

Romans: Judgement & Justification—Justice Promised, Part 4

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<http://lifemessenger.org/romans-judgement-justification-justice-promised-part-4/>

EXPOSITION: Chapter 2:1-4:25

We concluded [Part 3 \(1:18-32\)](#) with the assertion that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against man as a covenant-breaker. And that he has therefore come under the retributive justice of God, worthy of the judicial penalty of death. Man is dislocated from God, the cosmos is broken, and all must now be set-to-rights.

The next one-and-a-half chapters (2:1-3:20) continue to prosecute this case: that all mankind – every individual – is guilty before God. While chapter 1:18-32 focuses on the generic human situation, both Gentiles *and* Jews (as the description also fits apostate Israel), chapter 2 (2:1-3:8) focuses almost exclusively on the Jew.

The Covenant Lawsuit

In fact, Paul classically prosecutes his case, like the prophets of the OT, after the pattern of the *covenant lawsuit*: the prophets act as Yahweh's prosecuting lawyer, the defendant (Israel) is summonsed (in Paul's case, Jew *and* Gentile are arraigned), Yahweh speaks as either the plaintiff or judge, calling on the heavens and the earth – the cosmos – as witness (or as a jury) to Israel's breach of the covenant, the accusation is made, followed by a refutation of the defendant's possible arguments, and finally the formal indictment and/or pronouncement of guilt and the sentence made (e.g. Ps 50; Isa 1:2-3, 3:13-15; Jer 2:4 ff.; Mic 6:1-8; Ps 82; Isa 41:21-29; 44:6 ff.; Hos 4:1-3; Dt 32). This, Paul's Epistle to the Romans achieves; but now the covenant lawsuit is prosecuted against the whole of mankind: Jew *and* Gentile.

The Covenant Scheme

As was explained in the [introduction \(Part 1\)](#), the architectonic scheme of Scripture is covenantal. God graciously made covenant with our first parents in the Garden. This they broke, plunging their progeny into chaos and sin, leading to the calling out of Abraham as a renewal of that original covenant purpose (Gen 1:26-28; 17:4-6; Rom 4:13). And this, Israel, like Adam (Hos 6:7), also broke which lead to the sending of the last Adam – Jesus – not only as the terminal point of man's covenant failure but also as the beginning of a new humanity, a new order of covenant obedience, setting-to-rights the broken cosmos.

And so, from creation to new creation God relates to man covenantally; thus, Paul's apostolic commission to bring about the "obedience of faith" throughout the nations (1:5; 16:26). Paul's whole Gospel mission is to reinstate Adam's race in right covenant relationship – that is, in the obedience of faith – with the creator-God. And through this fulfill the original mandate to extend the Edenic paradise throughout the whole earth.

The Covenant Structure

As explained in Part 1, the discovery of the five-fold covenant structure of Ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties has provided a ground-breaking insight, confirming the Bible's own interpretation of the biblical covenants and their design.

A victorious king would form a treaty with his vassal king, establishing: 1) his supremacy; 2) his authority; 3) his laws; 4) his punishments and rewards; and 5) his succession.

Based on this, THEOS provides a convenient acronym: T (*Transcendence*); H (*Hierarchy*); E (*Ethics*); O (*Oath*); and S (*Succession*).

With Christ as our victorious King and we his vassals, the covenant arrangement is clear: 1) he has sovereignly and graciously established covenant relationship with us (*Transcendence*); 2) he has established his authority in his Word and delegated it through his servants, ministers of the Gospel and ministers of the state (*Hierarchy*); 3) he has given his law as the standard of justice (*Ethics*); including, 4) penal sanctions and blessings (*Oath*); and finally, 5) provided for the continuity of his reign through the promulgation of the Gospel and through godly families, churches, and culture (*Succession*).

The Covenant Solution

In the mould of the OT prophets, Paul, by explicating the Gospel, prosecutes a lawsuit according to this covenant arrangement. Man has been arraigned by the court of heaven and indicted as a covenant-breaker. Sentence has been passed according to the covenant sanctions (*oath*) and he has been justly condemned to death.

Nonetheless, while man has been justly condemned to death, the Gospel presents Christ as the covenant solution, as both "just and justifier of those who believe" (3:21-4:25). Covenant has been broken but justice and justification for man is now provided.

In this section Paul explicates more fully the thesis of his epistle, found in 1:17: "*for in it [the gospel] the righteousness [dikaiosune] of God is revealed from faith for [to] faith, as it is written, 'The righteous [dikaios] shall live by faith'.*"

An assessment will be made in 2:13 and 3:21-31 concerning the revisionist approach of the '*New Perspective of Paul*' (E. P. Sanders, J. D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, et al) to the meaning of the words "righteousness" and "faith". While on the surface this may seem of merely academic interest, it is emphatically not—this unfortunate controversy cuts to the very foundation of the believer's assurance of salvation.

The Gospel is the power of God (1:16) because it is the revelation of God's righteousness. The Greek word group that Paul uses for "righteousness/just/justification" (*dik*) is rooted in the Septuagint (LXX), rendering the Hebrew *sedek* (*sdk*) word group, conveying the basic meaning of conformity to a norm.

It is to be understood in the context of covenant: Israel's conformity to God's covenant with them as his people. The word group not only relates to conduct but also, and more significantly, status: to be justified is to be declared righteous, to be in right covenant standing with God.

Paul picks this up as the import of *dikaioûn*, evidenced by his whole argument in Romans; it simply means to acquit, to confer a righteous status on, and of itself does not infer moral transformation. It is a legal declaration of right covenant status for the person that believes in the one "who justifies the ungodly" (4:5); it is not only a setting-to-rights broken covenant, but through it a setting-to-rights a broken cosmos.

This, Part 4 will begin to explain more fully:

Part 4a: [Chapter 2:1-29—The Jews & the Judgement of God](#)

Part 4b: [Chapter 3:1-31—The Universality of Judgement & Justification](#)

Part 4c: [Chapter 4:1-25—Justification by Faith Alone Verified from the OT](#)

The Romans Series:

Part 1: [Kingdom through Covenant](#)

Part 2: [Caesar & Christ: Gospel Declared](#)

Part 3: [God Revealed & Man Judged: Covenant Disobeyed](#)

Part 4: [Judgement & Justification: Justice Promised](#)

Part 5: [De-Creation & Re-Creation: Paradise Restored](#)

Part 6: Disobedience & Dispossession: *Covenant Administered*

Part 7: Autonomy & Theonomy: *Covenant Obeyed*

Part 8: Personal & Cultural: *Dominion Regained*

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