

# Faith in One Living God

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 9*, February 22, 2015

## Romans 3:21-31 (ESV adapted)

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law God's faithful righteousness has been manifested, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – <sup>22</sup> God's righteousness seen through Jesus Messiah's faithfulness for all who have faith/believe.

For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and have lost the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are declared right by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Messiah Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a mercy-seat through the faithfulness shown in his blood.

God's purpose was to demonstrate his faithful righteousness, because of his passing over former sins in the forbearance of God <sup>26</sup> leading up to demonstrating his faithful righteousness in the present time, in order that he himself might be righteous and may declare right the one who lives by trusting the faithfulness of Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

<sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is declared right on the basis of faith apart from works of the law.

<sup>29</sup> Or does God belong only to the Jews? And not also to the Gentiles (nations)? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since God is one [Dt 6:4] – who will declare the circumcised right by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

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## Romans 1:16-17

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes (*pisteuein*), to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it God's righteousness is revealed from faithfulness (*pistis*) into faith (*pistis*), as it is written, "The righteous from faith (*pistis*) shall live." [Hab. 2:4]

## Exodus 25:22 God speaking to Moses about the Ark of the Covenant

<sup>22</sup> There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat (*hilasterion*)...on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

## Deuteronomy 6:4-5

<sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel: LORD (*Yahweh* | *Kyrios*) our God, LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

## Mark 12:28-30

<sup>28</sup> And one of the scribes ... asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: Lord our God, Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> And you shall love Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

## Galatians 2:19-20

<sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the flesh, I live by of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

## Can I Really Trust God?

This is one of the most packed and compressed sections of the Bible. So much of the message of Romans, the Gospel, is stated or pointed to here. Often seen as the central statement of atonement (what happened in the cross of Jesus) in the NT.

But the central theme is God's faithful righteousness (*dikaiosyne*) – not a righteousness that he gives us, but his own faithfulness to his promises to Abraham, Moses, David – the challenge of the whole story of human sinfulness and brokenness and all God has done through Israel. If you were an ancient Roman or modern New Yorker, what does it have to do with you? Isn't it just a story of covenant and law and Jewish rebellion and exile? Many Jews, like Paul, saw Israel's only hope in the Torah/law, in keeping the regulations of the law more carefully in a way that marked them off from Gentiles and other Jews. But the scope of those who claimed to be righteous (*dikaioi*) was ever narrower.

And yet the scriptures (OT) are the story of that one God, creator of the world and all people, a living, involved God who cares about his creatures, all that destroys their life, and the hope that life can be renewed, healed, made right. God's righteousness (*dikaiosyne*) reaches out to make them all right (*dikaion*), all nations both now and permanently in the age to come. But hadn't Israel's faithlessness undermined God's faithfulness?

## Seeing God in Jesus

No. God had never been dependent on Israel's faithfulness. Every human sins. It's universal. Israel knows transgressions more clearly through the law. Israel's faithlessness only made clear the universal brokenness of humanity. God knew all along (as seen in scripture) that he must fulfill his promises by his own grace, intervening in Israel's rich, symbolic history.

The Gospel (good news) tells how God has done that, focusing the whole story down to one man, Israel's Messiah, God's own self, the human for every human, Jesus. Jesus' own faithfulness (*pistis*) in life and death lays the basis for our faith/trust (*pistis*), a faith that any human, Jew or Gentile, can share, that can break down all barriers. All united in Grace.

It's not simple. In Jesus the complex strands of Israel's story are woven together. (1) The redemption from slavery in the Exodus, breaking us free from enslavement to our sin and brokenness. (2) On the cross ("in his blood") Jesus becomes the "mercy seat" (*hilasterion*) on the ancient ark of the covenant where on the day of atonement, the blood of the sacrifice for the sins of the people was sprinkled in the holy of holies, the place where God met his people. (3) He is the suffering Servant (Isa 53) who in his faithfulness bears our griefs and sorrows, and thus makes many righteous. He both embodies Israel and serves Israel and the whole world. Thus the ancient promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the world through Abraham's offspring/seed is brought to realization.

## From One to the World

Paul himself had lived out the boast of Israel that it alone had the law and a relationship with God. But God's demonstration of his faithful righteousness has excluded such a boast. Paul is not talking about a general boasting in moral achievement, but in the "works of the law" that defined the Jews alone as God's people. It should have been obvious.

The very center of the Scriptures was the affirmation that God is one. That must mean God belongs as much to all nations as to Jews. Yes, God worked through Israel's long history, narrowing it down ultimately to the Messiah embodying Israel and the whole world.

But all that is shown by the law itself. That's what it was always all about. The Gospel is seeing that God embodied in the loving faithfulness of Jesus and living in that faith and love.