

9. Hope for eternal life

June 8, 2008

There are 118 death row inmates in the State of Arizona who are sentenced to die with lethal injection for the crimes they've committed. The majority of them are in the Florence State Prison which is located in Florence, AZ, 65 miles east from Phoenix.

The Florence State Prison has been the judicial site in Arizona for state executions since 1910. But these death row inmates are doing their best to lengthen their lives by appealing countless times and tangling their cases in the courts. There is one word all of them are desiring, "Pardoned" even though all of them are in that situation because they took other people's lives. They are all eager to live one extra day.

There are over 6.6 billion people live on earth at this time. I can say every single person on this earth is a death row inmate – all waiting to die once someday.

From Romans 1:18 to 3:20, we've read and studied total depravity of the human race. We realize that there is absolutely nothing good in us to deserve God's grace and eternal life. It seems that there is no way to heaven and we are doomed for hell without any possibility of pardon from God and no hope for eternal life in heaven.

However, our God is so gracious and compassionate to provide a ray of hope and guidance through His Son Jesus Christ who gives a choice of eternal life freely to anyone who desires.

But the majority of the world population would rather choose eternal death than believing God's way because of their own pride that insists their idea over God's.

A. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD TO MEN

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets,

Apostle Paul already made it crystal clear to us that no one, I mean NO ONE, can be righteous by following the law of God. First it is impossible for any sinful human to obey all the requirements of God's law. Second, our righteousness is nothing but a filthy rag to compare with God's righteousness.

Under the Old Testament law, righteousness came by man behaving. But under the New Testament Gospel, righteousness comes by believing. The law itself reveals the righteousness of God, because the law is holy and just and good.

"*But now*" speaks of the newness of God's work in Jesus Christ – it really is a New Covenant. Being witnessed by the law and the Prophets reminds us that there is still continuity with God's work from the Old Testament time.

B. ALL HAVE SINNED

Romans 3:22-23 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Faith is only as good as its object. All men trust something, but the Christian trusts Christ. Many people say, "I trust in God!" But this is not what saves us. It is the personal, individual faith in Jesus Christ that saves and justifies the lost sinner. Even the demons believe in God and tremble, yet this does not save them.

Some people insist that they can make their way to heaven with their own righteousness and good works. They claim to believe that God is real and the Bible is true, yet they disagree with it. A simple logic tells me when a person disagrees with the truth, that makes the person to be false.

All have sinned. No one is righteous. Paul states that truth again here, not so much to return to the topic of universal sinfulness but to encourage us that the Gospel, like sin, isn't confined to any particular race of people.

C. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH REDEMPTION

Romans 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

At your workplace when it is the time to get paid, you don't run to your boss' office and thank him repeatedly for the paycheck you are going to receive. You just pick up your paycheck that is rendered to you for your labor. You deserve it and you earn it.

But the grace of God is not something we deserve. I am sure many of you heard this: God in His mercy does not give us what we do deserve, and God in grace gives us what we do not deserve. God declares us righteous while we are still sinners.

Justification is a legal declaration, an announcement of one's status before God. Its opposite is condemnation. Justification doesn't mean that we become instantly perfect and holy. But we are instantly forgiven and loved by God.

Redemption is a term used in the slave trade. It pictures our being purchased and delivered from the ownership of satan and sin by Christ's blood and made free in Him.

Christ's righteousness is instantly credited to our account. So when Father God looks at us, He sees the perfect obedience and holiness of His Son. Once justified, the process of spiritual growth – sanctification – begins.

D. PROPITIATION BY HIS BLOOD

Romans 3:25-26 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Salvation is free to us, but it is not cheap to God. "Propitiation" means the satisfying of God's holy law, the meeting of its just demands, so that God can freely forgive those who come to Christ. The word "blood" tells us what the price was. Jesus had to die on the cross in order to satisfy the law and justify lost sinners.

NIV renders 'propitiation' as "a sacrifice of atonement". That is another good translation.

There are many denominations within the ranks of Christianity that try to remove the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. They say it is gross to talk about the bloody cross. I don't know what kind of image they have in mind. If you beat up a man thirty nine times with a whip with metal pieces at its end and pierce him on his hands and feet with nails and shove down a crown of thorns on his head and pierce

him with a spear on his side, that person bleeds terribly. The Son of God who is God Himself went through all these for us and they tell Him it is gross and not necessary. What a pathetic ignorance they have! That is a downright blasphemy.

God must be perfectly consistent with Himself. He cannot break His own law or violate His own nature. God is loving, yet He is holy and righteous. A God of love wants to forgive sinners, but a God of holiness must punish sin and uphold His righteous law. How can God be both "*just and the justifier*"? The answer is in Jesus Christ. When Jesus suffered the wrath of God on the cross for the sins of the world, He fully met the demands of God's law, and also fully expressed the love of God's heart.

It was not the nails and the handful of Roman soldiers who kept Him on the cross, but it was the love He had for us. He knew that without His sacrifice we would never be able to be with Him in heaven.

The best illustration of this truth is the Jewish Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. Two goats were presented at the altar, and one of them was chosen for a sacrifice. The goat was slain and its blood taken into the holy of holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat, that golden cover on the ark of the covenant. This sprinkled blood covered the two tablets of the law inside the ark.

The priest then put his hands on the head of the other goat and confessed the sins of the people. Then the goat was taken out into the wilderness and set free to symbolize the carrying away of sins.

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

In the Old Testament period, the blood of animals could never take away sin. It could only cover it until the time when Jesus would come and purchase a finished salvation. God had "*passed over*" the sins that were past, knowing that His Son would come and finish the work. Because of His death and resurrection, there would be "*redemption*" – a purchasing of the sinner and setting him free.

When Jesus died, He reached all the way back to Adam and took care of those sins. No one, including satan, could accuse God of being unjust or unfair because of His seeming passing over of sins in the Old Testament time.

E. NO ROOM FOR BOASTING

Romans 3:27-28 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

I checked out the definition of 'gift' from the dictionary:

Gift: Something bestowed or acquired without any particular effort by the recipient or without its being earned

In other words, a gift has nothing to do with the recipient's capability, being deserved. It is strictly up to the gift giver. When a person receives a gift, he should not boast, "I got this gift, because I am so nice and deserving." That would be stupidity and empty words.

What, then, should our response be to God's giving us such a gracious gift? The gift of salvation glorifies the Giver, not the recipient. There is no room for boasting.

The only thing human can boast about is sin. Since we cannot do anything else to meet the requirements of God's righteousness, we have absolutely nothing to boast, but rather we should be grateful that God chose to save us.

Galatians 6:14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

A renown hymn writer Isaac Watts penned this hymn:
When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

F. WHAT ABOUT THE law?

Romans 3:29-31 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, 30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Since Paul argues so forcefully in Romans that justification comes by faith in Christ and not by keeping the law, he must periodically remind his readers that he's not saying the law is evil or even that believers should ignore it.

Justification by faith upholds the value of the law in two ways:

- 1) **It shows the true purpose of the law, which was to reveal our sinfulness and drive us to Christ.**
- 2) **Through justification by faith we actually keep the law when we walk in the Spirit.**

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) **The grace of God is acceptance without reservation, forgiveness without condemnation, pardon without probation.**

It is unrestrained love poured out on the undeserving. That is exactly what God has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- 2) **Since we cannot do anything else to meet the requirements of God's righteousness, we have absolutely nothing to boast, but rather we should be grateful that God chose to save us.**