

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS HAS BEEN REVEALED TO MEN

ROMANS 3:21-31

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I. GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AVAILABLE BY FAITH ROMANS 3:21-22a

3:21-22a. But now God's righteousness apart from the law has been manifested, borne witness to by the law and the prophets, that is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, *which is* for all and *is* upon all who believe.

The initial word in the Greek of the new unit (*nuni* = **now**) is emphatic. [The English word **but** translates the *second* word: *de*.] The emphasis serves to call attention to the new consideration that, despite human *unrighteousness*, God has another kind of **righteousness** that is available to mankind. This *righteousness* is testified to (**borne witness to**) **by the law and the prophets**, the very same Scriptural witnesses that Paul has just cited as utterly condemning man for his sinfulness (3:10-20).

In the major section starting at 1:18, Paul began by declaring the wrath of God to be revealed (*apokaluptetai*) from heaven. The material up to 3:20, in effect, has justified that wrath. Now, however, something else is declared to be "revealed" (*pephanerōtai*), but *this* manifestation is not one of *wrath*, but rather of *righteousness*. Furthermore, this revelation is not to be discerned from human experience,

¹When he went to be with the Lord in November of 2008, Hodges had completed a commentary on Romans through the middle of Chap. 14. GES has completed the commentary and is in the final stages of editing it. Our goal is to have it in print by the April 2011 GES Annual Conference. This article is pulled directly from that commentary.

as was the case with wrath (cf. 1:19-32). Instead it is a matter that God has communicated in His inspired word, namely, *the law and the prophets*. Unlike the revelation of wrath that can be deduced from visible phenomena, mankind *must be told* about this new kind of *righteousness*.

As a result, God's righteousness about which Paul is now speaking is a matter of **faith**. Hence, after mentioning this *righteousness*, Paul goes on immediately to define it more precisely: **that is[= *de*], God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ**. No human mind would or could have imagined such a righteousness had it not been disclosed in Scripture.

Thus justification by faith is not at all a human idea, but a divine idea! The history of the interpretation of Romans, right up to our modern day, shows all too clearly how foreign this concept is to the heart and mind of man. Were it not in Scripture, it would have to be dismissed as a mere fantasy. Indeed many commentators have dismissed it that way, not in so many words, but by redefining Paul's concept so as to make it congenial to human thought. Those writers, for example, who take 2:13 as if it somehow represented a factual reality, exemplify this very tendency. It is striking, therefore, that God chose for the exposition of this truth a convert whose unsaved mentality was its direct opposite, the relentless Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus!

But not only is this righteousness one that comes *through faith in Jesus Christ*, it is also one whose potential scope is universal so that it is **for all**. The Greek of this phrase is *eis pantas*, which of course in this context means *for all*, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. It has the same reference as the phrase "all the world" in 3:19. This is, in fact, a righteousness offered by the same God with whom "there is no partiality" (cf. 2:11). The *all* in *for all* is likewise identical with the "all" who "have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (3:23).

Regrettably, the standard modern critical editions of the Greek NT of Rom 3:22 drop the immediately following

words, *kai epi pantas (and upon all)*, due to their omission by the old Egyptian manuscripts. But this is a mere error of homoioteleuton in which the scribe's eye has slipped from the first *pantas* to the second *pantas*, omitting the words in between. It is one of the most common of all scribal blunders. The words *and upon all* are attested by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and are printed in *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*.²

But although *God's righteousness* is intended *for all* (without distinction) it is actually bestowed *upon all who believe*. The phrase *who believe* is an articular participle construction in Greek (*tous pisteuontas*) that is read most naturally with this last *pantas* only (the one immediately preceding it). Thus Paul is saying that this *righteousness*, which is intended *for all*, is actually bestowed on *believers*, i.e., on those *who believe*.

The last words of v 22, "For there is no difference," relate primarily to the following verse and will be discussed there.

