.27 – 28), but ultimately turns to the larger concern of bringing about the blessing of life that was promised by that covenant (Dt.30 – 33). This would mean that Jesus is God’s way of being faithful to His covenant, especially in that Jesus represented Israel and was truly Israel in fulfilling what the Law demanded in order to bring about the promised blessing of life – laying the groundwork for the ‘christus victor’ theory of the atonement, in particular, the ‘physical redemption’ theory stressing Jesus’ inner struggle against the sinful humanity he wore. So, exegetes sense correctly that much rests on the definition of the word ‘righteous.’

I believe that the immediate context of Romans leans decisively towards ‘covenant faithfulness.’ After Paul describes the manifestation of sin even in the Jewish person (Romans 2:17 – 28), he clarifies his position through a dialogue with a hypothetical Jewish debater raising questions and objections (Romans 3:1 – 8). One of those questions is, ‘If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it’ (3:3)? God’s covenantal faithfulness is in view. Paul’s response is that God’s faithfulness will not be nullified; rather, God will be ‘found true,’ even if ‘every man be found a liar’ (3:4). The very next question, a backward form of logical reasoning based on the previous question: ‘But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? I am speaking in human terms’ (3:5). In other words, since Jewish disbelief won’t nullify the faithfulness of God, will the Jew be excused for disbelief? In fact, if Jewish disbelief were a precondition for God to be faithful to His covenant, then doesn’t Jewish ‘unrighteousness’ demonstrate ‘the righteousness of God’ by comparison and by logical necessity? Paul’s response to this is a resounding no! Notice the parallelism: Jewish disbelief, or unfaithfulness to the covenant, is their unrighteousness, but God’s faithfulness is His righteousness. So, if Paul in 3:1 – 8 is asserting that God IS still faithful to His covenant with the Jews, then it makes good sense that he is in Romans 3:21 – 26 proving HOW God is indeed being faithful to His covenant. In Paul’s own words, HOW is God being righteous?

There is more evidence found in the concerns of Romans 4, where Paul brings up Abraham. But Abraham is not just an ‘example’ of someone who had faith. He is the person by whom God’s covenant promises for humanity were initiated. And Paul’s concern in Romans 4 is to show how the historic framework of God’s covenant with Abraham sets the stage for God to deal decisively with human sin and evil in Jesus. The origin of the covenant, in other words, should have a deep and fundamental alignment with the goals of the covenant and the eventual extension of the covenant to many, many others. And that it does. Abraham’s faith is paradigmatic: not only did He believe a word from God, who reckoned him to be righteous, but what he believed about God was that God could bring forth life out of death. The origin of the covenant is aligned therefore with God’s bringing the covenant to a climax in Jesus: We also believe a word from God *concerning Jesus* that God brought forth life out of death *in and through Jesus*. And the fact that Abraham was uncircumcised (Gentile) and then circumcised (Jew) in his reception of God’s covenant means that both Gentile and Jew – the whole world – must be the heirs of God’s covenant blessing, which is manifestly true in Jesus. Arguing that Abraham is simply ‘an example’ of someone who had faith makes most of the length and logic of Romans 4 rather awkward to explain. But it makes perfect sense if Paul’s concern was to describe how the inception of God’s covenant with Abraham fits naturally and resoundingly with Jesus as its climax (Rom.10:4). The covenant is Paul’s great concern.