

NT 632 NLS: Romans – Spring 2021

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Final Paper: Summarize the Instructor's proposal of Paul's argument in 1:17-8:39. Identify the flow of thought, the big ideas in each section and the transition from one argument to another.

Romans is a letter of self-introduction, in response to the misrepresentation Paul had at the hands of the Jews. The Roman church was one that Paul had not established or visited, hence the needed to introduce himself. He was misrepresented on account of his statement about sin not ruling over the believers, because they were no longer under the Torah but under grace. This paper seeks to summarize the instructor's proposal of Paul's argument in 1:17-8:39, identifying the flow of thought, the big ideas in each section, and the transition from one argument to another. The specific misrepresentation that Paul experienced was that, by virtue of his theology of justification by faith in Jesus alone, he was opposing the Torah that teaches justification through observing the Torah.

After the epistolary introduction (1:1-15), Paul introduces the main theme of the book of Romans, which is justification by faith (1:16-17). Before he develops the main theme in 3:21-31, he paints a picture of the need of Jews, as well Gentiles, for the Gospel. He does this by detailing sinful practices that incur God's wrath and that will bring impending judgment (1:18-3:20). This is the point at which the apostle develops the theme of the Gospel, giving light and hope to a very dark picture (3:21-31). He goes on to show how the Old Testament supports his

theology of justification by faith alone in Jesus (4). The blessings of God's salvation are lauded (5:1-11), then justification is viewed by juxtaposing Adam and Christ (5:12-20). Paul spends some time responding to the objection, of justification through faith, by shedding light on the possible misconception that his teaching gives moral license to sin (6:1-23). 7:1-25 is his explanation of the rationale behind 'Not under law' (6:14). Paul takes a hiatus from this discourse by presenting fresh statements of Christian existence (8:39).

Main Theme

Justification by faith in Jesus is Paul's main theme in the book of Romans and is introduced in 1:17. Paul declares in 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and in 1:17, he refers to it as the "righteousness of God." This righteousness (*dikaiousuneis*) is a status conferred on those who experience God's salvation. It is an acquittal that puts a person in right standing with God and affords him or her the experience of a right relationship with God. Only by faith can this be appropriated and enable the acquitted person to live by faith. The adjective 'dikaiois' means the justified who will 'live by faith' in the present age in the on-going Christian life. It can also mean the righteous 'by faith will live' a life in the future age. In summarizing the verse that introduces the theme, it can be rendered, "For in the gospel the gift of a justified or acquitted status which comes from God is revealed. It is appropriated by faith alone. Just as it is written 'The one justified by faith will live.'"¹

Jews and Gentiles Similarly Guilty

The apostle employs the diatribe style to demonstrate that Jews and Gentiles are both guilty of transgressing the Law. His strategy is the use of a 'hook' to arrest the attention of the

Jews. He made it clear that God has revealed essential parts of His character through creation, yet humans respond by suppressing the truth and turning to idolatry. This has incurred God's judgment of giving them over to their sins. Three times Paul mentions God's "Giving them over" (1:24, 26, 28).

Paul lists the specific sins that the Gentiles commit, and foremost among them is one which Jews consider one of the two most condemning of Gentile sins – homosexuality. This was to set the stage, before spreading before them their own sins of *complacency, reliance on the law* and *on circumcision* for justification. The apostle made the Jews aware that they practiced the same sins, and that God will not be lenient with them, because He judges rightly and is not partial. God is patient, but this should lead to repentance, not complacency. Furthermore, they are greatly misled if they think that observing the Torah will save them from eschatological judgment. Paul's aim is to undermine the Jew's dependence on the law for salvation, by revealing that the law brings the opposite of what they expect. Instead of life, it brings death; instead of freedom, it brings bondage; and instead of justification, it brings condemnation. The law is a mere catalyst – an enabler which intensifies the experience of sin, not resolves the dilemma. Paul deliberately represents the Torah negatively in order to convince the Jews that it is a misleading source of justification. Relying on circumcision was not an option either. He once again uses the diatribe style to argue that circumcision is of no value if it is not an inner one of the heart. If Gentiles obey the Law, they are the ones considered circumcised. Both Jews and Gentiles are under the same judgment, because the law is not a sufficient foundation on which to base salvation. It only serves to expose sin. "For through the Law comes knowledge of sin" (3:20)