II. JESUS CHRIST IS THE MERCY SEAT FOR ALL MEN ROMANS 3:22b-26

3:22b-23. For there is no difference. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Paul has just stated (v 22a) the universal scope of this righteousness of God by declaring it available to any, and to all "who believe." This universality is founded on an equally universal fact. Indeed, **there is no difference** between Jew and Gentile inasmuch as **all** (whether Jew or Gentile) **have sinned**. It should be noted that Paul in no way qualifies this reality by any phrase like "a great

²Hodges and Farstad were the co-editors for this Greek text: Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, editors, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

deal” or “too much.” From Paul’s point of view, the mere fact of sin is sufficient to condemn all mankind.³

Paul had already made this clear when he described the final judgment. He had stated that on that occasion “as many as have *sinned* without the law shall also perish without the law” and that “as many as have *sinned* under the law shall be judged by means of the law” (2:12; italics added). It is *sinner*s who must fear this eschatological event. But, in fact, that is what everyone is, *for all have sinned!*

It follows inevitably from this simple fact that all *also fall short*⁴ of the glory of God. The sense of the phrase *the glory of God* must not be separated from Paul’s thought in the immediate context. Obviously part of God’s glory is the absolute perfection of His righteousness. To sin is to flagrantly miss the lofty moral standard of that glorious righteousness. But by implication, if one is granted *God’s* righteousness, one is raised thereby to a level consistent with His glory. Man’s plight is hopeless unless or until he can receive a righteousness compatible with *the glory of God!*

3:24. so that men are being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—

Paul’s statement in v 23 is followed immediately by a participial construction in Greek that is grammatically subordinate to the verbs of that verse. The circumstantial

participle *dikaïoumenoi* (**being justified**) connects grammatically to *hēmarton kai husterountai* (“have sinned and fall short”), in v 23. This poses a challenge for the translator. The participle is most naturally construed as one of manner, stating *the way in which* justification comes to all. But this of course is not the same as saying that such justification does come to each and every sinner. As Paul has already stated, it comes to those “who believe.” But the flexible character of the participle in Greek would not have suggested to the Greek hearer/reader that justification comes to every sinner. A translator must to some extent paraphrase here.

Thus the words *so that men are* have been added in the translation for the sake of clarity. The meaning simply is that, in view of universal sin, justification comes only in this way. Since “all have sinned,” all must find justification in the fashion now described. In particular, sinful men must be **justified freely by His grace**. “God’s righteousness,” therefore, that comes “through faith in Jesus Christ” (v 22), does not involve any form of synergism with “the works of the law” (cf. v 20), as though these could be “elevated” by the exercise of faith. On the contrary, “God’s righteousness” comes *freely* and it comes only *by His grace*. Paul therefore begins his discussion of the doctrine of justification by sharply defining its means in contrast to the ineffectual nature of “the works of the law,” by means of which there can be *no* justification (v 20)!

This is actually possible, in fact, **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. Here then for the first time in Romans, Paul refers directly⁵ to the death of our Lord. [He *has*, of course, alluded to it in 1:4 by his reference

³Hodges did not believe in original sin as it is commonly taught. That can be seen in a careful reading of his words here. He does not understand *all...have sinned* as a reference to Adam’s sin imputed to every man. He sees it as a reference to the fact that all living human beings, both Jews and Gentiles, have sinned in their personal experience. In Hodges’s view Adam’s sin was not imputed to all. Rather, in his view Adam’s sin was passed from father to child as an inherited compulsion to sin (what many call “the old sin nature”). See his discussion of Rom 5:12-21 for further details.

⁴The verb translated *fall short* (*husterountai*) is a present tense, unlike the earlier verb, translated as *have sinned* (*hēmarton*), which is a past tense (aorist). All have sinned in the past, and all presently continue to *fall short of the glory of God*.

⁵By *directly* Hodges means something like *transparently* or *obviously*. The knowledgeable reader, which the believers in Rome were, knew that *redemption* referred to the work of Jesus when He died on the cross for our sins, though neither the cross nor the death of Jesus is mentioned specifically in v 24 or even in the verses which follow. Paul does refer to the blood of Christ in v 25, another reference that the discerning reader grasps as relating to substitutionary atonement.

to the resurrection.] In this initial reference to Christ's death Paul employs the term *redemption*, a word especially connected in Greco-Roman society with the ransoming of prisoners of war or the manumission of slaves. The implication here is that *Christ Jesus* has bought us out of some form of servitude. Paul will make this concept clearer as he proceeds.

It should also be noted that *the redemption* Paul speaks of is *in Christ Jesus*. As the Apostle will now go on to show, this *redemption* is not simply procured *by Christ Jesus*, but is actually found *in Him*.

