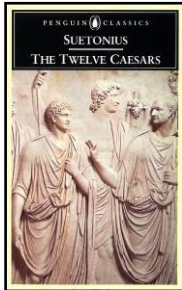


Route 66

Romans: Our Righteousness

Part 45 – November 28, 2010



The Twelve Caesars

Our primary source of information about early Roman History comes from a book called “The Twelve Caesars”, written in 121^{AD} by the royal secretary, Suetonius. In it, Suetonius records that in 49^{AD}, the Emperor Claudius “expelled all the Jews from Rome because they were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus.”¹ Biblical scholars overwhelmingly agree that “Chrestus” is a corruption of the Greek, “Christos” which means Christ.



Emperor Claudius

Apparently, nineteen years after the crucifixion, the disputes *among* the Jews over the claims of Christ had become *so* violent that Claudius’ only solution was to remove *all* Jews from Rome! During the Apostle Paul’s second missionary journey, he met a recently expelled Jewish couple who had moved to Corinth.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. – *Acts 18:1-2a NIV*

For about five years, the Christian church in Rome was composed entirely of - and therefore heavily influenced by - *gentiles*. Then Claudius died in 54^{AD} and his edict was repealed. And when the Christian Jews returned, there was suddenly much tension in Roman churches. Some were emphasizing tradition while others were emphasizing the freedoms allowed by grace.

About three or four years later Paul decides to respond to this unique situation. And we are left with the most forceful, logical, and articulate treatise on salvation ever written. It has long been referred to as the gospel according to *Paul*. But, whereas the gospels tell Jesus’ *story*. This book perfectly defines Jesus’ *message*.

The first thing Paul does is to put everyone on even ground. He spends the first two-and-a-half chapters hammering in that Jew and gentile alike deserve God’s judgment and condemnation. He reaches a crescendo in the middle of chapter three.



We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: “There is **no one** righteous, **not even one**; there is **no one** who understands, **no one** who seeks God. **All** have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is **no one** who does good, **not even one**.” – *Romans 3:9b-12 NIV*

¹ Life of Claudius 25.2

Paul's point is that our sense of righteousness has been knocked off-kilter. Our moral compass has become an *immoral* compass. Ever watch a movie and find yourself rooting for the *bad guy*? Writers capitalize on our aptitude to justify and excuse unholy behavior, even when our *reason* tells us that it's not *reasonable*.



In "Silence of the Lambs" Hannibal Lecter is intelligent, witty, charming, and calm. Whereas, his psychiatrist is an egotistical sadist; his guards are dimwits; and the F.B.I. lies to him. By the end we're rationalizing: "So he eats people ... there are worse things; off-hand I can't think of one, but if I were a cannibalistic psychopath, I'd want to be just like Hannibal!" It is in our nature to rationalize unrighteousness.

Paul doesn't say that they *commit* sin. This is clever; he says all are "under sin". This was well-known slave/master terminology. Paul depicts sin as a taskmaster that *owns* everyone. And no slave was *ever* set free by traditions, customs, or regulations. A slave must be *purchased* by a *liberator*. And the *Liberator* must be the *focus* of our faith. Paul now pivots on two *crucial* words:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. - *Romans 3:21-22a NIV*

All sin is a capitol offense in God's eyes. Yet, He graciously set up the OT sacrificial system as a way of "pardoning" sin.

The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves ... - *Leviticus 17:11 NIV*

BUT NOW, as Paul says in Romans 3:25 ...

God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice ... - *Romans 3:25a NIV*

You see, we need *more* than a pardon. Any president, governor, or king can pardon someone; but they're absolutely powerless to remove the guilt and the shame that dogs us when we sin. And: "He did this to demonstrate his justice". God had a huge dilemma: He loves with perfect compassion, but He judges with perfect righteousness. Those He loves most rightly deserved to be banished eternally from His presence.