Main Theme Developed

Now that Paul has plainly shown that salvation is for both Jews and Gentiles alike; is a matter of the heart and not outward rituals, such as circumcision; and cannot be attained by obeying the Law, he is ready to expound on his main theme. The Romans 3:21-26 passage is this elaboration on the main theme of Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.' The word *righteousness*, "Dikaiousuneī," has two meanings that must be understood contextually. One is God's *saving power*, and the other is *moral righteousness from God*. The *righteousness*, that is used in Verse 21, means "salvation status" as in a right relationship with God or the saving power of God. It is attained "apart from the Law" through faith in or of Jesus – either 'through the faithfulness of Jesus' or 'through faith in Jesus'. Because both Jews and Gentiles sinned and lacked God's glory, they needed the justification that redemption offered freely by His grace.

The redemption that is available was made possible when God put His Son up as propitiation for all humans. This idea is simplified by the juxtaposition of two court rooms. The human court represents a place where no forgiveness takes place in the proceedings, neither is there any reconciliation with the judge. This is more of a secular Greek understanding where the wrath of a deity is appeased. The Old Testament perception of a court room is one where there is forgiveness and reconciliation to the judge. A positive twist is put on a negative Greek view of propitiation. An added beauty is painted of the idea of propitiation when it is realized that the same word is used to mean 'mercy seat' in Hebrews 9:5. The significance is that when God put forth His Son as propitiation, it was all about His mercy in a redemption that cost the

shedding of blood. So, in combining the meanings of propitiation, we get “wrath-averting, sin-cleansing, sacrifice in fulfillment of what the mercy seat represented.”² God had a purpose, and that was to demonstrate that He was righteous and just in passing over sin, justifying sinners like Abraham, David, Habakkuk. In the present age, He justifies sinners who believe in Jesus. This could be summed by saying, “as the hilasterion, Jesus deals decisively with the problem of sin so that God can remain righteous even as He acquits/justifies sinners.”³

Old Testament Support of Paul’s Theology

Abraham was to 2nd Temple Jews what Mary is to Catholics. He was a model of piety and observance of the law. Though he was not morally upright, he was justified. *Dikaiosune*, in Romans 4 means justification, not immediate moral transformation. Being justified by works, does not mean that Abraham achieved salvation status by doing good works. This was not a matter of legalism – works-righteousness. It was more a covenantal nomism of ‘getting in and staying in’. Jews understood Genesis 15:6 as Abraham experienced it – he trusted God, therefore God blessed him. He wasn’t blessed because he observed Jewish rituals such as circumcision. The crucial point about Abraham is that God accepted him **before** he was circumcised. In Genesis 15:6, he believed God, and **then** it was counted to him as righteousness, ‘*tsedaqah*’. God brought him into relationship with Him, because he responded with faith. Later, circumcision came into the picture. It was all about grace.

Blessings of God’s Salvation and justification viewed in Adam/Christ Contrast

Justification and the blessings of *dikaiosune* are the themes of Romans 5. These blessings include peace with God – *shalom* and the freedom from estrangement; the grace

which marked a new era of history; the hope of the glory of God; and the enabling to rejoice while experiencing trials. In examining the theme of justification and its blessings, one notices that the themes of reconciliation and hope seem to be absorbed. It is justification that makes reconciliation possible, and a justified soul that has experienced reconciliation is full of hope. This hope makes it possible for the believer to be unashamed, because the love that God has been “shed abroad” in his heart fills him with courage. The fact that Christ died for the ungodly fuels the believer with the confidence which make disappointment a stranger and proves that this experience is no illusion.