3:25. whom God has set forth as a Mercy Seat, through faith, by means of His blood, to serve as proof of His righteousness in passing over, in the forbearance of God, the sins previously committed,

It is, in fact, the very Person of Jesus Christ that **God has set forth as a Mercy Seat**. The "mercy seat" under the Old Covenant was the golden covering over the Ark of the Covenant, a sacred box-type object that stood in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish Tabernacle and in the later Solomonic Temple. [It was lost when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.] The sacrificial blood of the Day of Atonement was sprinkled on the mercy seat (Lev 16:1-17); and it was there, above this covering and between the cherubim that were on either end of the Ark, that God could meet with Moses or with the Jewish High Priest (cf. Exod 25:21-22; Lev 16:2). Here Christ Jesus is identified as the divinely appointed *Mercy Seat* where God and man can meet.

The exact meaning of the Greek word *hilastērion*, translated here by *Mercy Seat*, has been much discussed. Some meaning like "propitiation" (NKJV, NASB, HCSB) or "sacrifice of atonement" (NIV) is usual. But the primary use of the word in the Greek OT (LXX) as the name for

the mercy seat renders it quite likely that this word had that sense for Paul here.⁶

But Jesus Christ is *a Mercy Seat*, of course, only in a metaphorical sense. (In the language of typology we might say that the OT "mercy seat" was a type for which Christ is the Antitype.) Thus He is *a Mercy Seat...only by faith*. The Greek words for *by faith* (*dia pisteos*) stand immediately after the word for *Mercy Seat* (*hilasterion*) and are quite naturally taken with it as an expression of "the means through which" (*dia*) Jesus Christ functions as *a Mercy Seat*. His role is to be a "meeting place" between God and man *whenever* man exercises faith in God's Son. Thus the truth of John 14:6 finds expression here: "No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The NT, of course, knows nothing of any other way to God except through the Person named Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 4:12). The so-called doctrine of "implicit faith" is nowhere taught in the Bible and is a product of the finite human mind. A person cannot believe in Jesus Christ without knowing His name, and thus one cannot encounter the true and living God except in Him. But God has publicly **set Him forth** as His appointed *Mercy Seat*. Precisely for this reason, His name needs to be proclaimed to every kindred, tribe and tongue, just as Paul had undertaken to do so far as God enabled him to do it. The human idea that salvation is possible, at least in some cases, without this proclamation is an enormous theological error.

The next words, **by means of His blood**, render the Greek phrase *en to autou haimati*. The grammar would permit them to be connected with the words for *through faith*, so that we might read the two phrases together as *through faith in His blood*. But this reading is very improbable. Paul nowhere else speaks of "faith *in His blood*" and there is no good reason to think he does so here. [As most commentators point out.] Rather, since the OT mercy seat was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement, it

⁶For a good discussion of *hilastērion*, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 231-36.

is extremely likely that here Paul has chosen this expression as part of his metaphor about Jesus as God's *Mercy Seat*. Our Lord has become a *Mercy Seat*, where God and man can meet, precisely *by means of* the shedding of *His blood* for the world's sins.

No doubt Paul had thought deeply about the way the Temple ritual manifested God's saving work in Christ (whether or not he wrote Hebrews!). Indeed even the words **set forth** (*proetheto*) suggest that in all likelihood Paul was thinking of the hidden nature of the Old Covenant mercy seat (cf. Heb 9:7-9), in contrast to the public character of the new *Mercy Seat*. God had publicly displayed Jesus Christ as the way to Him, a fact symbolized by the rending of the veil of the Temple when Christ died (Luke 23:45). A theologian of Paul's depth was likely to have had all these things in mind here.

The concept of Christ Jesus as a *Mercy Seat...by means of His blood* is now elaborated in terms of its evidential value. The words that follow, **to serve as a proof** (lit., "for a proof": *eis endeixin*), are most perspicuous when taken with the whole phrase that began with *whom God set forth*. In other words, God has openly displayed Christ as a *Mercy Seat...by means of His blood* as a demonstration (*proof*) of two great facts in particular. The first of these is now stated. (The second is stated in v 26).

The sacrificial work of Christ on the cross is, first of all, **a proof of God's righteousness in passing over, in the forbearance of God, the sins previously committed**. The idea contained in the words translated *the sins previously committed* (*tōn progegonotōn hamartēmatōn*) can hardly have reference to anything other than to *the sins* that men did before Christ was crucified.⁷ In His dealings

⁷Some have read their own theology into Paul's words here, suggesting that he means that at the moment of faith the blood of Jesus takes care of one's sins up to that point in his life. Sins committed after that point need to be dealt with by a man-made system of confessing sins to priests, doing works of penance, last rites, communion, etc. As Hodges points out, it is impossible that Paul meant that. He was referring to sins committed prior to Calvary.

with mankind, God had been **passing over** human sin and dealing with mankind in the light of the future work of Christ. Unless God had anticipated the cross of Christ, mankind could have expected Him to exercise definitive justice rather than the grace and forgiveness that He so often extended. But His righteousness in exercising this kind of *forbearance* (or, "clemency": *anochē*) was not as yet manifested. The public death of His Son was a vindication of God's merciful dealings with sinners in all the preceding ages. Thus it was a **proof of His righteousness** in so conducting Himself with mankind.

