

SOUND DOCTRINE FOR SPIRITUAL SUCCESS – Studies in Romans

The Continuity of God's Plan (Romans 3:21-26)

In conjunction with the central doctrine established by Paul in proclaiming justification by grace through faith, there is also the concept of the continuity of God's plan of salvation. From the very moment of Adam's fall into sin, the need of the human race, regardless of ethnicity or religion, has been that of being forgiven by God. Adam was in need of it as much Abraham, and Abraham as much as Moses, Jews as much as Gentiles. In v21, Paul appeals to the Law and Prophets of the Old Testament in order to clarify any confusion as to whether or not his teaching is some sort of heretical departure from the norm. It is not! It is simply a fulfillment of the same, applied to everyone who qualifies as a descendant of Adam (Acts 17:26). That includes all of us, as sinners in need of a Savior; a truth established beyond the shadow of any doubt in Romans 3:22-23 –

“ . . . even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . . ”

In order to further confirm this common bond of continuity, Paul reveals a unique truth in this passage, rarely mentioned in the New Testament. Notice what he writes in Romans 3:25 –

“ . . . whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed . . . ”

The doctrine of propitiation is presented as a necessary factor in our salvation. In this instance as well, the death of Christ on the Cross, through the shedding of His blood, validates the righteous character of God. Thus far, on five separate occasions, the apostle has emphasized the wrath of God as an expression of His righteous anger toward the behavior of a human race, lost and fallen in sin. But here, Paul wants us to know that the multitude of offenses which have incited God's anger against us, have been dealt with, in harmony with the complete satisfaction of His justice; a satisfaction of His justice which occurred at the Cross.

As gracious and free as our salvation truly is, there is also nothing unjust or unrighteous about it. This is why Christ's redemptive work also serves the purpose of being a propitiatory sacrifice. On the one hand, Christ's death on the Cross pays the penalty of sin (redemption); on the other, it satisfies the righteous wrath of God against sin (propitiation). Paul's emphasis in v25 also helps us to understand God's forbearance of sins previously committed. It should not be interpreted by Gentiles as God's indifference toward sin, nor misunderstood by the Jewish readership as a permanent removal of sin under the Old Testament sacrificial system (Hebrews 9:15). His forbearance is motivated by God's anticipation of what would take place at the Cross.

Why has God gone to such great lengths to make His salvation so free and easy? Any other alternative would have been impossible for us to fulfill; or out of harmony with His perfectly righteous character.