Symmetrical comparisons between Jesus and Adam with asymmetrical components emphasize the superiority of the blessings that come through Christ. Adam’s trespass brought death and condemnation, whereas Christ’s gift granted justification and life. The magnitude of Christ’s gift of justification in its scope and weightiness is incomparable, as the words “how much more” and “overflow to the many” indicate. The blessings of Christ’s righteousness truly are great.

Response to Objection: Justification by faith without works does not mean moral license

Romans 6 begins with Paul’s emphatic denouncement of the potential argument that the end of Romans 5 very likely would induce, that since grace abounds where sin increases, one may as well indulge sin. The denouncement comes with Paul’s response, in 6:1, “By no means!” Rather, the gospel commits the Christian to a life of righteousness. Everyone has two masters, and the Christian has chosen Christ and His righteousness, implying that he is not free to sin. The central argument is that all must choose between two masters, whether sin or

righteousness. Whichever one is chosen, to that the person becomes a slave. It is not a question of whether one has a master, but which master is given allegiance and whose slave one becomes. The believer chooses Christ which means a slavery that paradoxically provides the greatest freedom at the same time. It is the freedom to **not** sin.

Not Under Law

After seeming to indict the law, Paul says nothing is wrong with the law. The purpose of Romans 7 is to exonerate the law of any responsibility for its negative impact. The negative impact is that it now exposes sin because it brings a knowledge of sin. 'It awakens conscience', 'aggravates the experience of sin', and makes one unquestionably accountable. The law is good, and though Paul considered some parts of the Torah, such as Sabbath and food laws, to be obsolete, nothing in the context says that they are released from their obligation to the Torah. "The relationship to the law is one that aggravates sin, instead of being an antidote. It was a catalyst for condemnation, not justification."⁴ Paul puts dying to sin in the same category as dying to the law. Instead of being a solution, it is an explosive. Nonetheless, it is not bad, it is sin within the person that is bad.

There is a struggle between the divided self, not between a sinful nature and the spiritual nature. It is between two forces or two wills. The 'I' is a person who has a deep desire for obedience to God. The anguished cry of this person for deliverance is not that of a believer speaking, but it is an imbalance between right and wrong. The weight is not on the negative. Paul is saying this to convince his readers that the problem is not with the law; it is the person.

Paul talks about the difference it makes when the law is encountered in the 'new me.' When it does, good things happen. In a fallen state, bad things happen when the law is encountered.

Christian Existence

Paul restated images from 1:17 and offers fresh statements in Chapter 8. Positive images are the adoption as sons and daughters, present suffering-future glory, the Spirit's assistance in prayer, and God being for us. Contrary to some thinking, Romans 8 is not primarily about the Spirit. It is Paul's continuation of the argument that justification is through faith in Christ. There is the Law of the Spirit of death and the Law of the Spirit of Life. The new law empowers the believer to live a righteous life, and herein are two fundamental outcomes – a life according to the flesh which will yield death and a life according to the Spirit which will yield life and peace. If one chooses to live life in the Spirit, the result is positively eschatological. He will live because the Spirit will raise him up. What are the implications? Believers must live according to the Spirit, as that is the only real evidence that they belong to God.

A part of this Christian existence is that the Spirit in this new life "effects and attests to our adoption"⁵ Abba is expressive of intimacy in this relationship of adoption borne out by the Spirit bearing witness. We also have the first fruits of the Spirit as we groan and eagerly await the redemption of our bodies in future glory. Again, in this new existence, it is the Spirit who assists us in praying since we do not know how to pray. As we allow the Spirit to intercede, we know that He works our different circumstances for good, if we are called according to His purpose. Those He called, He justified, and those He justified, He glorified. He will bring to glory

those who continue in righteousness to the end. For those who are justified, He will spare nothing and is always on their side. "IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?" (8:31)

Endnotes

1. Lecture notes, January 20, 2022
2. Lecture notes, March 10, 2022
3. Lecture notes, March 10, 2022
4. Lecture notes, March 17, 2022
5. Lecture notes, March 31, 2022