3:26. and for a proof of His righteousness at the present time, so that He may be righteous and justify the person who has faith in Jesus.

There is no connecting word in Greek between vv 25 and 26. The **and** appears in our translation for the sake of smoothness. The Greek, however, does not require the conjunction and Paul slightly changes the construction here. Whereas the words *serve as proof* (v 25) translate the phrase *eis endeixin*, here the words **for a proof** render the phrase *pros endeixin*. Although the expressions are functionally equivalent, the Greek hearer/reader might have caught a subtle shading in which, lacking the conjunction, the latter phrase could be felt as an outcome of the former. Much as we might say, "He did it for (*eis*) this reason with a view to (*pros*)..."

This is to say that God, in the death of Christ, not only offers "proof" of His righteousness in ages past, but that He does so with the specific intent (*pros*) of vindicating **His righteousness at the present time**. In other words the first vindication serves also the goal of the second. If God's "forbearance" in the past is shown to be righteous, *ipso facto* He is shown to be righteous in what He presently does. The cross of Christ is not *two* forms of vindication but rather a *seamless garment* that demonstrates God's righteousness in all of human history. All of mankind's sin, whether past or future at the time of the cross, is

dealt with by the death of Christ. He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The result is that God can **be righteous and justify the person who has faith in Jesus**. The English necessarily obscures an obvious Greek word play, since the Greek words for **righteous** (*dikaion*) and **justify** (*dikaionta*) are cognates joined in Paul's sentence by the simple **and** (*kai*). God, says Paul, is both *righteous and righteous-fier!*⁸ This simple assertion is actually the fundamental core of Pauline theology.

Throughout the centuries of Christian history, thinkers of every persuasion have wrestled with Paul's basic ideas. [An excellent, up-to-date treatment of this long-running discussion is available now in Stephen Westerholm's *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Eerdmans, 2004).] But at bottom, Paul believed two very basic things. These were: (1) God, apart from man's works, justifies the one who believes in Jesus; and (2) the cross is the basis for this justification and shows it to be a fully righteous act.

Here it is important to say that for Paul these are absolute realities totally independent of anything man does before or after faith. There is no basis whatsoever in Paul's letters to connect human works with justification by faith no matter when these works are performed. Whether done before or after conversion, they remain *works* (i.e., *erga* = “deeds” or “actions”). The distinction drawn by some writers between “works done to attain favor with God” and “works done out of faith or gratitude” is non-existent in the Pauline material. This alleged distinction is a theological fiction.

For Paul, “good works,” whether done under or apart from the Mosaic Law, cannot contribute to our justification. To say that somehow they do contribute would really amount to a denial of the simple fact that God *justifies the person who has faith in Jesus*. In that case God would

be justifying only the person who has faith *plus* works, not a person who just has faith! No matter how this idea is articulated, it contradicts Paul's fundamental idea that justification is “*apart from works*” (v 28; see 4:6!). Furthermore, to say that “our (post-conversion) works” somehow vindicate God's justification is a denial of the adequacy of the cross for that purpose! The famous statement that “we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone” is a Reformation idea, not a Pauline one. *This idea can be found nowhere in Paul.*

To be greatly lamented is the sad fact that, although Reformation soteriology denies good works entrance through the front door, good works are often reintroduced through the back door! The resultant theology is hard to distinguish, except semantically, from Roman Catholic theology. The synergism of faith and works in salvation is differently expressed in Protestant and Catholic theology, but its fundamental character is essentially the same: namely, there is no true justification without good works. Paul knows nothing of this.

Of course, theologians have spilled a tremendous amount of ink trying to show that works have some fundamental role in Pauline soteriology. But in Paul's writings works do not have any connection whatsoever with the truth of justification. For Paul grace and works are opposites. He will later say in this very epistle: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is by works, it is no longer grace, otherwise work is no longer work” (Rom 11:6). This is perfectly plain, and theologians have wasted their time trying to qualify, revise, or reinterpret Paul's lucid concept. According to Paul, when you mix faith and works, you change the basic nature of both!

