

Romans 3:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Analysis

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Paul's devastating conclusion: ex ergōn nomou ou dikaiōthēsetai pasa sarx enōpion autou (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, "by works of law no flesh will be justified before him"). Erga nomou (ἔργα νόμου, "works of law")—Torah observance. Dikaiō (δικαιόω, "justify")—declare righteous. Sarx (σάρξ, "flesh")—humanity in its weakness and sin.

Why can't law-keeping justify? Dia nomou epignōsis hamartias (διὰ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἀμαρτίας, "through law comes knowledge of sin"). Law's function is diagnostic, not therapeutic—it exposes disease but doesn't cure it. Like a mirror revealing dirt but unable to clean, law shows us we fall short but cannot make us righteous. This prepares for the revelation of God's righteousness apart from law (v. 21).

Historical Context

This frontal assault on works-righteousness contradicted Second Temple Judaism's dominant soteriology. Groups like Pharisees believed meticulous Torah observance, combined with God's mercy, secured covenant membership. Paul's gospel shattered this synthesis: law cannot justify; it can only condemn.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What "deeds" or religious performance are you tempted to trust for right standing with God?
2. How has the law (God's moral standards) functioned in your life to reveal sin rather than produce righteousness?
3. Why is recognizing law's inability to justify essential to embracing justification by faith alone?

Interlinear Text

διότι	ἐξ	ἔργων	νόμου	οὐ	δικαιωθήσεται	πᾶσα	σὰρξ
Therefore	by	the deeds	of the law	G3756	be justified	no	flesh
G1360	G1537	G2041	G3551		G1344	G3956	G4561
ἐνώπιον	αὐτοῦ	διὰ	γὰρ	νόμου	ἐπίγνωσις	ἀμαρτίας	
sight	in his	by	for	of the law	is the knowledge	of sin	
G1799	G846	G1223	G1063	G3551	G1922	G266	

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 2:16 (Righteousness): Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Acts 13:39 (Righteousness): And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Romans 3:28 (Righteousness): Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Galatians 2:19 (Word): For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Romans 4:15 (Word): Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Romans 9:32 (Word): Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

Romans 5:20 (Word): Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Romans 4:13 (Righteousness): For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Psalms 143:2 (Righteousness): And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Galatians 5:4 (Righteousness): Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

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