

1. **Introduction:** We had an interesting discussion last Sunday on “godly” versus “moral.”
2. **Summary:** Moral (as a noun) refers to a person's standards of behavior or beliefs concerning what is and what is not acceptable for them to do.
 - From a Christian perspective, people may have good, bad, or neutral morals based on how their morals relate to God’s requirements.
 - Godly actions are actions that conform to God’s standards of behavior.
 - Ungodly actions may be moral in that they conform to the standards of acceptable behavior for of a particular person or organized group of people.
 - The October 2023 actions against citizens of Israel by Hamas were immoral and “ungodly” from a Christian perspective but were considered by the moral standards of Hamas to be “right” and commendable, bringing glory to those who participated.
 - Self-declared human “moral standards” vary but the moral requirements of the God of Abraham and Moses endure through all time. They were true for Adam and Eve and will be true for the last people alive at the end of time.
3. **Transition:** Paul described the degraded state of people of the world who live in the absence of the redeeming influence of Jesus Christ. The sad truth is that no one is righteous, no one seeks God. The answer to this dilemma is revealed in the gospel.
 - In 1:16-17, Paul says, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes., to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*
 - In 1:18-3:20 he established the truth that, without intervention by God, all humanity is “in the wrong” before God and subject to His wrath. That continues to be true.
 - Even in the fallen state, everyone has been provided, at minimum, with sufficient knowledge through what was created and from the writing of God’s Law on their hearts to recognize God’s eternal power and divine nature.
 - Because they have adequate knowledge to know God, humanity is under God’s wrath, both now and at the end.
 - The possibility of avoiding God’s wrath should lead people to glorify and worship Him.
 - However, unless God intervenes, that simply doesn’t happen.

- As Paul says in 3:11-12 ***“no one*** (who is not “In Christ”) ***understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, no not even one.***”
 - The only shield from God’s wrath is to accept the gospel offer and become “in Christ.”
 - Because the full misery of God’s wrath will not be poured out until the end, many people currently feel good about themselves and their life apart from God.
 - Though they see the spiritual and moral decline within themselves and the people around them, they fail to recognize that what they see is the result of the present manifestation of God’s just wrath. The status of humanity before God is full of warning.
 - But there is good news! Though people are not in themselves capable of fixing their sin problems, **God has supplied a solution.**
 - That is what Paul talks about next. Verse 3:21 begins the presentation of God’s provision for obtaining righteousness through faith.
4. ***Romans 3:21-26: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.***
- When God gave Israel the Law through Moses, He provided a way for forgiveness of sins and gaining righteousness before Him through the Law: Obey the Law perfectly all the time and earn righteousness before God.
 - From Moses to Jesus, righteousness could be obtained by perfectly obeying the Law. No one could do that! Another gracious gift was needed from God. He gave us Jesus, the incarnate Son, His life and His sacrificial death.
 - The dramatic ***“But now”*** of 3:21 signals Paul’s acknowledgement of the historical turning point in God’s dealing with the sinful human race. That turning point is the incarnation of the Son as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, the God-man.
 - This great turning point was long prophesied and anticipated by the Jews. Again and again in sacred texts there were indications that at the right time God would provide a savior who would bring a major change in the way God deals with the world’s people.

- The long-anticipated change came about through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Jesus.
- Together with precious promises, God gave His Law to the Jews, not for their benefit alone, but for the benefit of all mankind through them.
- Failing to keep the details of the Law was unrighteous. The truth was that no human can keep all the Law all the time. So, Paul says, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*” including both Jews and Gentiles in his condemnation.
- All people need the salvation offered in the Gospel.
- Is the idea that the Law is inadequate to insure Jews righteousness totally new? No!
- Even in the OT documents where God gives the Law’s unyielding commandments, God gives instructions for atonement for sins (breaking the Law) through animal sacrifice (i.e., atonement by the principle of substitution).
- It is as though God said here are My commandments, keep them and all is well. But because I know you will not be able to keep them, I will point you toward a solution to be made manifest when the time is right. The promised solution of “another way” is Christ.
- Christ’s finished work of salvation opens the door to the righteousness apart from perfect obedience to the Law all the time.
- God offers (guaranteed by His omnipotent power) to declare “legally righteous” anyone (Jew or Gentile) who in faith accepts Christ as who He says He is and to have done what He says He has done.
- Believe in Jesus and His saving work and a “for-sure” path to glorification will be opened for you. Your destiny will be to live everlasting life in the presence of God.
- Broadening of the offer of a way to righteousness so that it includes Gentiles seemed new, but it was entirely consistent with prophecy and God’s promise to Abraham that through his descendant all the families of the world would be blessed.
- The big change is in how a person can achieve a righteous status before God. The route to righteous standing through the Law was **right behavior**. The new route to righteous standing through the Gospel is **belief in Jesus and His finished work of salvation**.
- In grace and mercy God offers to substitute Jesus’ righteous record for the sinner’s record of failure. The only requirement is that the sinner in faith believes in Christ and His salvation earned for us through His life and sacrificial death.
- The righteousness of justification God provides to the one who believes is righteousness with no human input. It is from God alone. It is His gift based on nothing a person has done. The only criterion is to believe.

- As we will shortly see, Paul reminds us that even the faith to believe is God's gift so no one can boast by saying they believed when others didn't.
- But someone might say, isn't substituting Jesus' record for a sinner's record unjust?
- No! God's declaration of legal righteousness (justification) is grounded in the fact that on the cross Jesus paid the penalty due our sins, paid it in full by receiving the full measure of punishment due every sin.
- Believers are pardoned from the penalty due their sins because the penalty has been paid in full by Jesus Christ.
- To appreciate the enormity of the change in status from condemnation to righteousness consider carefully Paul's description in 1:18-3:20 of judgment and the eternal destiny for those who refuse to believe.
- The contrast is an eternity of punishment versus an eternity of bliss in God's presence.
- When that truth of "the penalty due our sin" compared to the gift provided by Jesus through His payment of the death penalty owed our sin "sinks in," the significance of Paul's "**BUT NOW**" becomes vividly clear.
- We stood condemned to death, but Jesus took our place. He provided a way for us, as condemned sinners, to be justified before God through His effort with no help from us.

5. Next: Begin with Romans 3:27-31.