Paul concludes the long Greek sentence that began in v 23 with the words *the person who has faith in Jesus* (*ton ek pisteōs Iēsou*; lit. = “the one of [by] faith in Jesus”). Here for the first time since 1:17 we meet Paul's frequent phrase *ek pisteōs* (see also in Rom 3:30; 4:16 [2x]; 5:1; 9:30;

⁸Possibly another way to bring this across in English would be something like *so that He may be righteous and may declare righteous the person who has faith in Jesus*.

10:6; 14:23 [2x]). All the other instances in Romans (with the exception of 14:23) use the phrase in reference to righteousness or justification coming *by means of* faith. This suggests a second look at its usage in this verse.

In our translation we paraphrase the Greek article (*ton*) with the words *the person who* and the Greek *ek by has*. But the Greek is perhaps more likely to mean something like *the by faith in Jesus person*. In that case the Greek article is a functional ellipsis of the idea “the person who receives this justifying action” (cf. *dikaiounta*). Paul’s brevity at this point is due to his intention of explicating this idea very shortly.

It is noteworthy that in this direct reference to *faith in Jesus* (*Iēsou* is an objective genitive) Paul uses only the human name (in v 21 he uses “Jesus Christ”). But for Paul, of course, both the words *Lord* and *Christ* were still titles, the latter one indicating Messiahship. The distinctive feature of NT evangelization was that it called on both Jews and Gentiles to exercise faith in the person named Jesus. (Note precisely this idea in John 20:30-31). After the coming of Christ, it was no longer adequate to believe simply in a Messiah whose identity was unknown. On the contrary, the Christian proclamation was that the Messiah (= Christ) *had now appeared* and that His name was Jesus (hence “*Jesus Christ*” [v 21] = “*Jesus Messiah*”). Henceforth justifying faith found its true focus, not in an unnamed promised Messiah, but in Jesus of Nazareth. It is in fact “the name of *Jesus*” that is above every name and to which every knee will someday bow (Phil 2:9-11). Therefore, too, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The *righteousness of God*, therefore, that is now “manifested” (v 21) in the promised Christ, comes by *faith in a man named Jesus*.

III. FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS VINDICATES THE LAW ROMANS 3:27-31

3:27. So where is boasting? It is excluded. Through what sort of law? Of works? No indeed, but through the law of faith.

The truth stated in vv 21-26 leads to a triumphant declaration by Paul that **boasting** has been **excluded**. This trait (*boasting*) has already been ascribed to the Jews in 2:17-20 and they especially are probably in mind here. (No doubt now that he knows the grace of God, Paul himself is chagrined by his own proud spirit in his unregenerate days.) But if justification is granted only to “the person who has faith in Jesus” then such a person can find no ground for *boasting*.

In fact, *boasting* is actually *excluded* (Greek = “shut out”: *exekleisthe*) by the very principle **of faith**. (Here Paul obviously uses the term **law** in the sense of a “controlling principle” or an “operating rule.”) The sort of law that excludes human pride is definitely not the principle **of works** which, in fact, invites *boasting* (see Eph 2:8-9). On the contrary, the only “rule” that does exclude human pride is *the law of faith*, that is, the “rule” that men are justified only by “faith in Jesus” in contrast to justification by “the works of the law” (3:20).

An error often found in contemporary discussions is that “works of gratitude to God” are somehow ‘immune’ to the temptation to boast. But this is contrary to both experience and Scripture. In fact, in the only passage in the Gospels where our Lord explicitly refers to justification (Luke 18:9-14), a Pharisee is represented as *thanking God* for what he conceives to be his numerous religious virtues (Luke 18:11-12)! All experience confirms that even when our theology ascribes our works to God’s grace, boasting is *not* excluded! Man is perfectly capable of bragging that his works demonstrate that he is one of God’s “elect”! In

essence, the Jews of Paul's day did that, for Paul charges that, "You bear the name of 'Jew,' and you rest in the law and *boast in God*" (Rom 2:17)! Justification by faith, and by faith alone, can block this all too human failing.

No system of theology that *includes* works in its soteriology can also *exclude boasting*!

3:28-29. So we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not in fact also of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles!

