

Andrew Cook:

Over the last few programmes here on Serving Today, we've been learning about the theme of the righteousness of God. We've done this by looking at the biblical background, first from the Old Testament, then at how the New Testament deals with it.

Our focus has been the summary statement in Paul's letter to the Romans which the German Reformer Martin Luther described as the 'sweetest of phrases'. Here's a reminder of Romans chapter 1 verse 17.

Voice *'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."'*

Andrew:

From this verse we've seen the close connection between the righteousness of God and justification by faith. Faith is the only means by which we are made righteous, and it's only possible on the basis of the saving death of Christ on the cross. This, says Paul, is what the gospel reveals about the righteousness of God.

In this, the last part of our overview, we're going to think about some implications of this theme from the Bible. First, being justified, or being made righteous, should mean true joy because we don't have to face God's judgement.

In Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians, one of the big issues he had to deal with was whether justification was by faith alone or, whether it also involved works of righteousness. The implication then is that we that we really don't have to do anything to be made righteous. I don't have to prove myself to God, because of what Christ has done on the cross.

Here are a couple of verses that say this decisively. First, Romans chapter 3 verse 27:

Voice *'Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the 'law' that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.'*

Andrew:

Or again Galatians chapter 3 verse 11 says:

Voice *'Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."'*

Andrew:

It couldn't be clearer. The law, or works of righteousness, do not make you a believer. It follows that we're justified on the same basis as every other believer. In Paul's day, this meant it didn't matter whether someone was a Jew who strongly identified with Abraham as their forefather. There are therefore no grounds for any kind of spiritual self-importance, or boasting, or looking down on or being intimidated by others.

As Paul also says in Romans chapter 3 verse 24:

Voice *'All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'*

Andrew:

And this is what the Reformation clarified once and for all. Righteousness could not be earned or purchased or merited or bargained for. There is no human control or influence on justification because it is all of God's grace.

Justification by faith should also be unifying for the church. The church that Paul was writing to in Rome was in danger of division because of tensions between those from Jewish backgrounds who thought that the law still had a place in making you righteous. They looked down on Gentile believers who didn't see it the same way. This comes through for example in chapter 14 of Romans. Issues about what foods people ate or what special religious days they kept or not, shouldn't have any bearing on a believer's standing or acceptance by God.

Also important to Paul, and this is the final implication of justification by faith for now, was that it should lead to humility. Justification by faith should therefore shape and make a profound difference to fellowship between believers. This is well illustrated in the gospels when Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We don't have time to read all of it but this is Luke chapter 18 verse 9:

Voice *'To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:'*

Andrew:

And it ends with verse 14:

Voice *'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'*

Andrew:

I hope you noticed the references to justification and righteousness that Jesus uses here, and this, long before Paul ever realised his own need to be made righteous by believing in Christ alone.

Well, that brings to an end our brief study of the theme of the righteousness of God.