By dying for all who stood guilty and condemned before Him, He can liberate us from our slavery *without* compromising His perfect holiness or His absolute hatred of sin. We were freed when Jesus died on the cross, but so was God! He was freed to bring His children into His eternal presence. And only Christ has the power and authority to pardon *and* purify!

Therefore, since we have been **justified** through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... - *Romans 5:1 NIV*



Forgiveness is an “unclothing” of *our* unrighteousness. Justification is a “clothing” of *Jesus’* righteousness. All of the world’s religions can be divided into the following three categories:

- A. Those that say sin does not exist.
- B. Those that say salvation must be earned.
- C. Christianity.

Only *Christianity* offers the radical concept of the cleansing of sin *and* the clothing of righteousness - by *faith* alone. And because He wraps me in His perfect holiness, I’m not only pardoned, but cleansed *internally* from the guilt and shame.



Paul then talks about our universal struggle with sin, and how he finds himself doing the very things he doesn’t want to do. Our life in Christ is like walking along the side of a hill. Sin is the constant downward pull, while righteousness is the upward path. This is just how it’ll always be in this broken, world - always easier to go down than up. But, God’s Spirit indwells us and empowers us to resist the pull when we live a life of gratitude for God’s grace.

... offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. - *Romans 6:13b-14 NIV*

Life through God’s Holy Spirit is one of liberty: it’s the freedom from sin and death and condemnation. Chapter eight opens with “no condemnation” and ends with “no separation”.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... - *Romans 8:1 NIV*

... neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. - *Romans 8:39 NIV*

No condemnation, no separation. That’s what we have in Jesus if we simply confess Him as our Savior *and* Lord of our life.

... if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. - *Romans 10:9 NIV*

In chapters nine through eleven, Paul urges the Jews to embrace the gentiles as grafted branches into the faith of Abraham. And he reminds the gentiles that they’re supported by Jewish roots. He humbles the Jews by reminding them that Israel rejected their Messiah. And he humbles the gentiles by informing them that God has promised to one day redeem and restore Israel.

From chapter twelve on, Paul focuses on behavior and judgmentalism. And everything pivots on a single, incredible word: “therefore”.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.
– Romans 12:1 NIV

“Therefore” means, on the basis of all I’ve covered before this: Sin and corruption; Christ and the cross; righteousness through faith; peace, joy, freedom, and adoption; and no condemnation! And he sums all this up with two words: “God’s mercy”! In response to God’s mercy, we should offer ourselves as “living sacrifices”. OT sacrifices died for man’s sin. We’re now called to live for God’s glory. We exist to put the glory of God’s mercy on display.

Only Christianity can have a “therefore” like this one! Every other religion turns it around: You accomplish this list of things, and you can *earn* God’s acceptance and approval. But for the Christian, Jesus has *already* accomplished it!

THEREFORE! Every time I serve or encourage, or give; every kindness in God’s name, every effort toward righteousness is all done in view of one great and glorious thing ... It’s all: “In view of God’s mercy”.

So Paul says, why argue about trivial matters (like sacred days and dietary laws) that can’t add to your righteousness, but can only detract from God’s glory? And he ends the letter by saying ...

To the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. – Romans 16:27 NIV

“To God be glory” means “To God *belongs* glory”. And God’s glory is the infinite beauty of His goodness and truth. We were created to behold His glory, acknowledge His glory, treasure His glory, and reflect His glory! My unrighteousness un-glorifies God. Whenever we choose to sin:

The glory of God is not honored. The holiness of God is not revered. The greatness of God is not admired. The power of God is not praised. The truth of God is not sought. The wisdom of God is not esteemed. The beauty of God is not treasured. The goodness of God is not savored. The faithfulness of God is not trusted. The promises of God are not relied upon. The commandments of God are not obeyed. The justice of God is not respected. The wrath of God is not feared. The grace of God is not cherished. The presence of God is not prized. And, the person of God is not loved.

Un-glorifying God is the *ultimate outrage* of creation! And though our sin disconnects us from God’s glory, Jesus died on the cross to reconnect us eternally.

To God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!