Functionally v 27 was somewhat parenthetical. In effect it was a triumphant exclamation by Paul that the truth presented in vv 21-26 had successfully locked out boasting. The **So** (*oun*) that opens v 28⁹ most probably reaches back to the truth of vv 21-26, as its summarizing nature clearly suggests. The bottom line, Paul states, is that **we hold** (*logizometha*) **that a man** (*anthrōpon*, generic = man or woman) **is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.**

In making this concluding statement, Paul here slightly expands the phrase "apart from the law" used in v 21. What that phrase meant there is even clearer when expressed, as it is here, as *apart from the works of the law*, since this refers to any and all acts of obedience to the law's commands. It is not just the law as a system that Paul excludes from Christian soteriology, but also *the deeds*, i.e., *the works of the law* that are excluded. As he will shortly say, "to the person who *works* the compensation is not made on the basis of grace, but on the basis of what is owed" (4:4; italics added). Paul will not allow human deeds (*erga*) any role at all in man's justification.

This principle is in fact a universal one. Since *the works of the law* are irrelevant when *a man is justified by faith*, such justification is available to all mankind, whether they possess the law or not. God is not **the God of the Jews**

only, but also of the Gentiles. The question format which Paul uses here to affirm this truth heightens the rhetorical effect of his declaration. Most emphatically, He is the God of all mankind.

3:30-31. Consequently, there is one God who will justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. So do we annul the law through faith? Far from it! In fact we establish the law.

Alluding to the familiar Jewish declaration (the Shema, Deut 6:4) about the oneness of God, Paul declares that **there is one God** for all humanity who **will justify** any human being by means of **faith**. The slight change of construction from **by faith** (*ek pisteōs*) to **through faith** (*dia tēs pisteōs*) should not be overplayed, since the first phrase is the usual one that Paul employs for this doctrine, regardless of racial distinction. But the addition of the article (*tēs*) in the second phrase is perhaps the key to the nuance involved since articles tended to occur with abstract nouns (like *faith*) when the abstract quality was itself under discussion.

It seems probable that a subtle difference is conveyed (perhaps unconsciously since Paul seems quite fluent in Greek!). We suggest something like this: (1) the *ek* phrase with its anarthrous noun (*pisteōs*) retains its usual force expressing an operating principle (= the "by-faith way"), while (2) the *dia* phrase with the articular noun (*pisteōs*) looks at the abstract term itself (= "through this thing called faith"). If something like this is accurate, then the first phrase, referring to Jews (**the circumcision**), retains its implicit contrast with *ex ergōn nomou* (cf. v 20) as the principle on which justification occurs for them. In reference to the Gentiles (**the uncircumcision**), the thought is more that they are justified *through* the very thing just referred to, i.e., *faith*. (Hence the article, *tēs*, before faith is almost an article of previous reference.)

⁹*Oun* is the second word in the Greek sentence (after *logizometha*); but it opens the sentence logically.

But does this principle of “faith-type justification” for both Jew and Gentile alike mean that the standards of **the law** are meaningless. This, at least, seems to be the idea involved in Paul’s question (**So do we annul the law by faith?**). The most obvious objection to Paul’s doctrine from a Jewish viewpoint would be that God’s standards are thus ignored and rendered invalid. The verb Paul uses, *katargoumen*, rendered *annul*, suits such an idea well. Paul’s reply (*mē genoito* = **Far from it!**), emphatically disclaims such a result.

On the contrary, Paul claims, **In fact we establish the law**. Paul does not here, or elsewhere in Romans, elaborate this observation. But its meaning for him is fairly obvious. If it is true, as he has affirmed, that “through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20), then the law’s revelatory role in regard to sin is fully respected by the corollary truth that “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified before Him” (3:19). To claim that man can find justification under the law, despite his multiple infractions of the law, would seriously diminish the dignity in which all of the commandments of God ought to be held. By contrast, to insist that the law cannot be a means of justification if it is violated at all is the only way that its full integrity and seriousness can be maintained. Therefore, to uphold it in this way is to *establish the law*.

Finally, it must be said that to take 2:13 as a statement that justification by doing the law is somehow possible (as many have) is to denigrate the importance of a full and unflawed obedience. Under this perspective, human beings often imagine that God will not be “too strict” in assessing their lives and will give them “a passing grade” for a deeply flawed performance. But this diminishes the seriousness of the law and is a concept totally foreign to Paul. Only the abandonment of the law as a means for, or an aid to, justification properly validates the full integrity of God’s righteous standards.